

# Children not in the media



## 2015 Children's media coverage: Namibia

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## 1. Introduction

In Namibia, media reporting on children's issues remains a challenge. However, this is not exclusive to the Namibian media industry as reports suggest that other Southern African countries also face the same challenges.

It is for this reason that Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Namibia Chapter and Save the Children International partnered to conduct an analysis of the Namibian media coverage of children and their issues. The aim of the analysis was to provide an understanding of the holistic coverage of children's issues in the media in order to hold journalists, editors and media houses in general accountable, as well as to identify ways of cooperation for improved reporting.

To achieve the above, five newspapers were monitored and analyzed. The daily newspapers monitored were state-owned *New Era*, *Republikein* and *Namibian*; weekly newspapers were both independent and these were *The Villager* and *Windhoek* and *Observer*. These publications were monitored for a period of two months from the 1 June to the 31 July, 2015. During the monitoring period, the five newspapers published a total of 7197 articles with 403 articles mentioning children and/or being about children. The 403 articles were then analyzed to determine how children were reported on. The findings of the analysis are detailed below.

## 2. Findings

This section presents the findings. Where possible, comparisons are made to results from previous years, as well as to other countries in Southern Africa.

The section begins with the quantity of articles and proceeds to origin, topics covered, children accessed, rights respected, and concludes with the quality of information.

### 2.1 How many children's stories are covered in the media?

Almost half of the population in Namibia consists of children. Therefore it can reasonably be expected that media coverage of issues concerning children would receive coverage that is comparative to the population<sup>1</sup>.

However, as the figure below reveals, this is not the case as articles about children constituted only six percent of all articles published by the newspapers which is a two percent decrease when compared to 2014 results<sup>2</sup>.

Such low coverage of articles about children as seen above is not unique to Namibia. South African media covered fewer stories during the same period<sup>3</sup>.

Figure 1 - Number of stories

<i>Medium</i>	<i>Articles about children</i>	<i>Total Articles</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
The Namibian	157	1800	9 %
The Villager	23	208	11%
New Era	91	1890	5%
Republikein	117	2835	4%
Windhoek Observer	13	464	3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>401</i>	<i>7197</i>	<i>6%</i>

<sup>1</sup> The State of the World's Children 2014 in Numbers

<sup>2</sup> Namibian coverage of children 2014

<sup>3</sup> South African children's report 2014

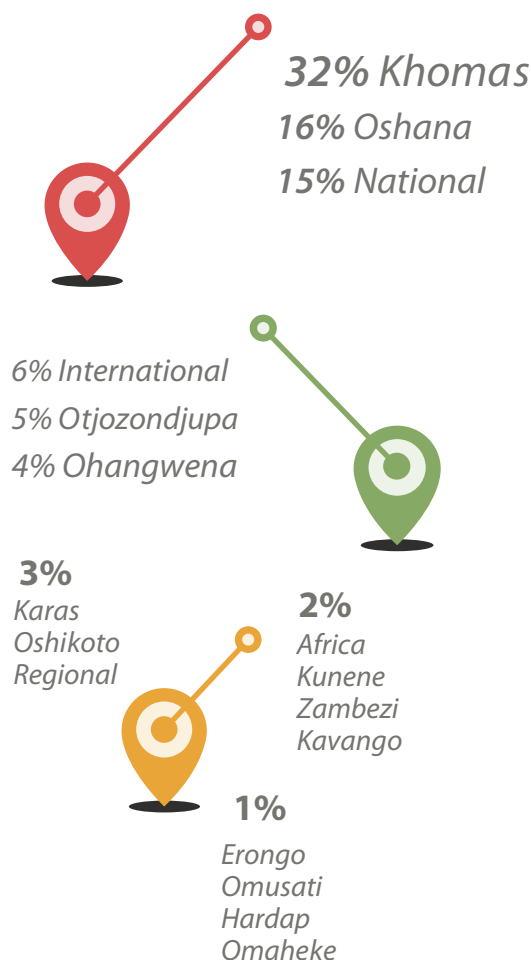
## 2.2 Where do the stories come from?

