



PORTRAYAL OF CHILDREN IN NEWS

**20 YEARS OF MONITORING NEWS
COVERAGE OF CHILDREN**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) was established in 1993 in Johannesburg, South Africa to promote ethical and fair journalism that supports human rights and to encourage a culture where media and the powerful respect human rights while promoting democracy, and the ideals of a just and fair society. Over the 30 years in existence, MMA has monitored media coverage of different issues and events of national importance as well as coverage of marginalised groups of people. One of these marginalised groups is children.

After identifying gaps in how children were portrayed in the news in the late 1990's, a yearly dedicated project to monitor media's coverage of children and offer recommendations was launched in 2003. For 20 years, MMA has monitored and analysed media coverage of children with a strong focus on representation, access and quality of information, etc, all through a child rights angle.

It is crucial to monitor media's coverage of children and issues the children face because as a media watchdog, we need to ensure that the media is ethical when reporting on children and that they adhere to the ethical and legal frameworks around reporting on children. This holds the media accountable using evidence collected from the monitoring.

Among the elements monitored yearly, is the protection or violation of children's rights to privacy and freedom of expression, among other media related rights. The right to privacy, for instance, requires that the media protect the identity of children involved in crime or abuse stories or any stories where revealing the children's identity might potentially put the children's lives in danger. Meanwhile, the right to freedom of expression requires that the media give an opportunity to children they report about to speak for themselves especially when it is in the children's best interest to speak.

Twenty years of monitoring has revealed that children's rights are violated, and their participation in the news is inadequate. These violations by the media go against the provisions of children's rights enshrined in both the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) (ACRWC). South Africa signed the UNCRC in 1993 and ratified it on the 16th of June, 1995. It was the first international treaty that the incoming South African democratic government ratified. Meanwhile, the ACRWC was ratified in 2000. Even though South Africa is a signatory to these two treaties, and even though there are a number of ethical and legal frameworks that the media are bound by, children's rights are still violated in media coverage.

To commemorate 20 years of media monitoring of coverage of children, MMA will compare data from 2003 when the first monitoring was done to 2023 data. It must be noted that there were instances where a year or more would be skipped in monitoring. In such instances where the data was not available in a particular year, the 2023 data will be compared to the data from the next available year. For instance, if 2004 was skipped, then the 2023 data will be compared to the data from the next year after 2004 when the monitoring was done. The aim of the comparison is to determine whether there has been progress in reporting on children in the news in the last 20 years.

This report will begin by providing the methods used to gather and analyse the data for the study and will be followed by research findings. Lastly, the report will make a conclusion based on the findings and then provide recommendations on how the media can enhance their reporting on children.



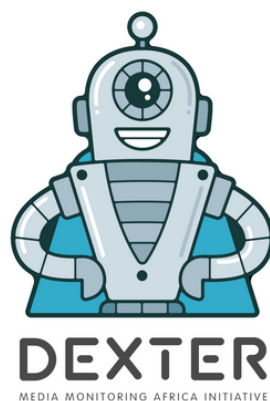
2.METHODOLOGY

MMA's media monitoring methodology has remained largely the same since 2003. Since the beginning, the methodology has always included examining the following elements; number of children's stories in the media, individual media performance, origin of the stories reported, top topics that the media focussed on, the extent to which the media included children's voices to the stories, promotion or violation of children's rights, gender representation, and the roles the media assigned to the children in the coverage.

Over the years, we have updated and refined the methodology to also include the comparison between the voices of children versus adults (see section 3.6) which gauges who speaks more in the news between the two groups; and quality of information in the stories (see section 3.10) using a quality check criteria that includes aspects such as whether the stories include causes, consequences, solutions and whether the stories discuss relevant policies or legislation, etc.

The monitoring period for 2003 was from March to May, and the monitoring period for 2023 was from the 1st of April to the 31st of August. A total of 36 media, including print, radio and television were monitored in 2003 and 17 online media were monitored in 2023. Broadcast media were not included in 2023 because of the current limitation of MMA's monitoring tool, Dexter which only scrapes articles from websites. The Dexter tool which uses machine learning, was used to collect the articles from the media websites that were manually monitored and analysed by trained and experienced MMA monitors and analysts.

In both these years, stories were selected using keys words; learner/pupil, child/children, minor, baby, toddler, infant, teenager. All those articles that did not relate to children were excluded from the analysis. Approximately 22, 000 news items were monitored and analysed in 2003 and a total of 18, 794 stories were monitored and analysed in 2023. The monitors used a set criteria that checks aspects like topic discussed in the story, whether children are speaking, the role the children occupy in coverage, how the children are portrayed, the children's gender, and the quality of the information, etc.



3. FINDINGS

In this section, the findings from the monitoring results are presented, and comparisons are made between monitoring conducted in 2003 to the one done in 2023. However, since 2003, and as has been mentioned above, some elements have been added to the methodology. Therefore, some sections will be compared to 2009, 2012 or 2016 if the section was not included in 2003. In 2009, the quality of information criteria was introduced to the methodology and in 2012, children's versus adults' voices criteria was introduced.

The section begins with the number of stories and continues with the media performance, origin of the stories, most covered topics, children's voices, children's voices versus adults', children's rights, how children are portrayed, boys versus girls in coverage, and quality of information.

3.1 CHILDREN'S STORIES IN THE MEDIA

The number of children's stories in the media are monitored to determine the priority attached to children by the media. In determining this, the stories that are related to children are compared to the stories not related to children in all the media monitored over the monitoring period.

According to a population census conducted by Statistics South Africa, there are 60.6 million people in South Africa and children constitute 36% of this population.

The media coverage of children does not come close to fittingly represent this demographic. The 2023 results as seen in the Figure 1 below show that children only made up 6% of coverage across all media monitored. This coverage percentage is the same as the one recorded in 2003. (1) It must be noted that there are years when the coverage slightly increased but the percentage has hovered around 8%. (2)

The finding is concerning and disappointing considering that the media now have much more space to publish stories with the availability of online platforms compared to 2003 where publishing of news stories was limited to hard copy newspapers aside from broadcast bulletins.

The lack of adequate stories on children in the news has far-reaching consequences to the development and well-being of children and promotion of their rights. When issues facing children are not adequately reported in the media, there is likely to be no redress as the issues will not receive attention from policy makers and duty bearers.

