



Secondary Victimization of Children by the Media: An Analysis of Perceptions of Victims and Journalists

Neeti Tandon¹

London School of Economics, UK

Abstract

Children who are the most sensitive and vulnerable section of society provide for best human-interest stories and media tends to capitalize on this. Often stories pertaining to children involved in crime are hyped and sensationalised by the media resulting in their re-victimisation. Secondary victimisation² of children occurs both at the stage of newsgathering and through the publication of photographs, and other personally identifiable information. The journalists covering crime have a challenging task of striking the right balance between the "public's right to know" and "responsibility of bringing the issue to light" versus "the individuals right to privacy." It is a matter of debate whether such victimization that leads to further trauma for the child victims is caused by the journalists due to their negligence or lack of training. The paper discusses secondary victimisation as a concept, how and why children are victimized by the way the news is gathered and presented and the impact it has on them. Children as victims and as offenders have been covered since both are circumstantially very different from each other.

Key Words: Media; Victimization; Children; offenders; Victims

¹ Journalist; Graduate Student, London School of Economics (formerly Correspondent CNN-IBN, a News channel in India). Email: neeti.tandon@gmail.com

² Primary victimization comes from being a victim of the crime itself (e.g., through the physical suffering and psychological damage), secondary victimization stems from the reaction of the victim's social milieu (e.g., suffering from stigmatization, social isolation, or degrading questioning). Secondary Victimization by the media refers to instances when Media exploits or victimises its subjects for commercial gains. It is presumed that the media and journalists are well aware or are at least expected to be aware of the laws, rules and code of conduct with regard to reporting especially when reporting on children. The term 'Secondary Victimization' in the present context has been used to mean victimisation of the child victims and child offenders by the media. Secondary Victimization by media has been classified at two levels. One that occurs due to faulty reporting practices while presenting the news and the other due to insensitivity on part of the journalists while gathering news.

Introduction

Mass media, whether print or electronic, is very powerful since it reaches out to entire communities, state, or country. With this power comes a responsibility of using the medium with utmost care. The image many people have of journalists reporting on tragedies is that of a predator stalking vulnerable prey, intrusively wielding a camera and shoving a microphone into the face of the bereaved, asking ridiculously obvious questions. The popular image is that news-men are more interested in selling newspapers and gaining ratings, than in recognizing or minimizing the harm they could be inflicting on their vulnerable story subjects.

Media Explosion and the consequent competition among different channels and newspapers for audience obviously affect the way in which news is covered. In a race for 'Breaking News', journalists reach the crime scene, at times even before the rescue workers or police officials. Victims and eyewitnesses are bombarded with questions even before they receive any help. While accidents, calamities, or crime leave these victims traumatized, questions like "How do you feel?" only add to their pain. Insensitivity on the part of the journalists often results in further victimization of the victims.

The manner in which media reports are published, also tend to sensationalize issues. The newspapers and channels attempt to increase their rating points and grab greater viewer ship by creating hype. When there is crime or violence in a town, residents need to know the relevant facts to ease fears, squelch unfounded rumours and help provide the information that serves as a foundation for community action and public policy to meet any threat. Media is admirably suited to do that. However, it is also very important to strike the right balance while gathering information and reporting such issues without exaggeration. When this balance is not kept, media ends up re-victimising the persons concerned.

Children and adolescents are most potential subjects of moral panic and public outrage. When involved in crime they are frequently portrayed by the media as, what Jewkes (2004) calls 'Tragic Victims' or 'Evil Monsters'. But it is well known that children are also most vulnerable to victimisation and re-victimization because of their innocence and inability of dealing with stressful and difficult situations.

Jenkins (1992) argues that any offences, particularly those that deviate from the moral consensus, are made eminently more newsworthy if children are involved. This is true whether the children at the centre of the story are victims or offenders. Though, Jenkins concentrates on child victims who, he says, not only guarantee the newsworthiness of a story, but can also ensure the media's commitment to what might be called 'Morality Campaigns'.

Crimes against children and deviant behaviour by children are therefore often portrayed by the media as a signal of spiralling levels of crime and amoral behaviour of the society at large. It is no surprise therefore that the stories about children involved in crime, receive enormous media attention. A study conducted by Tuazon (2003) revealed that, throughout Asia, there had been increased newspaper coverage of children's issues and concerns, both good and bad. However, news articles and features still tended to focus extensively on distressing situations in which children figured as hapless victims of criminal and other forms of abuse. Crime and violence have topped the newspapers' coverage of children for the past two years.

The quantum of coverage of children in crime is not objectionable as long as the reporting practices are sensitive and ethical. In fact if such serious crimes were not

reported, it would be a major concern for media and society. The problem lies in the manner in which they are reported and sensationalized for commercial gains. Even on television, small children who were raped by their father or grandfather were coerced to tell their stories in front of the large studio audience. Child victims are made to relate gruesome details for the benefit of the audience. Obviously, the media is not concerned with the sensitivity of the child (Goonasekara, 2001). Media has been violating the rights of children by victimising, stereotyping images and denying children their right to communicate, as they might want. Children are, therefore, at a higher disadvantage with regard to victimization by the media.