The origin of articles was analyzed in order to identify the thematic areas that receive the most media coverage. It further provides insight into the pertinent issues that affect children in some of the country's 14 regions.

As is the case with South Africa, Namibia's urban centres/regional capitals have the highest coverage of children's stories<sup>4</sup>. The Khomas region where Windhoek, the country's capital city is located, had the highest percentage of coverage of children's stories at 32. Urban centers are more likely to receive higher coverage because most of the more established media houses have journalists or freelancers stationed there.

The rest of the country's regions had very low coverage, each with less than five percent although regions like Omusati, Ohangwena and Kavango West have relatively large populations. It is a call for concern as it shows that issues affecting children are neglected by the media through their inadequate or completely no coverage. The media are therefore encouraged to widen their coverage by also seeking stories from underreported areas perhaps through citizen journalism as technology now allows them to do so without having to spend a lot of resources.

Figure 2 - Origin of stories



## 2.3 What are the stories about?

Analyzing the topics coverage presents the opportunity to identify the trends that exist in the media. The figure below highlights the top 10 topics covered by the media in Namibia during the monitoring period.

Figure 3 - Top ten topics



It can be seen from the figure above that the top 10 topics that received coverage are a mixture of both positive and negative issues that affect children. Topics like child abuse, crime, health and education feature in the top 10 of other countries such as South Africa and Lesotho, which suggests that children in Southern Africa face similar challenges.

What is rather positive for Namibia is that education had the highest coverage at 23 percent. However, sport is less covered at 12 percent compared to 2014 where it was covered at 18 percent. Media in southern Africa and around the world tend to report mostly on negative stories about children. However, Namibian media should be commended for having more positive stories compared to other countries where the monitoring was done in 2014 and 2015, despite facing a number of challenges<sup>5</sup>.