(1) https://www.mediamonitoringafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Children-Dying-to-make_-2003-1.pdf

(2) https://www.mediamonitoringafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Are-we-ever-going-to-be-heard-South-African-coverage-of-children_2015-1.pdf

Children's stories Vs. Other stories (2003 and 2023)

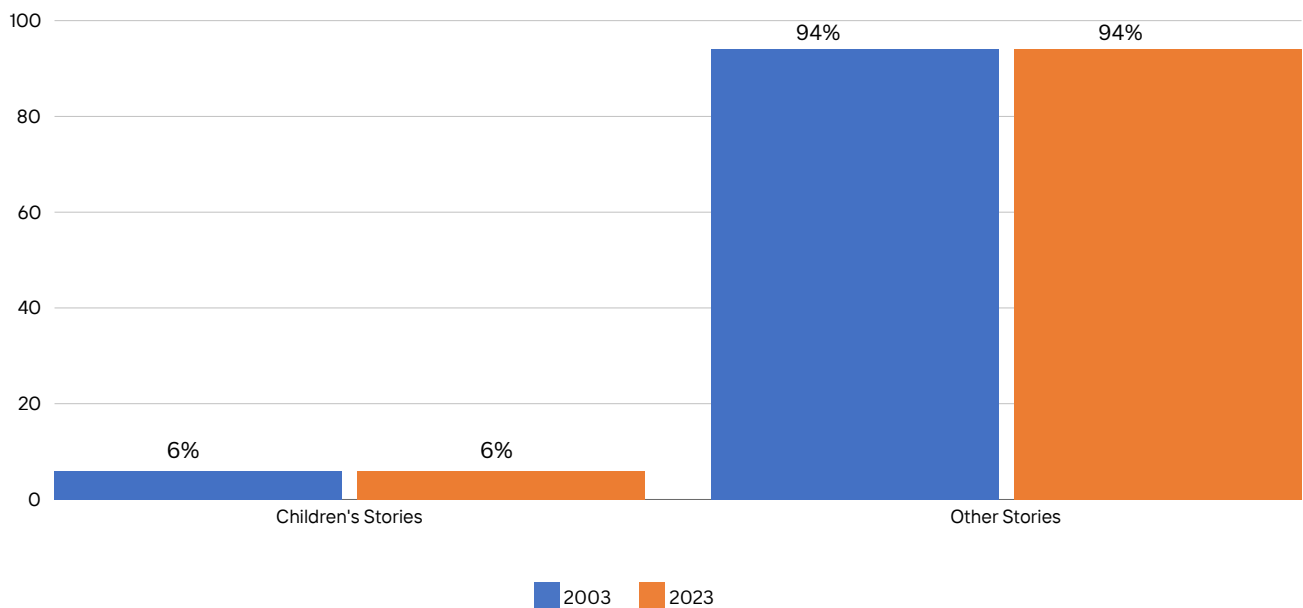


Figure 1: Amount of coverage on children

3.2 MEDIA RATINGS

Media performance was scrutinised to determine which media were leading in terms of children's coverage on children.

From all the media monitored in 2023, *Weekend Argus* topped the list of media monitored in terms of performance with a commendable 28% of coverage on children. This means that during the monitoring period, *Weekend Argus* dedicated 28% coverage to children and issues facing the children. This is a huge increase when compared to the 5% recorded in 2003.

From 2003 to 2023, *Sowetan* and *City Press* increased their coverage of children by 5% from 4% to 9% and 3% to 8% respectively.

In the two years being compared, there are some media that have significantly decreased their coverage of children. For instance, *The Citizen* had the biggest decrease in coverage compared to others from 7% in 2003 to 1% in 2023. It was followed by *Daily News* which decreased from 8% (2003) to 3% (2023) and *Saturday Star* from 6% (2003) to 1% (2023).

Daily News was the leading media in terms of performance at 8% coverage in 2003. Meanwhile, *Business Day* was the lowest in 2003 at 1% and commendably, the publication increased its coverage to 4% in 2023. Other media that have increased their coverage of children from 2003 to 2023 are *Sunday World* (increase of 4%), *The Herald* and *The Sunday Independent* (increase of 3%).

The conclusion that can be made from the results is that the media is not prioritising children and the issues they face. This robs citizens, policy makers and other duty bearers of the opportunity to be informed of issues facing children and denying them an opportunity to find solutions. The more children’s issues are neglected in the media, the more children continue to suffer with little to no solutions to the issues they face.

Media Monitored	2023	2003
Weekend Argus	28%	5%
Cape Argus	10%	-
Sowetan	9%	4%
Sunday World	9%	5%
Daily Sun	9%	-
The Herald	9%	6%
City Press	8%	3%
The Sunday Independent	7%	4%
eNCA Online	5%	-
Cape Times	4%	6%
M&G	4%	6%
Sunday Times	4%	6%
Business Day	4%	1%
Daily News	3%	8%
SABC Online News	3%	-
The Star	2%	6%
Saturday Star	1%	6%
The Citizen	1%	7%

Figure 2: Media performance

Note: The media with no data for the year, 2003 were not monitored in 2003 because they were either not in existence or were excluded from the list of media monitored for various reasons.

3.3. ORIGIN OF THE STORIES

Coverage of stories on children from different parts of the country was monitored to determine whether there is a broad geographic representation of children and their issues in the media. This gives us an indication of the attention each province affords to children's issues.

In 2003, Gauteng recorded 37% coverage of children placing it top of the list of provinces. However, when compared to the population of children in the province, Gauteng was overrepresented. In 2003 Gauteng's children's population was at 15%.⁽³⁾

Meanwhile, Kwa-Zulu Natal was the most underrepresented province in 2003 with a coverage share of 4%. The coverage was less compared to the province's children's population which was at 23% in 2003.⁽⁴⁾

The 2023 results show that nothing much has changed in terms of trends in geographical representation of children in the news. Gauteng, Western Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and Eastern Cape continue to be the provinces that receive the most coverage with Gauteng leading at 33% in 2023. These provinces taking up a huge share of the coverage out of all the provinces could be attributed to the fact that most media houses are located in metropolitan areas which makes it easy for journalists from these areas to report stories on children more than their counterparts in rural areas.

Media should always strive to represent the different provinces equitably to ensure that issues that are affecting children from all the provinces are highlighted. This will help hold the relevant people accountable because neglecting children in some provinces while prioritising others means that children from the neglected provinces are less likely to get their issues addressed as their issues will not get the attention of policy makers and duty bearers.

