The Attitudes and/or Perceptions of the Mass Media on Issues Concerning Children in Zimbabwe

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out the attitudes and/or perceptions of the mass media [that is television, newspapers and radio] on issues concerning children in Zimbabwe. An analysis of various newspapers was done and observation on television was conducted to capture issues that affect children in terms of their total development. The researcher also listened to different radio stations on issues concerning children. Videotapes and audiotapes were recorded. The findings indicated that various issues and programmes for children were available in the mass media. The study also found out that adults and/or important people in various positions are voices for children in the mass media. Issues concerning children originate from rural and urban areas and in courts. Major issues concerning children centered on child abuse [particularly child-sexual abuse], baby dumping, and baby snatching. Among the recommendations, is that more programmes for children are needed in the mass media so that children voice themselves rather than having adults representing them. Also, the mass media should take an active role in exposing issues concerning children and disseminating information to the public at large especially on child-sexual abuse as it is so rampant in society.

Keywords: Mass media, Child abuse, Children’s rights, Convention, Child oriented.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The parental care giving practice given to most African children is authoritarian whereby explanations to and reasoning with the child is not encouraged. The parent does not encourage verbal give-and-take which allows the child and does not share with the child the reasoning behind a policy. At home and at school, the guiding standard has been obedience and respect for authority by the young. The notion that children should be seen and not heard still runs deep in many communities/societies in Zimbabwe. Promoting the concept that children have a right to express views, and that adults should listen and take notice of them, has been a major hurdle. In the long run, many children face various problems and meet many challenges silently as they cannot speak out. Seldom, children cannot voice themselves or air their views on matters which concern and affect them either positively or negatively. They are just not given the opportunity.

True child participation in the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, encourages adults to an understanding of children as important actors in expressing, evaluating and advancing their own rights. A safe living environment, free from fear of unfair punishment or exploitation is essential if children are to feel free to express themselves.

To protect children’s rights and to enable children address some of the issues which affect them, mass media channels like newspapers, television and radio can be used. Despite parental controls, virtually all children find ways to gain exposure to currently popular media [especially adolescents]. The most important thing one can do for children is to understand and learn what is in the media, what children of different ages understand and learn from media messages, and how various media thus affect children’s behaviour. Hence, the need to examine children’s programmes in the media. Children today spend more time watching television than in any other single activity except sleeping [and for some, television has even made serious inroads into sleep time]. Children watch more and more television per day as they grow from infancy to adolescence. Hence, the mass media can do much to allow children speak out on issues concerning them. Thus, an important way for children’s voices to reach a wide audience is by giving children greater access to the media. The media is important for offering children the possibility of expressing themselves.
One of the principles of the Convention is that the views of children be heard and given due respect [Article 12 Respecting Children’s Views]. This is also reflected in Article 13 of the Child’s Right to Freedom of Expression [UNICEF, 2002; 2000; 1995]. It is in the spirit of these provisions that children should only be able to consume information and material but also to participate in the media. This requires that there exists a media which communicate with children. In view of this, do child-oriented media exist in Zimbabwe? Specifically, do the radio and television programmes devote special segments for the young audience? Is Zimbabwe making the media more accessible to children, both as programme-makers and viewers? Are programmes made both by and about children dominating airtime? Are broadcasters throwing open their doors to youngsters, enabling them to produce their shows on issues concerning themselves?

The rights of the child bring particular challenges for the media. As with human rights in general, the press and other media have essential functions in promoting and protecting rights of the child, including through monitoring violations and other actions by adults and the government. In view of this, the researcher would like to examine the mass media’s attitudes and/or perceptions on issues concerning children in Zimbabwe. The researcher would like to find out how the mass media, for instance, the press/newspapers present issues concerning children in terms of headlines, placement, depth and/or content, and the language. An analysis of the editors’ and presenters’ attitudes and language used as they present issues concerning children will be done. Other issues to be examined are the frequency of children’s issues or programmes in the media and the time of programming [i.e. how many times do these programmes appear and is the time appropriate]. The researcher would also like to find out what voices children have in the media, that is, do children stand for themselves or are they represented by other people? If other people represent them, how then do these people present or portray issues about children? Finally, the researcher would like to analyze where children’s issues in the media originate from.

**Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical basis for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner’s model of the Ecology of Human Development. Bronfenbrenner [1979] suggests that children develop in four ecological systems, which have effects on children as contexts in which children develop.

The Micro-system is the lowest level which refers “partly to the setting for a child’s behaviour and partly to the activities, participants and roles in that setting” [Berndt, 1992:36]. Thus, for children, micro-systems are the places they inhabit, the people who live there with them, and the things they do together. According to Bronfenbrenner [1979], a micro-system refers to relations between the child and the immediate environment. It is the actual setting in which the individual lives, works and plays [Kopp and Krakow, 1982]. Thus, the family context, which is the child’s home with parents and siblings, the child-care centre, school, church and neighborhood, comprises the micro-system. Thus, the micro-system is the immediate setting in which the child develops which includes people, objects and event that directly affects the child. At first, for most children, the micro-system is quite small- it is the home, involving only interaction with one person at a time [dyadic interaction]. As the child grows and develops, complexity normally increases as the child does more, with more people, in more places.

The Meso-system is the second level of the environment which is defined by the relations among the various settings in which children spend their time, e.g. connections between home and school, home and church [Berndt, 1992; Garbarino and Abramowitz, 1992]. It refers to the network of interrelationships of settings in the child’s immediate environment [Bronfenbrenner, 1979]. A meso-system reflects connections or relationships between two or more micro-systems in which the child participates [Lefrancois, 1993; Kopp and Krakow, 1982]. Meso-systems are the relationships between contexts in which the developing person experiences reality. The richness of meso-systems for the child is measured by the size [number] and quality [depth] of connections.

The Exo-system is the third level of the environment which includes settings that children do not enter or actively participate in, but that affect them indirectly. Lefrancois [1993] states that the exo-system are linkages and relationships between two or more settings, one of which does not include the child. The activities in the exo-system influence the child’s developmental outcomes, e.g. the parents’ job/workplace, community services, school-board, and mass media [Bronfenbrenner, 1979]. Thus, children are affected by what happens in their parents’ place of employment, even if children never enter those settings. Garbarino and Abramowitz [1992] emphasized that the significant decisions made in the exo-system affect the child indirectly or the adults who do interact directly with the child. Thus, exo-systems refer to social settings that affect the child but do not directly impinge upon him/her. Exo-system influences also include community and social welfare services, legal services, school-board, planning commissions and the mass media. Hence, we can simply say exo-systems are situations that have a bearing on the child’s development but in which the developing child does not have a direct role. As noted before, the work place of his/her parents [for most children since they are not participants there] and those centres of power [such as school-boards] make decisions that affect the child’s day-to-day life.
The Macro-system is the most global level of the environment, which refers to the consistencies in the systems at lower levels across an entire society/culture [Berndt, 1992]. The macro-system includes the larger social, political and economic structure of the society. According to Lefrancois [1993] the macro-system is the totality of all other systems, evident in the belief, the options, the life-styles, the values, the mores and so on, of a culture/society. Macro-system refers to the attitudes, mores, beliefs and ideologies of a culture [Bronfenbrenner, 1979]. Thus, macro-systems are the “blue prints” for the ecology of human development which reflect a people’s shared assumptions about “how things are done” [Kopp and Krakow, 1982].

Systems at each level have distinctive characteristics that are relevant to a child’s development, and therefore different criteria are appropriate for assessing the impact of each level on the child. Furthermore, these levels may be either positive or risks. These levels of the environment have effects on children as contexts in which children develop.

It is the exo-system which the researcher would like to examine on how it impacts on the child’s development. As has been alluded to earlier on, one of the exo-system include the mass media. Few children contribute directly to the programming in the mass media, but they are affected by the programmes they watch or hear. Hence, the need to examine the mass media and how it impacts on the child’s development.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to find out the attitudes and/or perceptions of the mass media on issues concerning children in Zimbabwe. The following questions guide the study:

- What children’s programmes are available in the mass media in Zimbabwe?
- What is the frequency of issues which concern children in the mass media?
- What kind of exposure is given to issues concerning children in the mass media?
- Do Zimbabwean children have voices in the mass media?
- Where do the children’s issues in the mass media originate from?