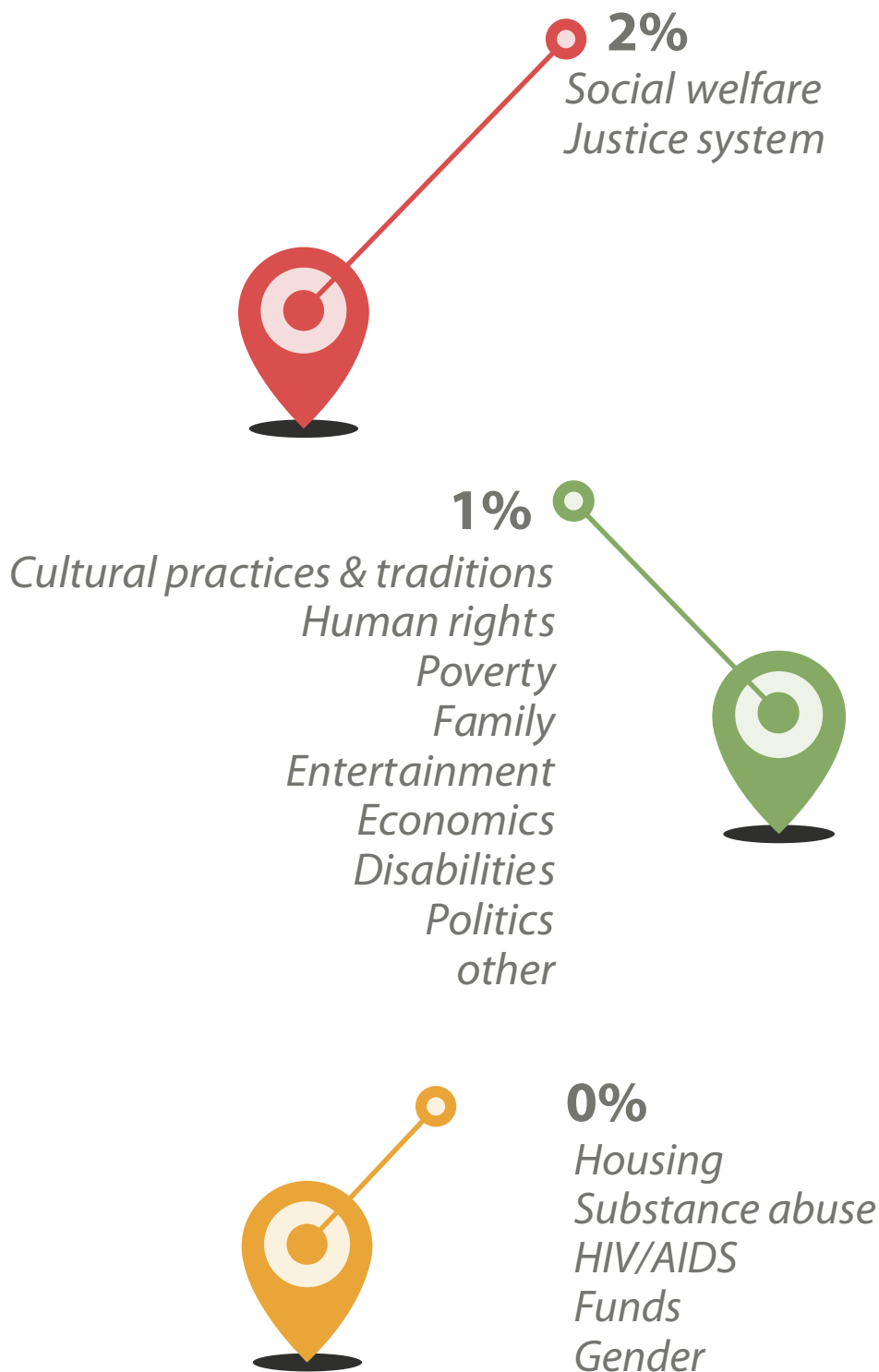
<sup>5</sup> Namibian coverage of children 2014

## 2.4 What are the stories not about?

Children in Namibia face issues relating to teenage pregnancy, poverty and HIV and AIDS among others, yet these issues received very little coverage as reflected in the figure below.

These results are the same as those for the year 2014. Media tend to focus on particular issues and in the process neglect others. For example, in 2015 HIV and AIDS and housing received the same coverage as in 2014<sup>6</sup>.

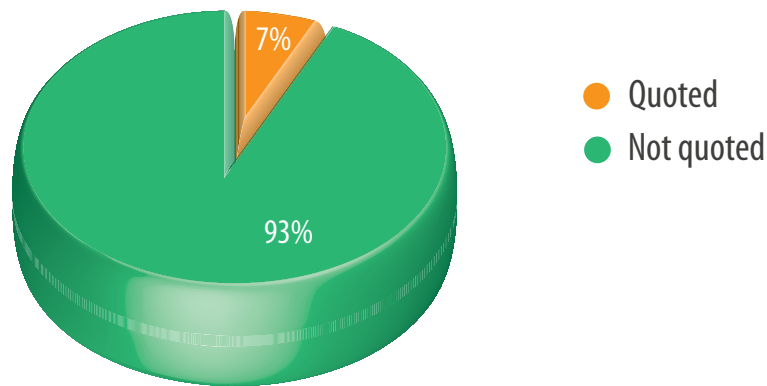
Figure 4 - Less covered topics



## 2.5 Do children speak in the articles?

Children must be given an opportunity to speak for themselves about their achievements, hopes, fears and the impact of adult behavior on their lives.

Figure 5 - Children's voices



It is discouraging that in almost all the articles about children, they are often just mentioned and not given an opportunity to express their views. While it is unethical to access children especially abused and traumatized ones in the absence of social workers or parents for example, journalists must make efforts to let children share their views on issues that affect them.