Children's Stories Vs. Children's population per province in 2003

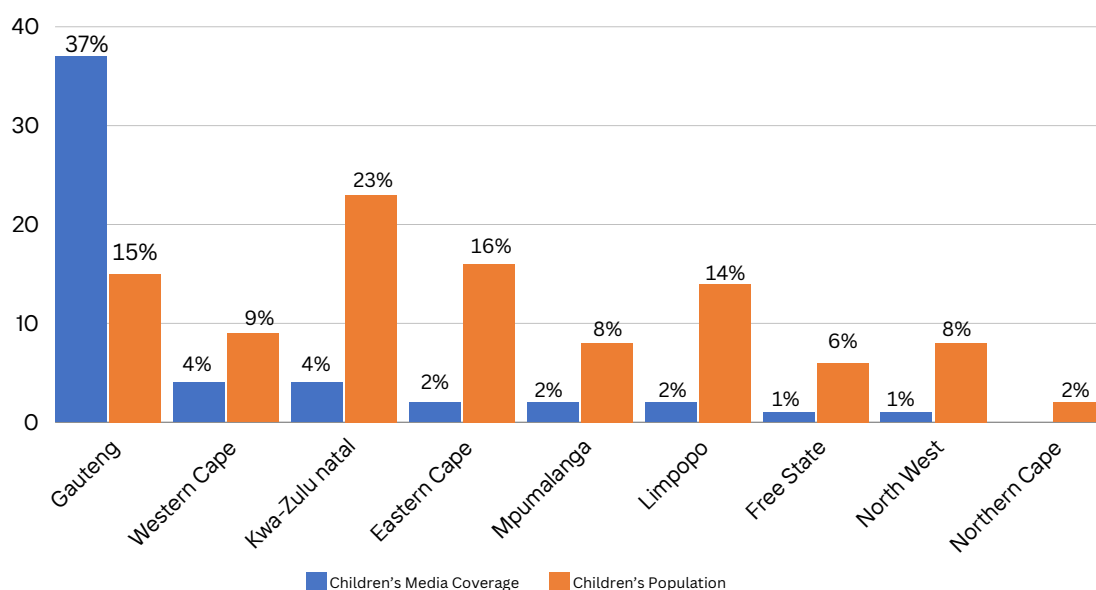


Figure 3: Provincial representation of stories on children in 2003

⁽³⁾ https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Children-Dying-to-make_-2003-1.pdf
⁽⁴⁾ <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022022.pdf>

Children's stories Vs. children's population per province in 2023

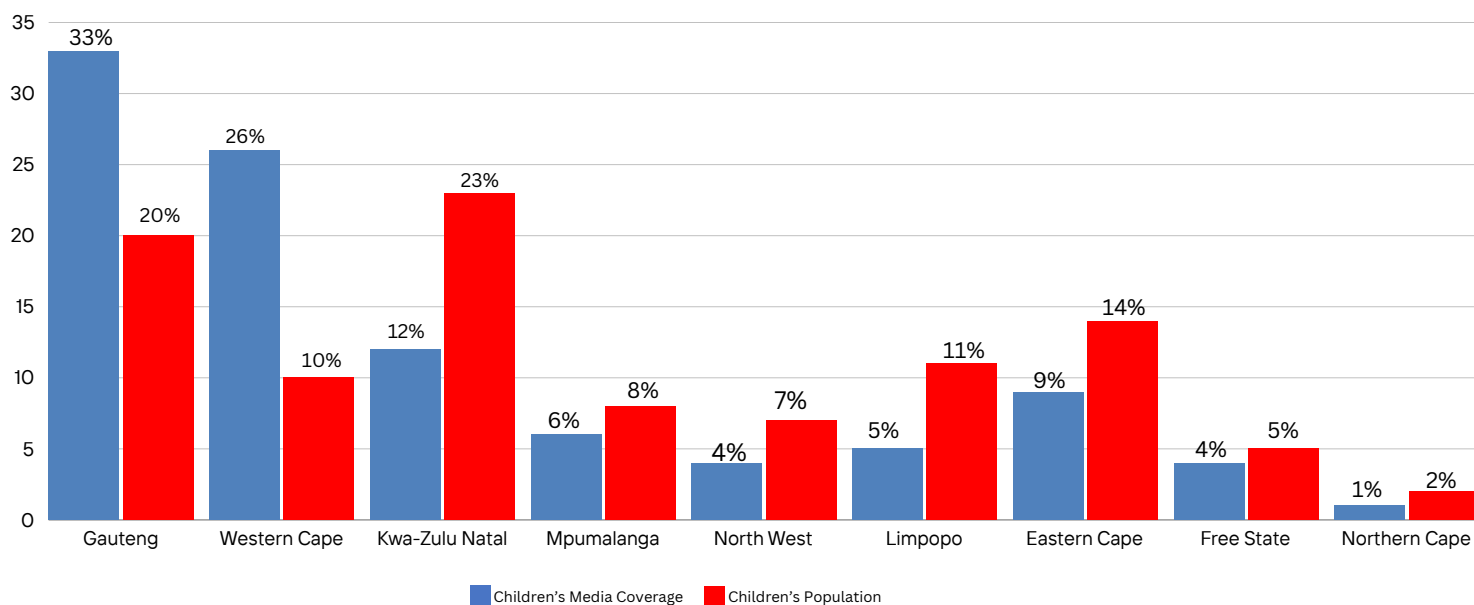


Figure 4: Provincial representation of stories on children in 2023

3.4. TOP 10 TOPICS

Topics in stories on children are monitored to determine which issues involving children are seen as newsworthy and/or prioritised by the media.

In 2003, the top 10 topics constituted 94% of all the stories.⁽⁵⁾ Meanwhile, in 2023 the top 10 constituted 82% of all the stories. That the top 10 topics has been commanding a large coverage share for 20 years shows that the media have only been focusing on a few topics relating to children at the expense of the many other issues facing children in South Africa. The top 10 topics has remained largely the same in 20 years with crime being the most dominant topic with 18% in 2003 and 19% in 2023.

The notable major shift in the top 10 topics is the coverage of sports in 2003 and justice system in 2023. Sports was the second highest topic in 2003 at 12% but did not feature in the top 10 in 2023. Similarly, justice system as a topic garnered a coverage share of 13% in 2023 and in 2003, it did not feature on the top 10 list of topics.

Over the years, MMA has observed that as the stories on crime involving children increase, so do the stories on justice system. This can be attributed to the trend where the media mostly practise event-based reporting when it comes to children and stories on crime and abuse especially where there is a court proceeding or judgment do tend to be reported more. Many stories on children that dominate media coverage are stories reporting bad things that have happened to children.