METHODOLOGY

Document analysis of daily and weekly newspapers was done. These included the Herald, the Sunday Mail, the Sunday Mail Entertainment, Daily Mirror, Kwayedza, the Manica Post, the Standard, the Sunday Metro, and the Tribune. Newspaper accounts were sources of data, which were sources of information about an event or phenomenon. These were reports of events written by either participants or observers. If an event is deemed important or newsworthy enough, there was a newspaper account of what transpired, usually written by an observer. These accounts were descriptive and interpretive, although the principal intent was description. These were occasions when people issue reports, recommendations, or proceedings that describe their process, their results, or both; depending on the group or people and their taste. The researcher scanned the newspapers and simply obtained the documents/articles without visiting the site.

The researcher also listened to different radio stations and audio-taped the programmes on issues concerning children. Observation [which is a qualitative data source] was also used by the researcher. The researcher watched and recorded children’s programmes on videotapes from the television.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Children’s Programmes on Television

Kidznet cartoons are offered on a daily basis from Monday to Friday and are eclipsed on television from 2-4.30pm. These cartoons contain stories which children enjoy and become addicted to their entertaining material. The stories in the cartoons educate children. Simple language is used for children to understand. Cartoons have thus become a useful tool for teaching young children the English language. Children learn through imitation. Good manners are also taught as bad actors are always caught by the “police” in the cartoons. Evil-doers are also punished in the end; usually they taste the nasty end of their evil deeds. Cartoon violence characterize many children’s programmes but is less serious than aggression in adult programmes because it’s unreal and often comic and slapstick. These cartoons are characterized by formal features with “hype”, i.e., they use rapid changes of scene and characters, lots of physical movement, many special effects, rapid acts, loud music and frequent sound effects.
Animation is a cue that a programme is intended for children. The time of transmission of these cartoons is okay for infants who knock off at 12.00 noon at school. However, if hot sitting they miss on them. Parental guidance also lacks as most parents will be still at work. The maid will be busy with house-keeping chores.

Child Alert [Monday: 5-5.30pm] is another programme for children on television. It mainly focuses on issues pertaining to child abuse [awareness]. Children give their views on child abuse and other people in the community. Adults are invited and interviewed to clarify and give information on child abuse issues, responding to questions asked by children.

Citizen Child [Tuesday: 5-5.30pm] is also another programme for children which focuses mainly on issues pertaining to children's rights [UN Charter], e.g., the right to education. The rights are well explained by adults who are well versed in these issues. Children host the programme and ask the invited adults questions on issues relating to children's rights. The purpose is to inform, persuade and educate children and adults regarding children's rights, and in doing so, encourage and motivate them to promote children's rights in Zimbabwe. Younger children can view the programme with the help of an adult. Adults can also view this programme to give them a deeper understanding on children's rights and how they can assist children. It is more beneficial to view this programme with an adult and use the programme as a tool for improving family life and for civic education on children's rights. Once more the question on the appropriateness of time still comes in. Who hears children's views and concerns around 5pm?

Kidznet/Star Kids [Saturday and Sunday: 8-10am] is another programme which has about eleven segments [each with 10-20 minutes]. These include science and technology, something very useful in giving children ideas on what is happening in the world of technology. Does this not inspire children to have a technological mind which is very crucial in today's life? This is one major part of the show because it gives children a clear picture of what exactly is happening in this world. Other segments are equally important as children benefit from them, e.g. Religious Time where children have discussions on Bible stories, do memory verses, educational quiz and singing. 4-8 year-olds are targeted. Moral values are learnt from the stories told. Among the segments we have Out and About, Business Talk, Sport, Health, World of Young People, Letz Make and others. The health programme is very educational as children are taught to value their bodies and issues about nutrition and H.I.V/AIDS are discussed. Children are also given the opportunity to have general knowledge about Zimbabwe through quiz on tourist attractions, towns and the history of Zimbabwe [Liberation struggle, ministers and their portfolios, MPs and their constituents].