Faulty Reporting Practices

Many newspapers and media analysts today, large and small, are grappling with efforts to re-think their crime coverage. At issue is: *What do the media houses hope to accomplish by their reporting on violence?* Sensationalism and fear-mongering contribute to what Gerbner (1977) has called the *Mean World Syndrome*, where people exposed to graphic media accounts of violent crime, exhibit a heightened sense of irrational fear, thereby adding to a climate that keeps people imprisoned in their homes. Simply proclaiming the reader's right to know falls short of providing a meaningful and clear-cut mission, and the fact that information on crime is relatively easy to secure is not a good enough reason for devoting much space to stories on human cruelty.

To be of real benefit to the community, crime coverage should be educative. It must empower readers, providing them information that they can use to understand the problem and to prevent and solve it. Though aspiring journalists undergo some training with respect to ethics, nevertheless, it is a fact that news gathering and reporting is a business. The business of media sometimes overrides the sensibilities of news people. Examples of bad journalism are not hard to find. They are all, often plastered on a newspaper's front page and packaged to attract interest despite an imbalance between news value and sensation.

Insensitivity while News-gathering

There is a constant struggle between the media's right to know and the right of the individuals' to their privacy. Community newspapers enjoy a close relationship with the people they serve, yet their direct contact with victims is both a blessing and a curse. It is seen that the media tends to invade the privacy of victims, offenders and celebrities. For example, when a cine celebrity *Mr. Amitabh Bachchan* was hospitalised for abdominal injuries, a television news reporter from a reputed Hindi news channel, sneaked into his Intensive Care Unit. Mr. Bachchan is a respected icon that people would like to know about, but he deserves his privacy. This act of the journalist could have actually jeopardized his health further. Even though Mr. Bachchan and his family had prior experience of dealing with the media, yet they felt traumatized. One can imagine what would be the situation of those child victims, or offenders who have had no prior exposure to the media. They are likely to experience much greater trauma. They are thrust, often unwillingly, into a limelight they do not seek or enjoy. They are, therefore, victimised and re-victimised by the primary assault of the perpetrator, secondary assault by the criminal justice system and the news media.

Insensitivity by the journalists while gathering information is one of the foremost reasons that result in victimization by the media. From merely looking at the news reports,

one cannot possibly find out how the news was gathered, therefore it is important to assess and understand how journalists approach their victims while gathering news.

Laws for reporting on Children

The international legislative and regulatory framework relevant to the role of the media and children's rights offers some important pointers for journalists and the media in general.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) enshrines children's right to freedom of expression (Article 13); to protection of privacy and against attacks on his/her honour and reputation (Article 16); and also calls on the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child (Article 17). Articles 34 and 36 commit governments to protecting children from all forms of exploitation, including pornography. The European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (1996) also emphasizes children's right to express their own views in decisions affecting them, and calls on national bodies to provide information on children's rights to the media.

The Council of Europe Recommendation 1286 on a European Strategy for Children (1996) introduces the call for a change in the way children are viewed in society. The media should promote children's right to a healthy and balanced development, and all professionals who come into contact with children should have special training on children's rights (Article 8). The publicising of children's rights is a first step to increase public awareness and promote change in the traditional view of the child, declared the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. It highlighted the negative effects of the media on children, and wanted to see more controls over new information and communications technologies.

The Council of Europe's Recommendation No. R (91)11, concerning Sexual Exploitation, Pornography and Prostitution of, and trafficking in, Children and Young Adults highlights the media's role in reporting this issue by inviting them to contribute to a general awareness of the subject and to adopt appropriate rules of conduct. The Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (85)11 on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure draws attention to the interests of the victim, and the need to protect him/her from any publicity which will unduly affect his (sic) private life or dignity. In spite of plethora of legal provisions available at national and international level it is unfortunate that the children tend to get victimised and re-victimised.

In India, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 recognizes the importance of social integration and rehabilitation of children with deviant behaviour. Article 21 prohibits newspapers, magazines, news-sheets or any visual media from “disclosing the name, address, or school or any other particulars that lead to the identification of the juvenile nor shall any picture of any such juvenile be published”. The only exception to this law is when the media organization seeks permission from the responsible authority “for reasons to be recorded in writing, if in its opinion such disclosure is in the interest of the juvenile”. Media organizations that violate the above are liable for punishment under the law. The punishment however, is a meagre fine of up to one thousand Rupees. There are no guidelines for reporting on Child Victims except in case of sexual offences.