(5) https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Children-Dying-to-make_-2003-1.pdf

Stories reporting positive things involving children rarely get reported on – this includes stories on topics such as education where coverage tends to be on negative issues in children’s schooling such as overcrowding, bullying or placement issues.

It is concerning that after 20 years, the same topics relating to children continue to dominate the news which means that other issues are neglected. Some of the issues that received less coverage in 2003 include topics such as teenage pregnancy and poverty, etc while some of the topics that received less coverage in 2023 include topics such as sports, cultural practice, child labour, science, human rights, disability, gender and of course, poverty which is a huge issue that affects children in South Africa. In 2003, all the neglected topics which have been coded by MMA constituted 6% of all coverage and in 2023, the figure of neglected topics from the over 40 coded topics on the list was at 18%.

It is known that the government directs its work to issues that are prioritised and highlighted in media coverage. Therefore, neglecting certain issues affecting children while prioritising the same topics over and over again might result in neglect or slow progress in addressing those issues. This means that children might continue to be affected especially by issues that need urgent redress like poverty.

The media should strive to ensure diversity in topics they focus on in their coverage of children. This will ensure that all issues affecting children receive the needed attention from policy makers and duty bearers for redress.

Top topics in 2003 Vs. 2023

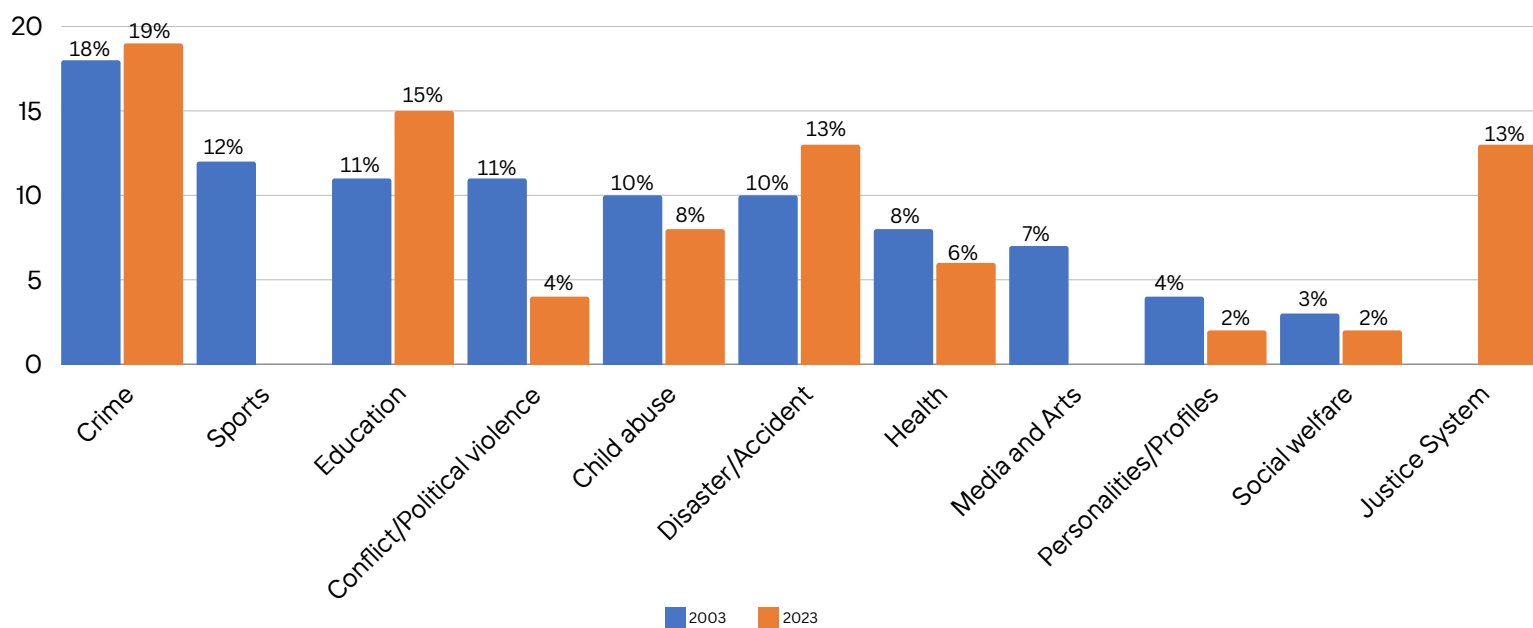


Figure 5: Top 10 topics in stories on children

3.5. CHILDREN’S VOICES

Children’s voices were monitored to determine how often the media accessed the children as sources in coverage of the children. This is vital because it helps uphold the children’s rights to participation and freedom of expression. Further, including children as sources in coverage of issues that affect the children enriches the stories with the children’s perspectives and these are necessary especially when finding solutions to issues children face.

In 2003, children were rarely accessed for their views because only 13% of the stories included their voices. Sadly, this percentage has decreased to 7 in 2023. This decrease raises questions about the extent to which children's voices are neglected in news about children. The decrease could be attributed to many things including the fact that topics such as crime and abuse dominate in coverage of children and the media are hesitant to find creative ways of speaking to children as sources on issues that are deemed negative.

MMA's previous research activities, spanning 20 years, consistently underscore this problem. These continuous gaps in representation emphasise the urgent need for media outlets to actively engage with children's perspectives.

It is always important for media to give children a voice to enable them to tell their side of the story. As children are often seen and not heard, their perspectives disregarded or marginalised. Including their voices in stories that impact them directly empowers them and gives them a platform to express their opinions, concerns, and hopes. This can be especially important in situations where adults are making decisions that will have a significant impact on children's lives, such as changes to policy.