In Star Kids children are asked subject based questions, e.g. in English children do spellings and meanings of words. The Letz Make segment [8.30-8.45am] has very good practical activities [Art], such that even those watching can follow instructions and make their own items too. However, on Sunday, the time of programme is not appropriate as most children will be at church, hence, they miss out.
Children’s Programmes in Newspapers

The table below presents an analysis of children’s pages in newspapers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAPER</th>
<th>TITLE SECTION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PLACEMENT</th>
<th>MODE OF REPRESENTATION</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>NATURE/TYPE OF ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail</td>
<td>Junior Fun</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Sunday Mail Entertainment</td>
<td>Colorful Titles [with Bold eye catching letters]</td>
<td>• Folktales</td>
<td>• Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Pictorial</td>
<td>• Greetings</td>
<td>• Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children’s photos</td>
<td>• Sport the difference</td>
<td>• Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Riddles</td>
<td>• Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Colour in</td>
<td>• Brain Teasers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Jokes</td>
<td>• Entertainment/Critical Thinking Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Manica Post</td>
<td>Children’s Page</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Own page before the Leisure Section of Weekend Post</td>
<td>• Bold Titles • Drawing s • Children’s photos</td>
<td>• Folktales</td>
<td>• Entertainment/Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Short stories</td>
<td>• Educational-Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Articles</td>
<td>• Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Did you know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fascinating facts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Things to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Jokes {s} of the week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Colour in and Have Fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Quiz [Bible]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Word search/Unscramble these words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Greetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwayedza</td>
<td>• Zvinai Zvirahwe • Rodza Pfungwa</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Inside Buck Page</td>
<td>Boxed in corners</td>
<td>• Zvinai Zvirahwe</td>
<td>Brain Teasers/Entertainment/Critical Thinking Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday News</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Sunday News Magazine</td>
<td>Children’s corner</td>
<td>• Rodza Pfungwa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronicle</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table the Some newspapers have programmes for children but other newspapers such as the Daily Mirror, the Herald and the Chronicle have no programmes for children.
Children’s Programmes offered on Radio

Not all stations have programmes for children. Radio Zimbabwe broadcasts Madambanevana every Tuesday at 11.00am. Children have rhymes and songs. Radio Zimbabwe has Mitambo Yevana Vadiki in the Ndebele version on Thursday. This programme is repeated and broadcast in the Shona version on Friday from 4.30-5.00pm. During this programme children have actual participation and they write letters answering competition questions. National FM broadcasts children’s plays every Tuesday from 3.30-4.00pm. Children phone-in; greeting their friends and relatives.