The National Human Rights Commission of India published a handbook of guidelines for journalists for reporting on Child Sexual Violence. The handbook highlights the roles and responsibilities of the media while reporting on sensitive cases like that of child abuse. It prohibits journalists from publishing any PII that may lead to the identification of the victims. The Press Council of India acts like a watchdog for print journalists. It has laid down a set of guidelines to ensure high standards of journalism in India. The Council also keeps track of newspapers for irregularities. The Council, however, enjoys no punitive powers and therefore limits its intervention to a moral guidance only.

Since a formal training for journalists is not considered essential in India, most journalists in the profession learn the tricks of the trade on the job. Hence they may not be well aware about the ethical practices of media when they start working. This might be one factor that leads to greater victimisation at the hands of media in India. Thus, the factors that may be responsible for victimisation by the journalists can be summarised as follows:

- Journalists develop insensitivity towards human suffering over a period of time.
- Lack of appropriate formal training of journalists
- Negligence on the part of journalists
- Sensationalising issues for commercial gains

The present study

The hypothesis, therefore, is that children involved in crime, as victims or offenders, are victimised by the Indian Media in their news coverage. In the light of the above an empirical study was conducted to understand (1) the manner in which the journalists in India conduct interviews and cover news; (2) whether they are aware of the legal requirements, especially in case of news gathering and reporting regarding children, and have the requisite sensitivity; and (3) to assess the manner in which children get victimised due to faulty reporting practices. The data was collected through content analysis and by administering questionnaires.

Literature Review

There are hardly any studies in India on victimisation by the media and its impact on society. Therefore, works of the foreign authors have been reviewed and attempt has been made to relate it with the circumstances in India. The basic concerns of victims can be regarded as universally true independent of geographical location since the psychological impact of a disaster; calamity or crime is by and large similar on people.

Fritz studied the impact of media on victims of crime and homicide. In a 1992 study of homicide survivors he found that 92% of the respondents felt that "it is not appropriate for a television news reporter and camera crew to approach a grieving individual immediately following a death" (Fritz K. L; 1992, 91).

On the contrary Steward (1996) who studied crime victims and their response to media in United States found several instances where victims welcomed the media as a cathartic experience. He cites the following reasons why crime victims themselves may be willing to talk to the media.

- As a memorial to a loved one
- To avoid the perpetrator of the crime gaining notoriety, publicity and any
- Justification for his/her crime.

- Anger Ventilation
- Safeguarding others from falling into a trap
- Keeping control of the situation
- Previous positive feelings about the Media.
- Anger As a result of the shock they feel
- To increase general understanding of the suffering of families of murder and manslaughter victims and offer comfort to others facing similar tragedies.

The National Centre for Victims of Crime, USA has identified fourteen significant concerns that crime victims and service providers have in regard to the news media's coverage of crime and victimization (Seymour & Lowrance 1988, 5-7). These are:

- Interviewing at inappropriate times.
- Using euphemisms to describe victims and offenders.
- Glamorising the offender.
- Exhibiting aggressive behaviour toward victims, survivors, and their advocates.
- Ignoring victims' and survivors' wishes.
- Filming and photographing scenes with bodies, body bags, and blood.
- Repeatedly using crime scene footage as a "lead-in" to newscasts.
- Reporting hearsay.
- Interfering in police investigations.
- Referring to drunk driving crashes as "accidents."
- Failing to cover a crime at all.
- Identifying child victims.
- Attempting to interview survivors of homicide victims prior to official death notifications by law enforcement.
- Inaccurate reporting.

Content analysis

A content analysis of reports published in the newspapers or broadcast on television can easily establish the extent to which children are victimised due to faulty reporting practices or negligence on part of the reporters. A sample of 57 news reports involving children in crime either as victims or as offenders was collected from the print medium over a period of time. These news reports were used for content analysis to explore any victimisation on account of faulty reporting practices or negligence on part of reporters. The newspaper clippings were selected on the following criteria:

- A child below 18 years involved in a crime either as a victim or as an offender.
- Features and opinion-based articles were not considered unless they mentioned specific cases of children involved in crime.
- A good mix of tabloids, national dailies, and vernacular dailies were tracked for analysis.
- The newspapers covered were – The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, Indian Express, The Hindu, Mid Day (Mumbai), Nav Bharat Times, Lokmat, etc.
- Having recognised the definition and what constitutes victimisation, the newspaper articles were studied for the following aspects:
- Whether the report was for a child as a victim or as an offender.
- The age of the child involved.
- Whether any code of conduct for reporting on children was violated.

- If a picture of the child or any other personally identifiable information of the child was published.
- Whether a quote from the child was included in the reports.
- Whether the tone of the story was positive or negative.

The data so gathered was analysed as per the details given in the sample data sheet.