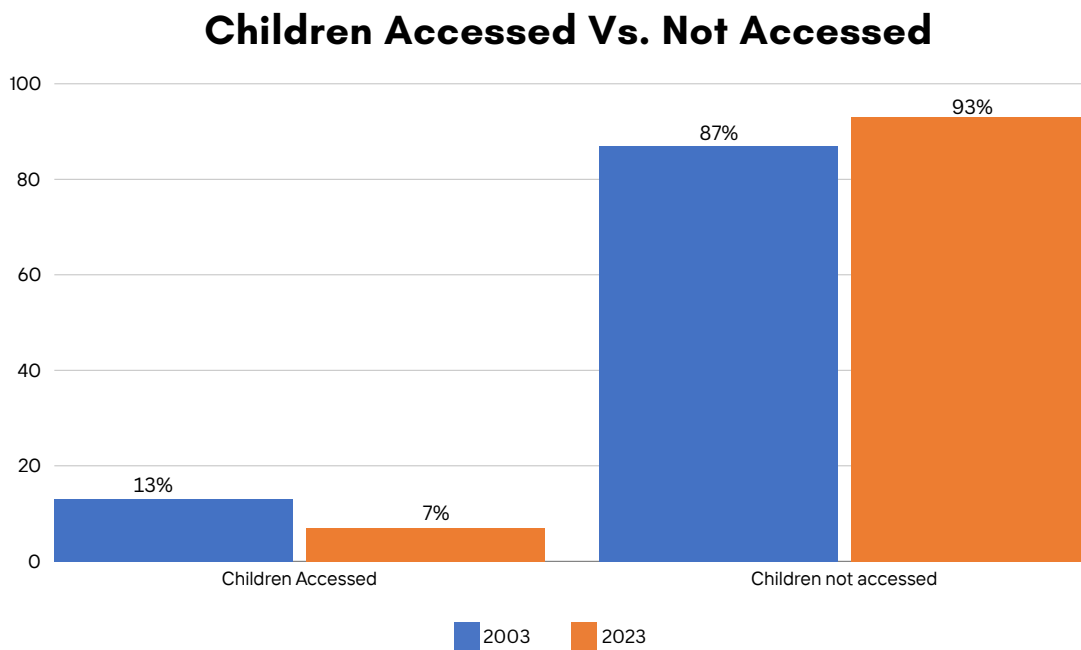


Figure 6: Children’s voices in media coverage

3.6. CHILDREN'S VOICES VERSUS ADULTS'

Children's voices versus adults' were monitored to determine who speaks more in stories that are related to children between children and adults. This section is different from the above section because it focuses on how many times children speak when compared to adults in the stories whereas the above section focuses on where children were sources. Children were regarded as sources when they were speaking, mentioned or pictured in stories.

For 20 years, media monitoring findings have shown that children's voices are often neglected in the media. The findings below show that adults speak on behalf of the children in media coverage of children at 99% (2023).

It must be noted that it is recommended for adults to speak on behalf of the children if it is not in the children's best interests. For example, when a child is a victim, suspect or a witness to a crime, the media should be cautious about speaking to such a child in coverage as doing so might subject the child to potential further harm including trauma. This is in line with Section 154 (3) of the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act which advises, "No person shall publish in any manner whatever any information which reveals the identity of an accused under the age of 18 years or of a witness or victim at criminal proceedings who is under the age of 18 years."⁽⁶⁾

In 2016 ⁽⁷⁾ when children's voices versus adults' voices criteria was introduced to the monitoring, the results showed that children spoke at 10% and adults at 90%. However, the 2023 results below show that the voices of children compared to adults has drastically decreased to 1%. As has been alluded to in Section 3.5 above, there are creative ways the media can employ to get comments from children without potentially subjecting the children to harm. One of these ways is by speaking to and quoting the children in coverage without revealing the children's identity as long as there is no potential for trauma. The other creative way is by speaking to children not directly affected by the story to give general comments as children on the issue.

The media need to ensure that children's voices are reflected and are audible in all the stories that involve them as long as doing so is in the children's best interest.

⁽⁶⁾ https://static.pmg.org.za/Act_No_16_of_2021_Criminal_Procedure_Amendment_Act_2021.pdf

⁽⁷⁾ https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Status-of-childrens-rights-in-South-African-media-2016-compared-to-2012_2016-1.pdf

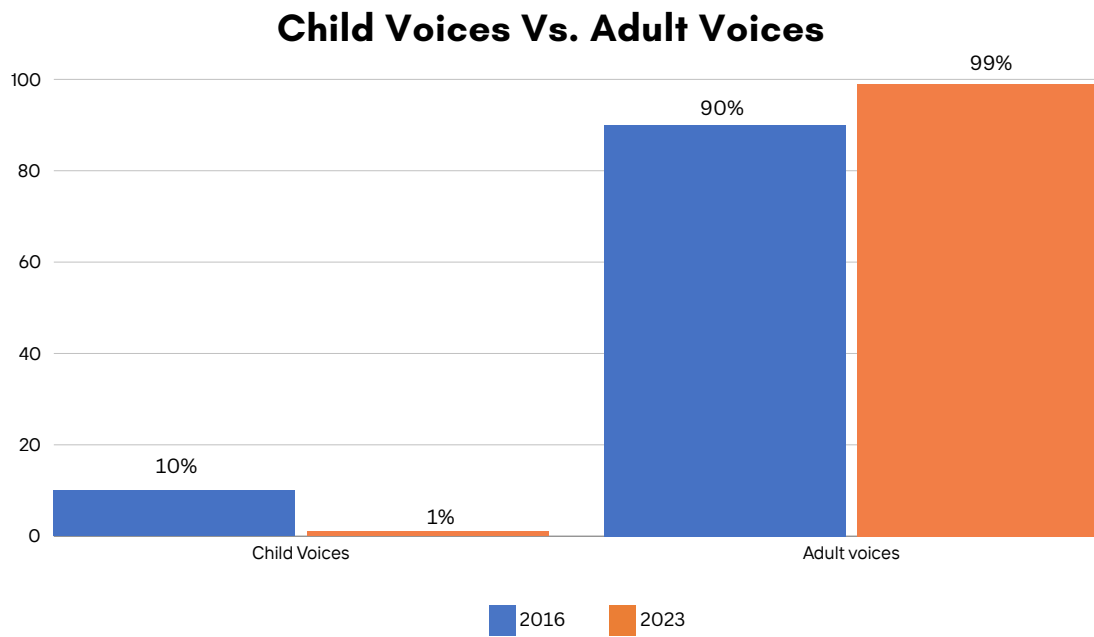


Figure 7: Children’s voices versus adults’ voices

3.7. CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

Rights of children are monitored to determine whether the media are adhering to the ethical and legal guidelines on reporting on children as prescribed by several ethical and legal frameworks including the [Press Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media](#) and the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act.