The Exposure of Children’s Issues in the Mass Media

In Newspapers

Obviously people’s reactions to various media depend on the characteristics of the medium [e.g. print versus film], the way in which content messages are presented and on the person’s own personality and the level of intellectual development. Hence, the need to analyze how children’s issues are presented in terms of headlines, placement, depth/content and the language used in the discussion by presenters. A sample of headlines on children’s issues from newspapers is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE OF PAPER</th>
<th>SAMPLE HEADLINES</th>
<th>ORIGIN OF STORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Herald</td>
<td>-Education Zim’s top priority: Government committed to educate its citizen- Move to make pre-schooling compulsory hailed</td>
<td>-Norton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/10/04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/08/04</td>
<td>-Norton schoolgirl murder: cops pick 4 suspects for questioning</td>
<td>-Norton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/08/04</td>
<td>-State to set up homes for street children</td>
<td>-Bindura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/11/04</td>
<td>-Schoolgirls gang-raped</td>
<td>-Bindura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/01/05</td>
<td>Pre-school education a requisite to enter formal school</td>
<td>Mahanye Secondary School in Chipinge [Rural]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/01/05</td>
<td>Teachers threaten to abandon school</td>
<td>Mahanye Secondary School in Chipinge [Rural]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/02/05</td>
<td>Caretaker jailed for rape</td>
<td>Harare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Mail</td>
<td>-Lomagundi defies ministry, hikes fees...and “this is our school” Chijaka</td>
<td>-Chijaka Primary School in Makonde rural --Chinhoyi [Mash West]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/09/04</td>
<td>-Sound education critical to industry :Murerwa</td>
<td>-Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/10/04</td>
<td>-Firm extends $272m grant for construction of school</td>
<td>-Hurunngwe District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Standard</td>
<td>-10 pupils share one text book at rural schools</td>
<td>Mazowe[Rural] Mash Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/11/04</td>
<td>-Community acts to educate its children</td>
<td>Rusununguko Primary School in Epworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/11/04</td>
<td>-Invasions: after farms and firms, its now schools</td>
<td>Epworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/01/05</td>
<td>-Akauraya mwana wake nechepfu</td>
<td>Headlands, Mt Darwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwayedza</td>
<td>-Vana vakapona nepaburi retsono vapisiriwa mumba</td>
<td>Chikwaka-Goromonzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Headline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Saturday Herald</td>
<td>16/10/04</td>
<td>Home gives orphans solace; Masiye Camp brings hope for orphans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22/01/05</td>
<td>Couple accused of abusing 8-year-old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plight of conjoined twins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Mail</td>
<td>05/11/04</td>
<td>Woman seduces Grade 7 boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21/11/04</td>
<td>Antibiotic recommended as new treatment for H.I.V positive children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30/01/05</td>
<td>Man fatally assaults 3-year-old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arundel registers 100pc pass rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tribune</td>
<td>16/04/04 to 22/04/04</td>
<td>Hand over child or face jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30/04/04 to 06/05/04</td>
<td>Man admits raping daughter 70 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Herald</td>
<td>15/12/04</td>
<td>Mothers back use of Nevirapine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>20/01/05</td>
<td>Orphans to benefit from UNICEF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Headlines**

Headline messages associated with children’s issues highlights comprehensively the issue, capturing most of the data itself as a summary. One can easily tell the story from the headline messages. Headline messages are phrased clearly reflecting an issue. In most instances, headline messages are not confusing to the reader. Many reports or cases about children’s issues can be easily analyzed from headlines. By merely looking at headline messages one can look beyond the line and tell the story. Thus, the reader can anticipate what the text is about from the headline. If the headline is interesting, one reads more fully the whole article. Most headlines on issues concerning children are in black, bold-eye catching letters [The Herald, 16/10/04]. This is a very good way of presenting children’s issues as the headline quickly attracts the reader’s attention. Also to capture the reader’s attention, some headlines are written in white print with a darkened background and put in quotation marks [The Tribune, 30/04/04 to 06/05/04]. Some headlines are boxed in red lines [as well as the whole article] to attract the reader’s attention [The Saturday Herald, 16/08/04]. However, some of the headlines are not boldly presented such that readers can miss them as they browse through the pages.

**Placement**

In the Herald, some of the issues concerning children are placed on front pages of the newspaper [The Herald, 17/08/04]. This shows that the media places value on children’s issues by giving them front page coverage so that every reader is attracted to the article and reads it. However, articles with children’s issues cannot always be on the front page. Some are found on inside pages of the paper under analysis page [The Herald, 13/01/05]; others are placed on lifestyle page [The Saturday Herald, 22/01/05]; and some are found under the Opinion page on Editor’s comment; letters to the Editor or under cartoons by I. Mpofo. In the Tribune, issues concerning children are placed under In the Courts page [16/04/04 -22/04/04]. In Kwayedza, issues concerning children are placed under Nhau Dzemumatare Edzimhosva [08/10/04-14/10/04].
In view of this, most newspapers place most of the articles on children in the inside pages except for a few which are placed on the front pages. Although the issues are placed in inside pages, the reader cannot miss them as one would like to know what goes on in the country, hence, one will turn to the Local News page. The same applies for the Analysis, Opinion and in the Courts pages. Definitely the reader would not like to miss such pages. In terms of placement, the media is trying its best to portray children’s issues.