Sample Data Sheet for content analysis

Article Headline	Publication And date	Victim/ Offender	Age	Gender	PII	Photo	Quote	By line
---------------------	-------------------------	---------------------	-----	--------	-----	-------	-------	---------

Questionnaires

It was essential to understand how the crime reporters approach the victims for quotes or bites. In order to understand how journalists approach the child victims or offenders while newsgathering and to assess whether any victimisation on that account had occurred. A structured questionnaire was administered to the journalists who were crime and city reporters from different organisations/media channels. It was equally important to know how the victims perceived the media. One option was to administer questionnaires or arrange interviews with the victims. However, doing this, without enhancing their trauma, was a challenge. The author, therefore, got the victims' questionnaires filled through social workers and councillors who were already dealing with the victims both boys and girls in the age group of 6-18 years.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires were analysed quantitatively using basic statistical calculations. Percentage and average was calculated for responses to assess the ratio of the responses from the available sample. Since the number of respondents was small in each case therefore, the results obtained are not conclusive. They could only be used as an indication of a trend. Questionnaires were administered to two or three sets of respondents to obtain a better understanding of the process of news gathering and consequent victimization. A group of 25 working journalists, crime and city reporters across different organisations were given questionnaires on the subject. Thirty Two child victims of sexual abuse and other crimes were also interviewed; the questionnaires were administered through professional councillors from a Non government organisation, already familiar with the victims.

Results and Discussion

Results of content analysis

Children as Offenders (Delinquents)

Children and adolescents represent the future, and if they engage in deviant behaviour, it is often viewed as symptomatic of a society that is declining ever further into a moral chaos. The focus on children means that deviant behaviour automatically crosses a higher

threshold of victimisation than would have been possible if adults alone had been involved (Jenkins, 1992).

The law recognises that children are not deviant by birth. Most delinquents are a result of their socio-economic conditions or psychological problems. The law, therefore, recognises the importance of protecting the identity of juveniles and providing for their rehabilitation. The concept of childhood is a bit ticklish. How old should a youngster be to take responsibility of his actions? According to Muncie (1999), childhood is a social construction. In other words, it is subjected to a continuous process of (re)-invention and (re)-definition and even in the modern period, has gone through numerous incarnations from 18th century romantic portrayals of childhood as a time of innocence, to more recent conceptions of childhood as a potential site of psychological and psychiatric problems.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that an individual is regarded as a child until he or she attains the age of 18 years. In keeping with the UN Convention the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 also regards 18 years as the age of the child. In India, therefore, it is illegal for the media to publish any personally identifiable information about an offender (delinquent) below 18 years of age. But it is not hard to spot the violations to this law in both print and broadcast medium. Based on the content analysis the following case studies prove the point.

Case Study 1: Nothing Minor about these Crimes

The article published in Times of India on November 26, 2003, is about two juvenile delinquents from Vadodara and Ahmedabad, who are said to be responsible for committing heinous crimes. While their actions were shocking and needed to be condemned, the media was expected to display a certain degree of restraint since the accused were minors. The article has an extremely negative tone, alleviating any benefit of doubt that the accused might deserve. This article was written after the accused were identified by the police and arrested on the basis of available evidence and both the cases were sub judicious. But the tone of the article does not suggest this, instead from the article it seems as though they have been proven guilty in court of law.

Another important point with regard to this article is that the identity of the juveniles has not been protected. According to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2000, it is illegal to reveal the names, address or any other personal information about juvenile delinquents. The publication of their names is therefore, a clear violation of the law. The article also mentions how the accused had “His head bowed when facing cameras”. This statement clearly indicates that attempts were made on part of the journalists to take his photograph or visuals. Again, this is in violation of the Juvenile Justice Act. Two people quoted in the article have mentioned that both the above-mentioned cases were perhaps a result of bad parenting. The children must therefore be given a chance to improve and start afresh. Identifying the juvenile’s in public might result in diminishing their chances to reform.

Case Study 2: MMS Scandal – Delhi

A minor boy from a famous school in Delhi was accused of recording pornographic content through his mobile phone and circulating it. The scandal raised issues regarding morality among children and the media hyped up the issue resulting in a ‘moral panic’. The case had created a sensation in November 2004 when pictures of a boy engaged in

sexual act were circulated through multi-media service (MMS) by the accused boy to his friends. Later, it reached students in other schools and hit the market. Subsequently, a student of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, was arrested for selling the MMS clip on the auction portal baze.com. The chief executive officer of baze.com had also been arrested in the case.

Reputed newspapers and television channels revealed the identity of the minors involved in the case. NDTV and Zee not only showed the visuals of the minor accused in the case, but also showed visuals of the minor girl involved. The school where the minors were studying was the first to raise objection for being named in the media. The school had to deal with damage to their reputation. In response, the school expelled both the minors involved. As a result the boy was forced to move to another school and the girl left the country.

The juvenile and the school where he studied moved separate petitions in the court on December 12, 2004, complaining about the manner in which the entire incident was being highlighted by the three media organisations. In August 2005, the juvenile court penalised Zee News, NDTV, and Times of India for having disclosed the identities of the minors. The court ruled that they had tried to sensationalise the case for "commercial gains".