The media must strive to amplify children's voices. However, the child's safety must remain paramount and careful thought should be given to protecting the child's identity.

Although it is a known fact by the media that children's right to freedom of expression especially in issues that affect them must be promoted, the media in Namibia and other Southern African countries violate this right by not accessing the children in stories as can be seen from the figure above where 93 percent of the stories did not access them.



## 2.6 How are children portrayed in the articles?

The media portray children more negatively than positively and this leads to the public forming an unrealistic perception of children.

The representation of children in the media largely remains very limited, and to a large extent negative. As indicated by the figure above, the identification of children as just 'children' is the most frequent role assigned to them in news articles at 56 percent. While this is not necessarily negative, it does not in any way mean the children are portrayed in a positive light. This is discouraging as it strips them of their identity and leaves them devoid of any individuality. In many instances, children are portrayed as helpless, unable to act, think or speak for themselves, a practice that perpetuates society's stereotypes about them. That said, the media are urged to portray children in a positive manner. This can be done by for example, portraying them as survivors in abuse articles instead of victims. The media can also attempt to cover developmental issues where children are playing leadership roles in their community and in the school environment.

Figure 6 - Children's roles

**Children**  
**Learners**  
**Children in need**  
**Sportspersons**  
**Victims**



## 2.7 Are children’s rights respected in the articles?

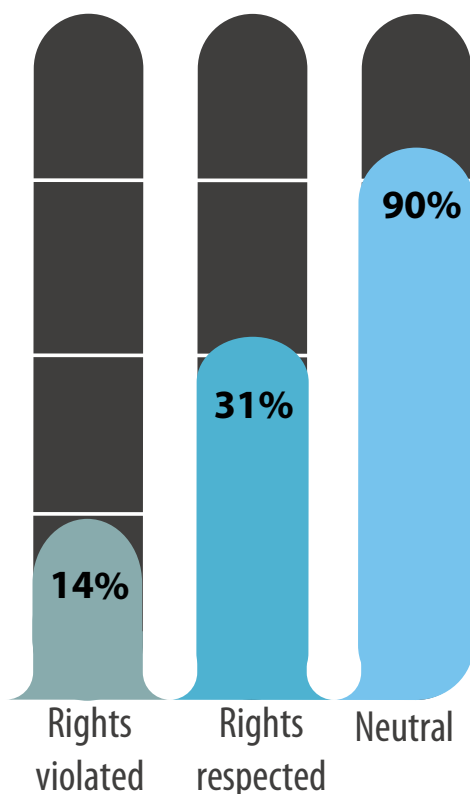
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out what governments and individuals should do to promote and protect the indivisible human rights of all children<sup>7</sup>.

It is therefore essential for the media to strictly observe all ethics when reporting on children. Journalists are champions of human rights and they act as the eyes, ears and voices of the public, drawing attention to issues affecting children and their rights. Through their work, journalists can encourage and improve the involvement of children in the media.

Children’s rights violation in the media in Namibia has increased from five percent in 2014 to 14 percent in 2015<sup>8</sup>. This is a significant increase when compared to countries like South Africa. This shows that the journalists in Namibia are either very negligent in dealing with children’s rights, or they do not understand the rights. An example of a child rights violation in the media is when the child is identified in an abuse story. When a child has been accessed for example in a positive story, then their right has been respected.

Namibian media needs to ensure that they protect the rights of children in their reporting through ethical practice. Journalists should be better skilled and undergo capacity building on child rights and ethical reporting regularly. When reporting on children, journalists should ask themselves questions such as “What are the consequences of this story and the manner in which it is reported to the child(ren) and their family?”

Figure 7 - Children’s rights



<sup>7</sup> UNCRC

<sup>8</sup> Namibian coverage of children 2014



## 2.8 Are girls and boys given equal attention in the stories?

Gender inequality is a problem that many countries including Namibia are grappling with and the media can be a vital tool in tackling and raising awareness around the issue.