Content/Depth

The content and/or depth of articles about children’s issues vary depending on the issue. Some are short especially if the stories are on child abuse because reporters simply give a summary as they report on court cases like rape, The Saturday Herald, [03/02/05]. Some of the issues are just presented in reported speech in the main part of the paper [Kwayedza, 08-14/10/04; Sunday Metro, 21/11/04]. Some articles are very long with lots of content especially when they are articles by reporters [The Herald, 13/01/05].

Language

The way news is reported can either kill or empower. Hence, the need to select words and choose terms which reduce stigma and promote gender equality [thus, taking gender into the media]. The media must play a role in creating an enabling environment to improve equal opportunities for both sexes. Hence, the language used in the media should be gender responsive. It is pleasing to note that the media use multilingual approaches/contexts when presenting children’s issues around certain programmes. However, the language used depends on the paper or station, e.g. Kwayedza uses Shona and all other papers use English. On radio, during the phone-in programme, various presenters use Shona, Ndebele or English. If the presenter notes that the child is having difficulty with the English language, she/he switches to the child’s language, be it Shona or Ndebele. So for young children who could not speak English during the discussions, language is not a barrier. Not having competence in one language has no repercussions on both the presenter and child spoken to. Thus, language does not hamper children to express themselves in the media. The English used in the media is not very difficult except when it touches on certain acts such as the Sexual Offence’s Act and Child Adoption Act [The Herald, 17/08/04]. These acts are not explained such that for some people they mean nothing. The papers and radio stations present children’s issues in user-friendly and accessible language which helps to reach a wide audience as the presenters use interesting and varied languages depending on the issue and the child being addressed.

Advertisements

Adverts are used to present children’s issues and these have flashy, eye catching headlines that appeal to readers. One cannot ignore the bright colours and bold letters. However, most adverts are designed for commercial purposes [to attract an audience for sales messages] and not for the purpose of teaching or raising important issues concerning children. Children are used in adverts to coerce parents to buy items on promotion. These adverts play a big role in influencing children to use certain things [as they glamorize such things] and they are often shown at times when children are watching. Adverts encourage young people to buy and do certain things, giving them the impression that using certain things makes them look good or cool. Both the products advertised and the advertising is specifically aimed at children. However, can children identify the persuasive intent of adverts [that they are meant to induce the child to like and buy a product]? Can children realize that adverts are symbolic, scripted, filmed, staged, and unreal?

Cartoons

The newspaper present children’s issues in form of cartoons [The Herald, 28/10/04]. This is presented in a fun way to the reader but with a strong message.

Children’s Pages

These are a regular feature in weekly papers such as the Sunday Mail, Manica Post and Sunday News. Varied activities like quiz colour-in and have fun, word search, etc are presented and these involve children. Short stories are also featured on these pages. The Manica Post’s Police tips section also focuses on children’s issues [27/08/04-02/09/04]. When need be, the papers have special supplements focusing on children, e.g. Back to school [The Standard, 29/08/04].
Children’s pictures with captions

The newspapers capture photographs of children and put appropriate captions below on issues concerning children [The Herald, 28/10/04; The Sunday Metro, 30/01/05].

On Television

Children are highly involved in most of the programmes on television, from presenters to participants, e.g. during Make and Play children are engaged in varied practical art activities. In Religious Time, children sing, listen to stories and recite memory verses. Children at home can phone-in and interact with live participants on Star Kidz. In Child Alert and Citizen Child, children have live interviews where they give their views on certain issues. Children also sing songs; have drama and poetry to raise awareness on child abuse and children’s rights.

Adults are invited and interviewed to clarify and give information on certain issues and respond to questions asked by children. On Citizen Child, fliers are displayed as background and during short breaks, e.g. give us wings to fly. The fliers have meanings for adults. During Mai Chisamba show, children are also invited to talk about issues that concern them, giving their views.

On Radio

Radio programmes pertaining to children allow children to write in greeting messages and answer questions for competition to win prizes. Songs are played for children to dance to. Some of the songs have strong messages on issues concerning children. On Madambanevana, children recite poems and rhymes, sing songs, etc. Children’s plays offers stories to children which are real. Children are involved throughout in these programmes either through phone-ins, letters or actual participation.