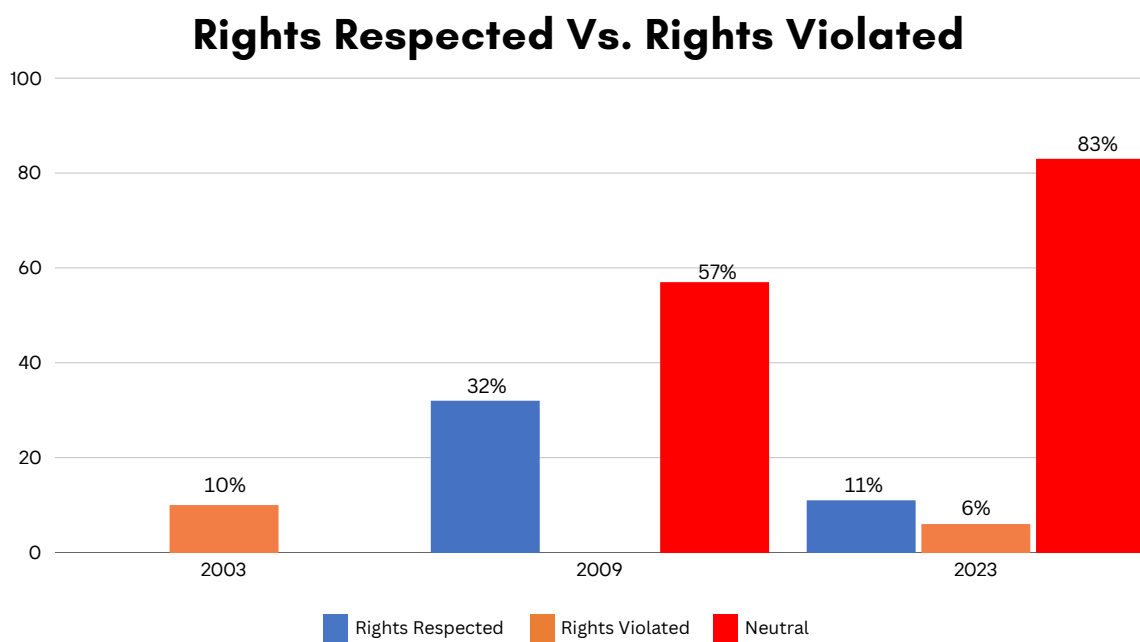


Figure 8: Children’s rights in media coverage

Figure 8 highlights a concerning trend regarding the media's efforts to uphold children's rights in stories involving the children. A total of 32% of the stories on children during the monitoring period respected the rights of children in 2009 and in 2023, this figure dropped to only 11%.⁽⁸⁾ Data for the year, 2003 is missing from the graph above because the criteria of monitoring rights respected on top of rights violated was not yet introduced in 2003.

The media were deemed to have respected children's rights when they withheld identities of children to protect them from further potential harm, and when they interviewed children when it was in the children's best interests.

Most of the stories that were monitored did not outrightly respect or violate children's rights in 2009 and 2023. These stories are dubbed neutral in the figure above. While this might be argued to be commendable, it is in fact a failure to protect and especially promote children's rights. Further, it could also mean that these stories did not have children as the central focus. Protecting the identities of child victims in media coverage when there is potential for harm is an essential ethical requirement. By protecting the privacy and dignity of those who have suffered harm, media professionals can help to promote the recovery and well-being of victims, for instance.

Furthermore, media accessing children in stories when in the children's best interests can help to promote children's rights, increase awareness and understanding of issues affecting children, help challenge negative stereotypes around children and, inspire and empower both children and adults to take action towards a better and more equitable world for all. Promoting and protecting children's rights in the news can be achieved only if the media start to strictly adhere to all ethical and legal frameworks around reporting on children – frameworks that the media are bound by.

In the report from 2003, it was noted that there was a 10% of stories that violated children's rights. The violation has since decreased to 6% in 2023.

Media were deemed to have violated the children's rights when they failed to withhold the identities of children when they were supposed to. This included naming the children or naming someone close to them which could make it easy for the children to be identified. Furthermore, the media were deemed to have violated children's rights when they were supposed to give them a voice and they did not.

The 4% decrease in these violations between 2003 and 2023 could be considered an indication that journalists are taking greater care to protect and respect children's rights when reporting on them. The media should however aim for zero tolerance when it comes to child rights violations in their coverage.

(8) https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Childrens-Views-not-in-the-news.Porrayal-of-children-in-South-Africa-print-media_2009-1.pdf

It is crucial to cover children's stories, but equally vital is the imperative to respect their rights when reporting on events that concern them. Balancing the need for information with the necessity of safeguarding children's rights is paramount. This involves a delicate approach that prioritises their privacy, safety, and well-being. In sensitive situations, such as disasters or tragedies, journalists must navigate the ethical terrain, ensuring that their reporting does not infringe upon the dignity or emotional stability of the children involved.

Incorporating child protection guidelines and ethical journalism practices is essential. Seeking informed consent from guardians or responsible adults, whenever possible, is a fundamental step. Moreover, utilising anonymised case studies, providing general information without specific details, and refraining from sensationalism are significant strategies. Additionally, journalists should be aware of legal frameworks and international conventions, such as the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which outline the rights of children including in media contexts.

By adhering to these principles, media professionals can fulfil their duty to inform the public while upholding the dignity and rights of the children they report on, ensuring a responsible and respectful approach to journalism involving minors.

3.8. BOYS VERSUS GIRLS IN COVERAGE

The coverage of boys versus girls was monitored to determine which sex received the most coverage in the media. The coverage on children has shown that media is almost achieving equitable coverage amongst boys and girls. In 2003, the results showed that 44% of the child sources in coverage of children were girls and 56% were boys.

Contrary to 2003, in 2023 girls at 54% were sourced more than boys (46%).

The media are commended for their efforts in ensuring that the representation of boys and girls is equitable. This is different from the South African media's representation of adult men and women where women are severely marginalised as sources in coverage of issues and events of national importance.

