

INCREASING SPATE OF SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA IN SRI LANKA

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Child abuse on the rise ?

2012 Police reports:

Rape 1759

Abuse 1194

Sexual harassment 547

(Colombopage,2013; BBC, 2012)

Context : Sri Lanka

- Population:20 million
- Child population :25.8
- 30 years of civil war
- Post conflict stage
- Political instability
- Violence



(Census 2012)

Media and child abuse

- A complicated relationship



The role of the media

- Social mobilization
- Publishing stories- a catalyst for more adversities?
- Media representation affecting societal views of child abuse and rape?

Methodology

- Mainstream print newspapers published in Sri Lanka from January - December 2012
- In the 3 national languages English, Sinhalese and Tamil
- 48 articles
- 12 duplicates of same event
- 1 incomplete
- 35 reports identified and analyzed
- Qualitative content analysis methods applied
- Meaning units, condensed meaning units and codes identified
- Codes categorized into themes

Findings

- Themes
 - ❑ Misrepresentation through the use of language
 - ❑ Misrepresentation through cultural lenses
 - ❑ Lost opportunities

Misrepresentation through the use of language

Making headlines:

1. Headlines that name the offences

“Father rapes his own daughter”

2. Headlines that ignore the offences

“Pregnant by a stranger”

3. Headlines that redefine or reframe the offences

“Love affair gone wrong”

Misrepresentation through the use of language

Choice of language and words

- Ambiguous terms

Molesting/ sexual acts

- Sensationalization

“girl molested by mother’s paramour”

“Septugenarian remanded for sexually molesting 12 year old”

Limiting scope and gravity of the crime

Misrepresentation through the use of language

- Bias towards abuser

“ Disabled soldier sentenced for rape ”

Shaping public opinion in a post conflict situation

Exoneration of perpetrator

Misrepresentation through the cultural lens

- *“Five arrested for raping 15 year old girl;*

The victim had gone to the Galewala Town after she had fallen out with her parents”

Traditional patriarchic views

Filial responsibility

Victim blaming

Lost opportunities

- *“A four year old was sexually molested by an elderly uncle while at play with a girl of the same age at a friend’s place. The mother of the victim had requested her daughter to go and play on another day **but the small girl had been adamant**”.*
- **“Septuagenarian remanded for sexually molesting 12 year old”.**

• Failing to use vital information to :

Educate

Shape public opinion

Social deterrents

Advocate

Media role in child abuse

- Misrepresentation of events
- Reducing gravity and pervasiveness of the crime
- Exonerating perpetrator
- Blaming victim
- Lost opportunities

More questions

- Increasing incidence of child abuse ?
Vs Increased reporting ?
- Empirical research vs Ethical issues ?
 - Lack of supportive services
- Does media shape public opinion ?

Lack of public outcry ??
Is it due to media reporting ?



Conclusions/ Recommendations

- Advocacy ? As for violence against women
- Research ?? Methodological and ethical concerns to be addressed
- Media reporting
 - Standard guidelines in local languages
 - References to laws
 - Mandatory inclusion of National Child Protection Authority hotline