Children’s Voices in the Media

The media gives children a chance to stand for themselves and air their views on issues concerning them, e.g. Child Alert and Citizen Child on television. Through drama, songs, poetry, discussions and interviews children get the opportunity to voice themselves. In newspapers, children also have the opportunity to voice themselves [The Herald, 14/10/04; 28/10/04].

Adults are also children’s voices in the media. Adults are invited and interviewed to clarify and give information on certain issues and respond to questions asked by children. Senior Magistrates and Senior Prosecutors are children’s voices and they are invited to speak for children, The Herald, [17/08/04]. This gives children an opportunity to talk about what worries them and what to do when faced with a crisis. Adults are also given the opportunity to stand for children as their voices in newspapers. They write letters to the editor with issues pertaining to children [The Herald, 01/11/04; 17/11/04; 30/11/04; 11/01/05; The Sunday Mail Entertainment, 10/10/04].

Cartoonists speak on behalf of children through cartoons [The Herald, 28/10/04]. Novelists become children’s voice [The Sunday Mail Entertainment, 28/11/04]. The Police Force also stands as a voice of children as they inform society on children’s issues through the media [Manica Post, 27/08/04-02/09/04]. The inspector’s victim friendly systems which deal with child abuse are a multi-sectorial model of dealing with crimes against children. The multi-sectorial team comprises of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, the Judiciary, the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, the Child and Law Foundation and other Non-governmental organisations that provide support, shelter and counseling to victims of sexual abuse.

The police force also speaks for children in cases in the courts presented in the media [The Sunday Mail, 30/01/05]. Probation officers are also children’s voices when children are offenders or come into contact with the criminal justice system for a number of reasons. When children appear in court they should get special treatment to promote their sense of dignity and encourage them to respect the rights of others. Appearing in court can be very scary for children; hence, the magistrate, prosecutors, defense lawyers, court clerks, and the probation officer are some of the people who work with the justice system that can help children who have to appear in court. They can help with counseling and preparing the child for the court appearance. For example, when a child under the age of 16 years has committed a crime, the police bring the matter to the probation officer from the Department of Social Welfare. The officer writes a report to the juvenile court to suggest any of the following; counseling, put in a rehabilitative institution, close monitoring by parents or canning/strokes.
The Origin of Children’s Issues in the Media

The origin of children’s issues is from rural and urban areas; and in courts.

An Overview of Children’s Issues in the Media

Baby snatching and baby dumping are quite common in Zimbabwe. The editor’s comment in the Saturday Herald [16/10/04] actually had this comment: Watch-out for baby snatchers. This was necessitated by the high prevalence of such cases. The incidents of baby snatching are mostly by desperate childless women trying to save their marriages. Tradition is partly to blame here because childless marriages are normally considered a curse. The blame is mostly placed on the woman. Hence, the desperation due to fear of a divorce leads to baby snatching. The Saturday Herald [20/11/04], had a story of a toddler who vanished with a house-maid for five months. Baby dumping and infanticide are due to poverty [Kwayedza, 08-14/10/04; The Sunday Metro, 24/10/04]. However, there is no justification for infanticide; child murderers and baby dumpers must be brought to book [The Herald, 16/08/04; 01/11/04].

Child abuse cases are also reported in the media. In most cases the perpetrators are people who are known to the children, e.g. Fathers [The Tribune 16-22/04/04; The Saturday Herald, 11/09/04; 22/01/05; The Sunday Mail, 30/01/05]. Other sexual abuses are blamed on traditional healers who advise people to be sexually intimate with children for ritual purposes, e.g. to enhance business or to be cured of a disease The Herald, [30/11/04].

Irresponsibility is another issue found out in the study [The Herald, 13/01/05; The Tribune, 30/04/04-06/05/04]. The media also presents information dissemination, e.g. Back to School Supplement [The Standard, 29/08/04]. Articles like the Manica Post [20-26/08/04; 27/08/04-02/09/04], looks at various issues concerning children, giving tips on child abuse.

SUMMARY

The mass media is a strong tool which can afford children a forum to freely express themselves. Zimbabwe’s mass media should be applauded for a fair effort it has made to promote children’s rights and exposing the violation of some of these rights.

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