In a 31-page order, the Juvenile Justice Board Principal Magistrate stated, "NDTV, ZEE TV and Times of India had contravened Section 21 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2000 which safeguards the delinquent's identity, privacy and confidentiality, by revealing minute details about the boy while reporting the case. "The three news establishments were fined Rs. 1,000 each. The court observed that their reporting was in "bad taste to increase circulation and viewership purely for commercial gains."

Children as Victims

The constituency most affected by the news media's coverage of violence and victimization is crime victims. Although sensitive media coverage of victim's cases can be helpful and in some cases, even healing, but if done with insensitive, voyeuristic, and uncaring manner then it can compound victims' emotional and psychological suffering.

The crimes against children refer to the cases in which the children are victimized and abused. These can be categorised under two broad sections:

- 1). Crimes committed against Children, which are punishable under Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- 2). Crimes committed against Children, which are punishable under Special and Local Laws (SLL).

The National Crime Records Bureau recorded a total of 11,633 cases against child victims in the country during 2003, reporting an increase of 11.1% from 2002. There is a specific problem with cases of child sexual abuse since rape and incest cases are not easily reported even to the police. If the journalists get information about these cases from police records, it is all the more important for them to ensure that such cases are handled with utmost sensitivity.

There are three specific situations that the journalists are likely to encounter with child victims:

- 1). Child victims are not able to understand what exactly is going on with them, especially after a traumatic experience.

2). The traumatic experience they have just undergone comes back to them time and again when journalists question them.

3). They are usually not aware of the manner in which media functions and sudden attention from camera crews and crowding of journalists could in itself act as a harrowing experience for the victims. Surrounded by strangers, attempting to question them increases their vulnerability and insecurity.

Revealing the Personally Identifiable Information (PII) of a child victim could increase the vulnerability and lead to a lot of problems for the child and the family. Revealing the location could increase the chances of a repeat attack and threats from the offenders. In addition, revealing the identity results in social stigma and spreading of rumours. As these news stories attempt to portray the children as victims of tragic circumstances and draw sympathy from viewers, the news media can often inflict a "second victimization" upon crime victims or survivors by enhancing their feelings of violation, disorientation, and loss of control. Common concerns victims express about the media include: interviewing survivors at inappropriate times; filming and photographing scenes with bodies and body bags; searching for the "negative" about the victim; printing a victim's name or address; and inappropriately delving into the victim's past.

The media reports on crime and tragedy give rise to a wide range of responses from the community, ranging from caution, vigil, and public sorrow to revenge. Media images are often criticised for acting as a trigger for riots or mass protests. Jenkins (1992) focuses on child victims in his study, who he says, not only guarantee the newsworthiness of a story, but can also ensure the media's commitment to what might be called 'Morality Campaigns' (Seymour & Lawrence 1988, 5-7). Some of them include: include...Since you have already mentioned 12 of them, why not mention all 14. So instead of some of them include, you could say, these are:

- Interviewing at inappropriate times,
- Using euphemisms to describe victims and offenders,
- Glamourising the offender,
- Exhibiting aggressive behaviour toward victims,
- Survivors, and their advocates,
- Ignoring victims' and survivors' wishes,
- Filming and photographing scenes with bodies, body bags, and blood,
- Repeatedly using crime scene footage as a "lead-in" to newscasts,
- Reporting hearsay,
- Interfering in police investigations,
- Failing to cover a crime at all, Identifying child victims,
- Inaccurate reporting

It is important for journalists to understand the emotions felt by victims and survivors. They are usually numb, physically and mentally stunned by the crime and its impact. Victims often feel confused and disoriented, especially immediately after the crime. However, the urgency of a journalist is also understandable since the story is "newsworthy" immediately after the occurrence of the crime. With time, though the shock is considerably reduced for victims, but so is the relevance of the news.

Steward (1997) found several instances where victims welcomed the media as a cathartic experience. He studied Crime Victims and their response to Media in United

States and cited the following reasons why crime victims themselves may be willing to talk to the media:

- As a memorial to a loved one
- To avoid the perpetrator of the crime gaining notoriety, publicity and any justification for his/her crime.
- Anger Ventilation
- Safeguarding others from falling into a trap
- Keeping control of the situation
- Previous positive feelings about the Media.
- As a result of the shock they feel
- To increase general understanding of the suffering of families of murder and manslaughter victims and offer comfort to others facing similar tragedies.

There are three specific problems that the journalists are likely to encounter with child victims:

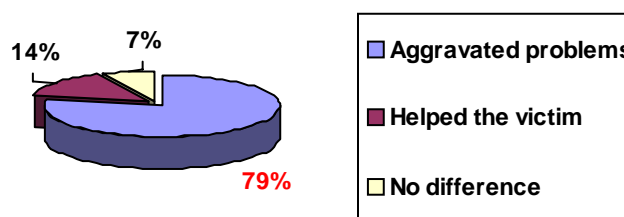
- 1). Child victims are not able to understand what exactly is going on with them, especially after a traumatic experience.
- 2). The traumatic experience they have just undergone comes back to them time and again when journalists question them.
- 3). They are usually not aware of the manner in which media functions and sudden attention from camera crews and crowding of journalists could in itself act as a harrowing experience for the victims. Surrounded by strangers, attempting to question them increases their vulnerability and insecurity.