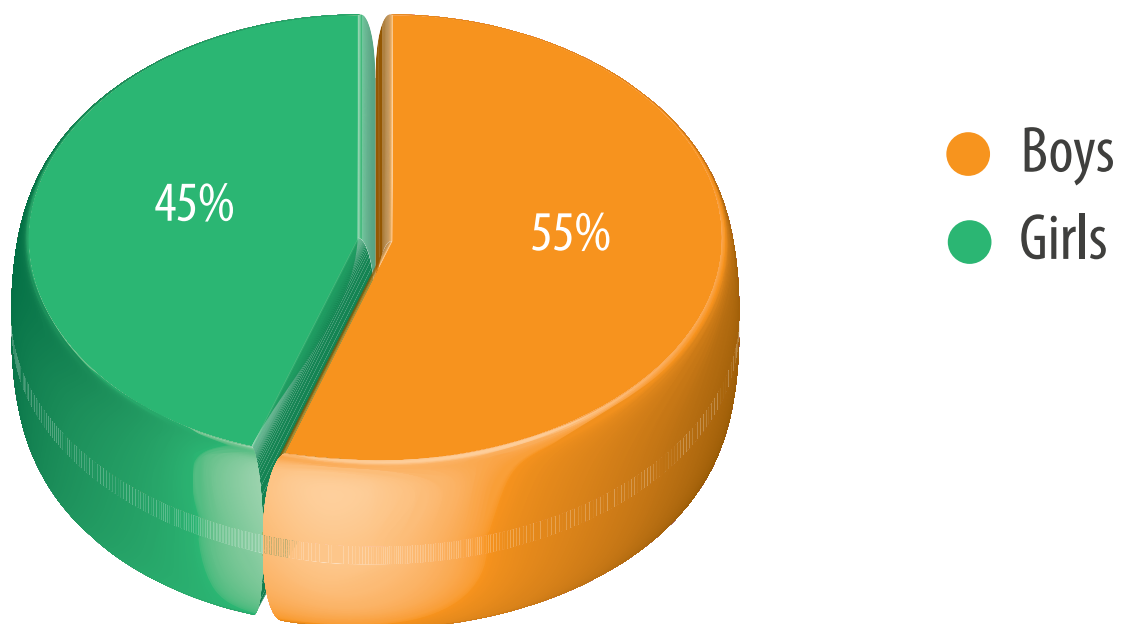
The media can be an important factor in the promotion of gender equality in terms of fair gender portrayal, the use of neutral and non-gender specific language, as well as giving both genders equal opportunity in the coverage

It is clear from the figure above that the disparity between the coverage given to boys and girls is negligible. This is similar to the findings in South Africa<sup>9</sup>.

These findings inform us that media are either merely reflecting societal reality or are feeding into gender stereotypes that portray boys as strong and good sportspersons, and girls as weak and vulnerable victims of abuse.

The media need to be encouraged to portray girl and boy children in all their different roles as this will ensure issues affecting all sexes are well reflected and no sex is marginalized.

Figure 8 - Girls vs boys



## 2.9 Is the information provided in these articles enough to raise awareness about children's issues?

The majority of people in Namibia rely more on traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio. It is thus very crucial that these media provide enough information in their coverage to assist their readers and audiences to fully grasp the information provided. The figure below shows the context of the articles.