Boys Vs. Girls in 2003 and 2023

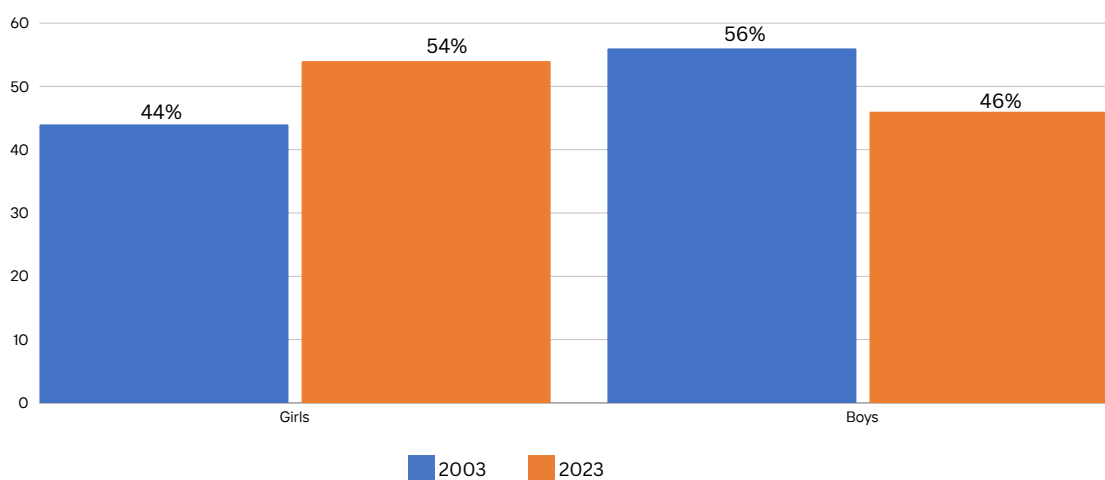


Figure 9: Gender representation of children in coverage

3.9. CHILDREN'S ROLES

The media often portrays children in certain ways that are not always accurate. This can lead to people believing things about children that are not true. For example, the media, more often than not, portrays children as helpless victims or just as children and yet, children are survivors and are just as complex and diverse as adults.

It is important to examine the roles the media gives children to help dispel the stereotypes about children being helpless victims or just children without agency. By understanding how the media portrays children, we can start to challenge these stereotypes by making sure the media report more on positive roles such as activists, and achievers, etc.

The top 5 roles that South African media allocate to children in the news since 2003 have remained the same. In 2003, victim, children, learners, sports person, and vulnerable children were the top 5 roles and constituted 67% of the all the coded roles allocated to children in the news in that year.(9)

Meanwhile, in 2023, victim, children, learners, survivor and sick child were the top 5 roles and constituted 89% of all the coded roles in news stories related to children.

Over the years since 2003, the percentages for the roles, victim, children, and learners have increased massively. Victim as a role increased from 25% in 2003 to 41% in 2023. Children increased from 17% in 2003 to 25% in 2023 and learners as a role increased from 14% to 18%. These increases could be attributed, amongst other things, to the increase in the levels of crime that involves children in South Africa and a need by media to ensure they are highlighted.(10)

Portrayal of children as victims can reinforce negative stereotypes, making children feel powerless and more vulnerable. Additionally, portraying children as just children with no actual role disempowers the children and they may begin to feel that they are without agency.

The media are commended for their portrayal of children as survivors in 2023, albeit at only 3%. We call on the media to do more to portray children in more empowering roles.



(9) https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Children-Dying-to-make_-2003-1.pdf

(10) <https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/parliament/crime-statistics-political-parties-concerned-about-killing-of-women-children-20230819>

Top 5 Children's Vs. roles in 2003 Vs. 2023

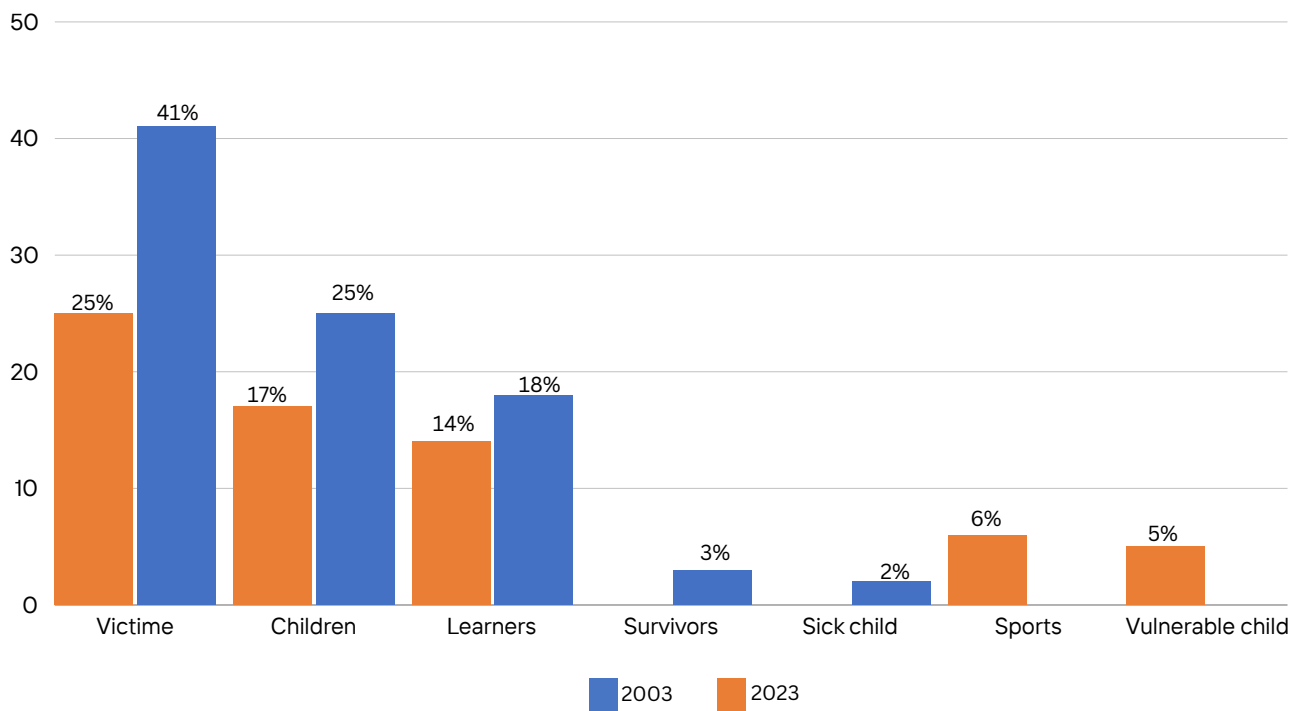


Figure 10: Children's roles in coverage

3.10. QUALITY OF INFORMATION

The quality of information in news stories is a cornerstone of responsible journalism, and it significantly influences the impact and credibility of media content. The principles of responsible journalism take on added significance when children are involved, given their vulnerability and the potential impact of media coverage on their lives. Responsible reporting on children requires meticulous attention to accuracy, language, privacy, and ethics to protect the children's well-being and ensure that media coverage contributes positively to their lives. The criteria for monitoring quality of information in news stories involving children was introduced to the monitoring methodology in 2009. Therefore, this section will compare the 2023 findings to the 2009 findings to show improvement or the lack thereof.



Quality Information

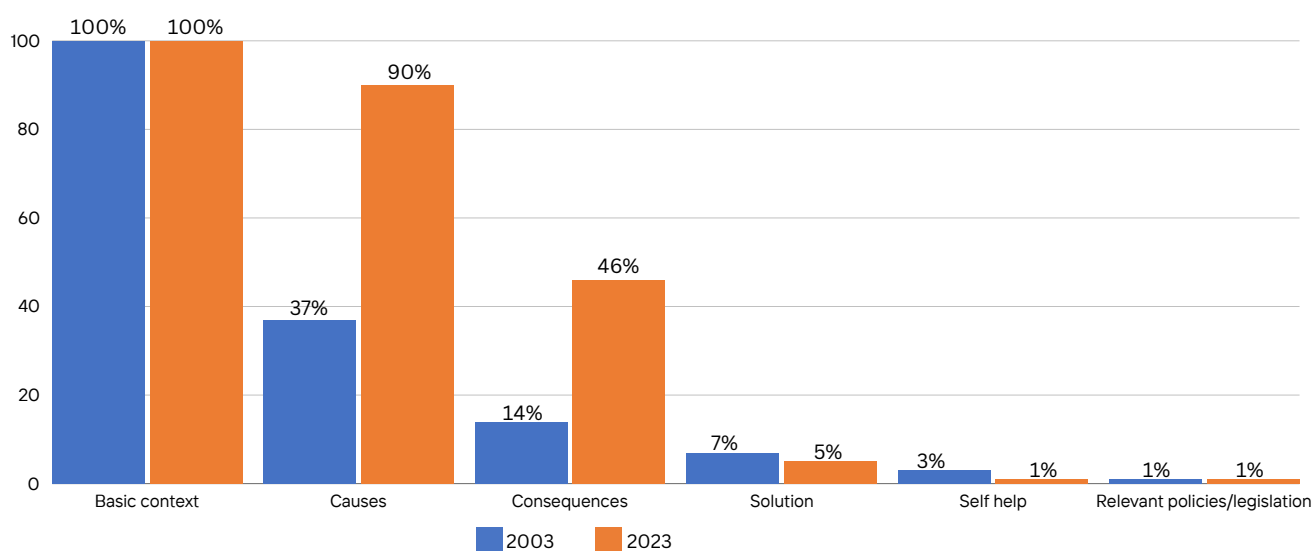


Figure 11: Quality of information in coverage

In both 2009 and 2023, every story monitored included fundamental elements that give basic context at 100%. However, only 37% of stories mentioned the causes in 2009 and a commendable 90% in 2023.⁽¹⁾

Furthermore, monitoring findings show that in 2009 and 2023, only 14% and 46% of the stories mentioned consequences respectively.

Causes in stories on children involve the media exploring what could have caused the issue being reported on and consequences involve the media exploring the consequences, including potential consequences of the issue being reported on especially consequences if the issue is not addressed.

When media coverage explores causes and consequences, solutions must also be explored and stories that did this accounted for only 7% in 2009 and 5% in 2023.

Similarly, stories that included self-help information were very few. Only 3% of the stories in 2009 and 1% in 2023 included self-help information. That stories reporting crime and abuse dominate media coverage of children should compel the media to include such relevant information to stories. It benefits victims and would-be victims if a story reporting a crime or abuse or any other issue negatively affecting children includes information on how to help oneself or where to go for help.

A crucial aspect of holding duty bearers accountable on issues affecting children involves the media reporting on these issues while referencing or questioning the existence or implementation of existing policies and legislation. Sadly, and concerningly, in both 2009 and 2023, stories that discussed relevant policies and legislation constituted 1%.

(1) https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Childrens-Views-not-in-the-news.Porrayal-of-children-in-South-Africa-print-media_2009-1.pdf

The media must be acutely aware of the significant impact their coverage can have on society, including shaping public opinion, setting the agenda, influencing behavior, and fostering an environment where issues affecting children are adequately addressed. Therefore, the media must consistently ensure that all stories involving children, whenever applicable, address causes, consequences, solutions, relevant policies and legislation, and provide self-help information.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the report has shown that the media in South Africa still need to improve on how they represent and portray children in the coverage. Media Monitoring Africa has come to the following conclusion based on the findings shared above;

- The coverage of children continues to be low at 6% in both 2003 and 2023. This means that issues that are affecting children are not receiving the needed attention from both the media and duty bearers. When issues facing children are not prioritised by both the media and duty bearers, there is likely to be slow or no redress.
- The media continues to report more on stories from provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape and neglecting other provinces. This consequently leads to issues affecting children in these provinces not getting attention.
- The media continues to violate the children's rights (10% in 2003 and at 6% in 2023), failing to protect the children's identities and marginalising the children as sources in stories about the children. Even though the violations are arguably fewer in 2023, the impact they have on children is huge.
- The monitoring findings indicate that children are spoken of and not spoken to in the media. In 2003 children's voices in news was at 13% and this decreased to 7% in 2023. This is problematic because it violates the children's right to express themselves and furthermore, denies them an opportunity to contribute to solutions with their lived experiences or perspectives.
- The top 5 dominant roles the media allocates to children remains almost the same year in and year out with victim and just children topping the list. The top 5 roles constituted 67% of all coded roles in 2003 and 89% of all coded roles in 2023. Media need to start diversifying the roles they allocate to children because less diverse roles may lead to society viewing and treating children in the stereotypical manner that the media portrays them.

To help the media improve their reporting on children, MMA recommends the following;


- ➔ The presence of children in the media is vital, especially since they represent a substantial population proportion in South Africa (currently 36%). MMA urges the media to report more on children and the issues they face.
- ➔ Media coverage should reflect the diverse issues that affect children, not only in terms of topics covered but also in terms of geographical coverage. Additionally, children can add new perspectives to common stories on topics ranging from economy to politics to sports.


- ➔ Where possible, the media needs to look beyond just mentioning children to accessing them as much as possible. It is important that the media are constantly reminded of the importance of including children's voices and are trained on how to reach them ethically, especially when accessing children can be cumbersome and daunting.
- ➔
When reporting about children's rights, the media should aim to have zero tolerance for infringement. By providing continuous training as well as effective systems of media accountability, media who violate ethical standards in their reporting can be held accountable.
- ➔ The media should strive to portray children in roles that empower rather than disempower them, since they are capable of much more than they are given credit for. It would be better to portray children as survivors, rather than as victims since the former has a positive connotation.



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