Revealing the Personally Identifiable information (PII) of a child victim could increase the vulnerability and lead to a lot of problems for the child and the family. Revealing the location could increase the chances of a repeat attack and threats from the offenders. In addition, revealing the identity results in social stigma and spreading of rumours.

Results of Empirical Analysis

Fourteen per cent of the victims interviewed were satisfied with the way their story was covered by the media. They felt that media reports had been helpful in fighting their legal battle. Not surprisingly these 14% also perfectly coincided with the ones whose names and addresses had not been made public.

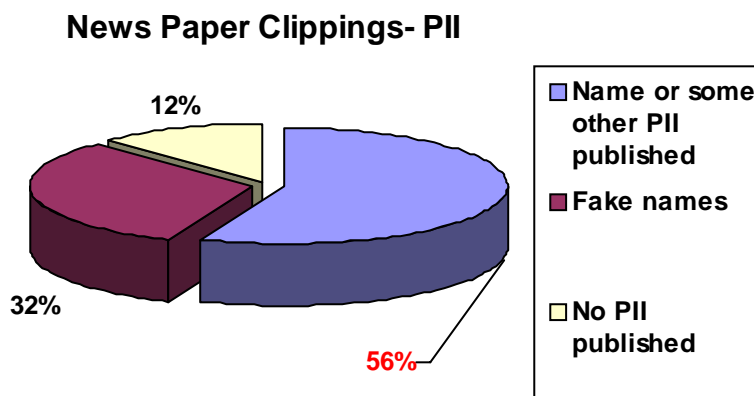
Impact of Media Reports on Victims



It was found that 56.14 % of the news reports analysed in this study, had mentioned some or the other Personally Identifiable Information (PII) or published the photograph of the children. Personally Identifiable Information refers to publication of the Name, Photograph, Address, Parents name, School, or any other information amounting to identification of the individual. There is a direct correlation between identification and stigmatization or isolation of the child in society.

Among the journalists, a shocking 52% of the respondents did not see anything wrong in publishing the photograph/visuals of juvenile offenders, and 64% said they would publish their educational background and parent's name, etc. However, when asked about publishing names or PII of child victims, the journalists were found to be more careful. 92% of the journalists said they would refrain from revealing the identity of the child victims. Only 8% journalist respondents said they would publish the names and other personally identifiable information. 4% said they would publish the photograph as well.

Many news reports that refrained from publishing the name of the victim/offender had published the name of the school, parent's names, and the address. These details were also sufficient enough to identify the individual.

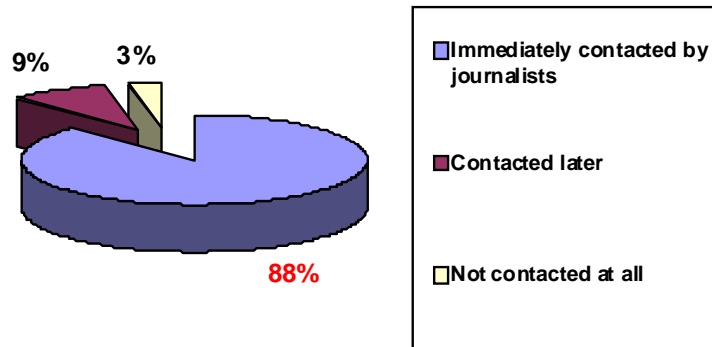


In 15.7% news clippings, the photographs of the child victims or offenders were published. Some publications had refrained from publishing the photographs of the victims' but went ahead and published their parents' photograph. For example, an article in Mid Day - Mumbai published a morphed photograph of the victim, however, photographs of both the parents were published in a manner that the individuals could be easily identified. There are also several photographs where the publications have mentioned that the photographs have been masked in order to protect the identity of the concerned persons, however, the masking has been done in such a small portion of the face, that large portions of the image remain visible and easily identifiable.

Interviewing the Child victims

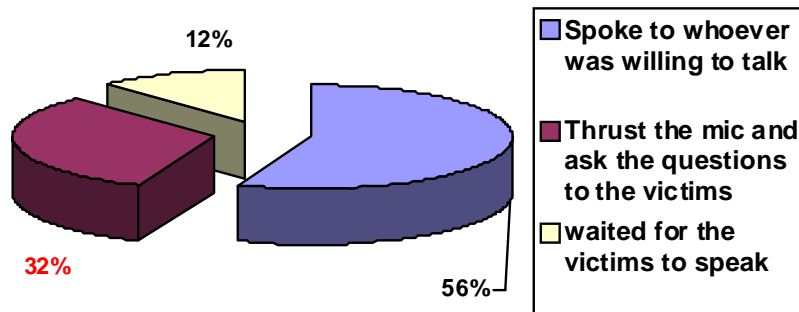
Of the 32 victims interviewed, 88% of the respondents said they had been contacted by journalists immediately after the incident.