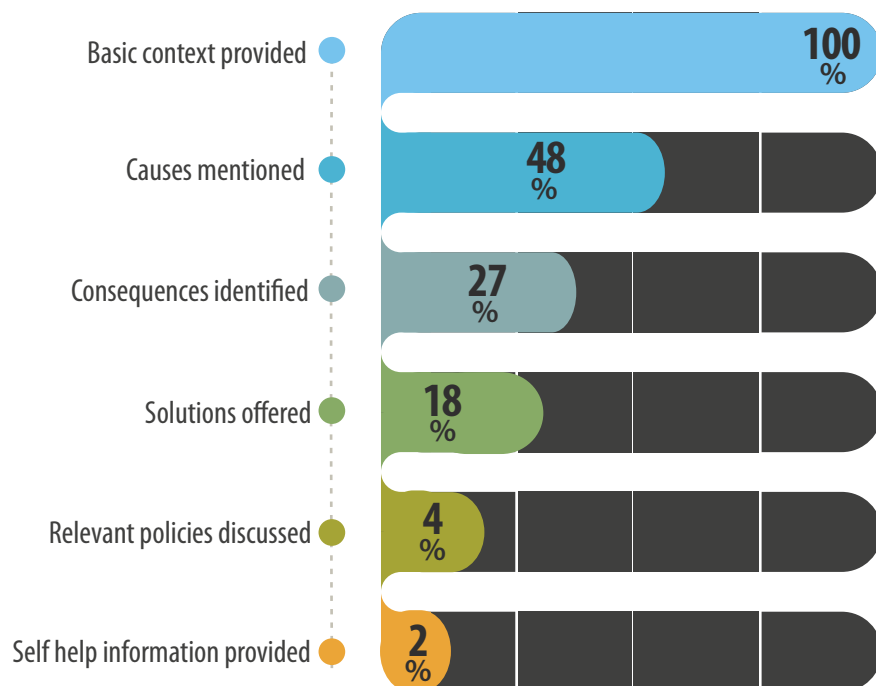
All coverage provided basic context about the events in the articles as can be seen from the figure above at 100 percent. Basic context in this case means responding to the five Ws and an H of reporting. These are 'what', 'who', 'where', 'when', 'why', and 'how'. What is disconcerting is that outside of the basic information, the coverage offered little else as only 48 percent mentioned the causes of the issue(s) under discussion. Twenty seven percent identified the consequences of the event(s) or issue(s) and 18 percent offered solutions.

For a story to be evaluated as having in-depth context, it should have considered broader social consequences and recurring patterns of events as well as offer or suggest solutions.

Bearing in mind that every sphere of society relies on the media for information, and that people often make decisions based on what is being said in the media, the media should ensure that their reporting is informative to the reader. More often than not, government makes decisions on policies that affect children based on information that the media provided.

Since the media are powerful in shaping people's perceptions and actions, they are urged to report responsibly by offering quality information in their coverage. This means going beyond giving the basic context and instead offering a broader context that will allow the public to gain greater understanding of all the facets of the issues being covered.

Figure 9- -Quality of information



### 3. Conclusion and recommendations

While Namibian media are commended for their gender representation and also for having more positive topics compared to other countries, they are urged to improve their reporting. Children need to be reported on in a proper manner at all times and to achieve this, MMA recommends that;

- ∅ The media ensure that the coverage of children is reflective of the challenges children face and proportional to the country's child population. This coverage should be diverse to ensure that no child is left out because of the media's bias towards reporting on particular thematic areas. The media should avoid turning children into 'icons of suffering' by portraying them negatively thereby perpetrating stereotypes about them. They should also ensure that children are accorded the dignity they deserve and respect their wish to remain anonymous if they wish to be.
- ∅ The media ensure that all reporting about children is in the best interest of the child. This should be a primary consideration.
- ∅ The media attempt to have children as sources and refrain from just mentioning them.
- ∅ The media continue to cover diverse topics about children. They must also ensure that all topics are treated with the same amount of attention to avoid having important topics such as HIV and AIDS and teenage pregnancy receiving less coverage.
- ∅ The media provide reliable and/or confidential support or advice for children who respond to items concerning, but not limited to health and abuse in their reporting.
- ∅ The media provide coverage about children that is comprehensive and provides information that empowers society by going beyond basic reporting.



Empowering  
Children &  
the Media

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