Media Response to victims



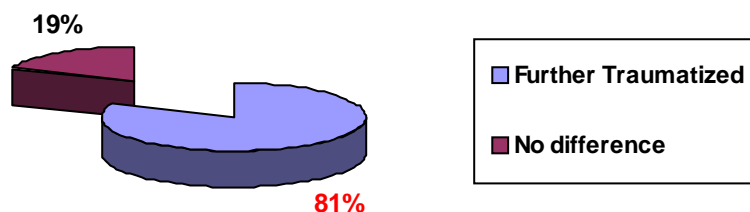
Even the journalists admitted that they had contacted child victims or offenders immediately after they received reports about a crime. 92% of the respondent journalists had either interviewed the child victims or attempted to interview them for some or the other story. Many victims said that they had expressed their unwillingness to talk to journalists. They were more comfortable talking to a known person immediately after the trauma.

Journalists Response



32% journalists admitted that they had thrust the mike or provoked the victims to respond to their questions. Some journalists however, added that they did this only when the story demanded and they felt that it was essential for them to get a quote or a bite from the victims or offenders. None the less this qualifies for secondary victimisation, as pointed out by the victims. Some victims said that they were forced in to answering questions from journalists. 81% of the respondents, who were forced to answer questions, said that they felt uncomfortable and traumatised due to the behaviour of the journalists.

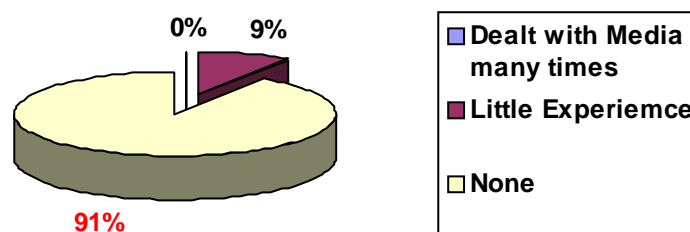
Impact of questions from journalists



The victims cited the following reasons for increased trauma:

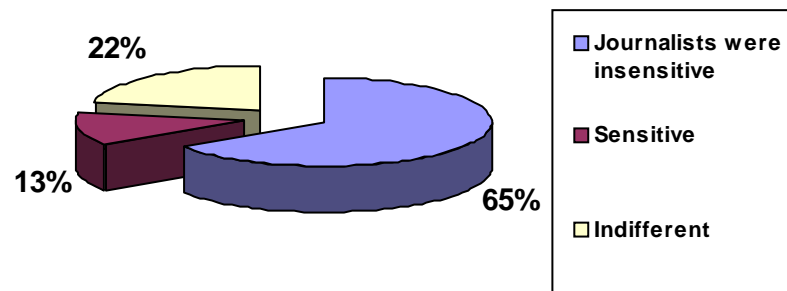
- The manner in which questions were asked was intimidating.
- The nature of questions was humiliating (especially in case of victims of sexual abuse)
- Several journalists approached them at different times with the same questions. Therefore they had to narrate the same horrifying experience repeatedly. This amounted to re-living the trauma several times.
- It is important to note that most of the victims had no prior experience in dealing with the media. About 91% were dealing with the media for the first time.

Victims' or Offenders' prior experience in dealing with media



A good 64 % of the victims interviewed by the journalists felt that they were reminded of their traumatic experiences again and again. The journalists and media images aggravated it for them. Analysis of newspaper clippings, however, did not provide results of the same magnitude. Only 8.7% of the articles had quotations from the child victims themselves. Most of the other reports had quotations from relatives, police officials or other persons related to the case. Including quotations from adults as opposed to minor victims, is reflective of a healthy trend. Overall 65% victims felt that the journalist who approached them, displayed insensitivity in dealing with their case.

How sensitive were the Journalists



It was generally observed that the awareness was higher in case of those journalists who had received formal training. Also the journalists working for National Dailies and News Channels were more aware than the vernacular journalists. The journalists working for tabloids displayed very poor understanding of victimisation as a concept. In fact this is also reflected in the content analysis of reports in National dailies versus the tabloids. The incidence of victimisation was approximately 72% higher in Mid Day as compared to other National Dailies.

Another important factor is that the print journalists seemed to be by and large more cautious about victimisation than the broadcast journalists. From the available responses it appears that broadcast journalists were 22% more likely to victimize the children by showing their visuals or taking their interviews than the print journalists. However, the sample size of the research is very small therefore the results cannot be regarded as conclusive.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The following recommendations can be cited in order to minimise the occurrence of victimisation by the media.

1. A formal training for journalists is not considered essential in India. Most journalists in the profession learn the tricks of the trade on the job hence they may not be well aware about the ethical practices of media when they start working. Foremost step should be to recognise the importance of training for journalists. The structure of the training programme should be such that it equips journalists to handle practical problems that they might encounter in the field. The Michigan State University was the first to formally establish a program to sensitise journalism students and make them aware about the various ways in which media victimization can occur. The *Victims and the media* programme is an intensive study of the interpersonal and psychological effects of trauma on journalists and the people they interview. Special interest is given to identifying the symptoms of post-traumatic-stress-disorder and its impact upon journalists and victims of crimes and other horrifying events. The program developed by a team of senior journalists, psychologists and victim volunteers is a relatively new concept even in the west but it has caught the attention of many journalism schools in the US and other countries. It is important to have such a sensitization programme in Indian Journalism Schools as well.

2. Formulation of specific Codes of Conduct and Regulation with regard to reporting on children is essential. Though code of conduct is often seen only as a guideline, not an enforceable law, it is none the less a useful tool in the hands of journalists and campaigners willing to take up issues with editors, publishers, and broadcasters.

3. Increase awareness among Media organisations and Media Professionals with regard to ethical practices for reporting on children.

4. There should be constructive Newsroom Debates between media professionals to analyse their own coverage with regard to children and its impact on them.

5. There is a need for victim support groups and NGO's that spread awareness about victims' rights not just with regard to legal action or social concerns, but also with regard to the media. Often it is seen that victims are either caught unaware when contacted by the journalists, or succumb to immediate pressure of camera's but repent later once they are recognized and stigmatized in their social circles. Victim Support groups and NGO's can help children and their parents in understanding the long term consequences of media coverage. They also help in spreading awareness about the victim's right to refuse camera interviews, or right to protection of their identity.

The media industry in India is still in its nascent stage. As the recent boom in the number of news channels and newspapers has opened doors for journalists, it has also brought along with it an unnerving competition for TRP ratings. But gradually the industry has started recognising the importance for formal training of journalists, need for ethics committee within the newsroom and formulation of standard procedures for crime and investigative reporting. While certain news organisations have set the precedence, it is still an exception rather than the norm.

When victims and people in distress need help, the media is best suited to facilitate their rehabilitation process. Talking to journalists could help the victims in ventilation. And journalists would also get better, more emotional and humane stories rather than one line responses if the victims relate to them. But it is unlikely to happen unless the journalists are professionally trained for the same and recognize the importance of understanding the psychological aspects of crime, deviance and victimisation.

Limitations of the study

The sample size was very small in each case. The research study could have been extended to get a higher number of journalists and victim respondents. Results would have been more conclusive in that case. However, this could not be done due to the lack of time and resources. Also, analysing a greater number of articles would have given a better and more conclusive result. But the researcher was limited by time constraint. Lack of regular access to television made it difficult for the researcher to track the television reports regularly. Therefore only one case study for television could be studied in detail.

References

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers recommendation addressing the place of victims in the criminal justice system. (1985). Recommendation No. R(85) 11 to the Member States on the position of the victim in the framework of criminal law and procedure Retrieved on 25th December 2006 from [http://polis.osce.org/library/f/2669/468/CoE-FRA-RPT-2669-EN-Recommendation%20No.%20R\(85\)%2011.pdf](http://polis.osce.org/library/f/2669/468/CoE-FRA-RPT-2669-EN-Recommendation%20No.%20R(85)%2011.pdf)

- Fritz, K. L. (1992). *Television News Coverage of Tragic Death and the Grieving: Does it Affect the Bereavement Process of the Survivor?* Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, Department of Communications Arts and Sciences.
- Gerbner, G. (1997). *Trends in network television drama and viewer conceptions of social reality.* Pennsylvania: Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania.
- Goonasekara, A, (Ed.), (2001). *Children in the News.* Singapore: Asian Media, Information and Communication Centre, Nanyang Technological University.
- Jenkins, P. (1992). *Intimate enemies: Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Jewkes, Y. (2004). *Media and Crime: Key approaches to criminology.* London: Sage.
- Juvenile Justice (Care and protection Act) 2000
- Muncie, J. (1999). *Youth and Crime: A critical introduction.* London: Sage.
- National Crime Records Bureau (2003). *Crime in India 2003.* New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau.
- National Human Rights Commission & Prasar Bharati. (1998). *A Guidebook for the Media on Sexual Violence against Children.* New Delhi: National Human Rights Commission and Prasar Bharati.
- National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC). (1987). *Victims' Rights and the Media.* Brochure. Arlington, VA
- Seymour. A. & L. Lowrance. (1988). *Crime Victims and the News Media,* Fort Worth, TX: National Center for Victims of Crime.
- Spielberg L. (1999). Journalist discusses victims and the media. Retrieved on 25th December 2006 from www.yaledailynews.com
- Steward, P. (1996). *Victims of crime and the Media.* Staffordshire, UK: Norfolk Constabulary's Press Office by Stafford University.
- Tuazon, R. (2003). *Media Still depicts kids as hapless victims.* Manila, Philippines: Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication.