# “THE MEDIA AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE WORLD”

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## Abstract

Strong commercial competition is one of the factors driving the media to exploit children. The display of emotions and sensational news attracts the public and sells. In the interest of profitability, some press companies are putting increasingly heavier productivist constraints on their editorial teams. This is why journalists sometimes take the easiest and most unreflective route towards collecting information, thus contributing to perpetuating myths and stereotypes.

Different interests find themselves in an unstable equilibrium when ethical standards are too often sacrificed on the altar of commercial imperatives. Self-regulation may not be convincing when newsgroups seem to ignore usage or use codes only for the benefit of their narrow interests. Even regulators are often deprived of the power to impose exemplary sanctions.

Press professionals have a duty to oppose the constraints that link them to the market. Journalists, writers and producers must work for a popular culture where children's needs are met without devaluing them. The competitive nature of the industry may encourage the media to take a "tug" to supplant a competing publication or network. However, journalists must remain aware of the need to adopt fair, open and frank methods in their quest for information. Journalism must always be ethical, especially given the needs of children.

International conventions and recommendations emphasize the right of children to have a say in decisions affecting them, and call for a different approach to children. The Council of Europe has recommended the development of documentary programs on young people from different countries, with the aim of providing children aged 7 to 18, including poor children and immigrants, Opportunity to express their opinion[1].

New ways should be sought to give children access to the media as sources of information. Press groups could consider engaging 'correspondent children' to report on all aspects of childhood life, and special training in which journalists can express the child's point of view.

[1] BJÖNBERG, Dr Ulla: Children and their Families, Childhood Policies, Conseil de l'Europe, 1994.

In order to assist journalists in their reporting on children's issues, another measure could be the drafting by NGOs in each country of a repertoire of reliable experts in different subjects, which should appear on each desk Writing…

**Keywords: Children** rights, opinions, Journalists, media, Professional press

## Introduction

While the rights of the child occupy a prominent place in the mainstream media, it is generally in the context of abuse and exploitation of children or pure sensationalism. Children are generally seen and heard with some retreat, reflecting the weakness that is theirs and echoed any debate about the media and the rights of the child, so that these young people are rarely allowed To speak in their own name.

Raising awareness and promoting children's rights are challenges facing the media. It is not only the duty of the press to make fair, honest and accurate reports of childhood, but it must also reserve a space for the varied, picturesque and imaginative opinions of the children themselves. Whether news, current affairs or even the complex world of the creative or performing arts, all media professionals, as well as the organizations they work with, have an obligation to recognize Rights and take them into account in the course of their activities.

But how to bring about this awareness? The answer is that we need to look at how the media works, the way in which the principles of accountability are applied, and how the media must be free from all the political and economic barriers that restrict their professionalism and Ethical standards.

The task will not be easy. In a world of rapid technological change and the globalization of information, commercial competition has led to a significant reduction of standards in traditional media. At the same time, many governments and public authorities manipulate information, through regulation or censorship, often more to achieve narrow political objectives than to meet the needs of peoples or To protect the rights of children. Whether guided by commercial imperatives or subject to political controls, journalists and media professionals are under increasing pressure.

A good report on the rights of children requires access to a great deal of information about children, many of which are in the possession of the authorities. The media can not work well if information on education, health, employment, development and social status is generally lacking. Too many governments and public institutions cultivate a taste for secrecy and retain information.

Respect for the independence of journalism is an essential condition for a media culture of openness to children and their rights. Journalists must be convinced that they can uphold ethical standards, not just obey orders, and have the power to protect their confidential sources of information. A large number of cases of child exploitation will never be revealed as long as those who provide information to the press will not be certain that their anonymity will be preserved.

The right to freedom of expression is always of paramount importance to the media, but the media can not take precedence over other important rights, especially the rights of children to be freed from fear of exploitation.

Journalists are suspicious of legislators, knowing full well that any outside intervention inevitably leads to censorship. However, it is legitimate to ask whether media self - regulation can adequately address public concerns about journalistic standards, particularly at a time when the rise of global press groups and media - Seem to exempt the press from accountability at the national level. What about the effectiveness of codes and voluntary guidelines that provide for the professional obligations of journalists? As with all forms of self-regulation, this effectiveness depends on the professional confidence of journalists, their knowledge of the subject and their working conditions.

A recent study of the codes, carried out by the British pressure group Press wise, revealed that associations of journalists had few codes of good practice relating to children's rights. In May 1998, the International Federation of Journalists prepared a first draft of international guidelines for journalists reporting on children at a conference attended by journalists from 70 countries. Regional discussions were held in Latin America, Africa and Asia on the text, which will be formally adopted in 2001 in Seoul at the annual meeting of the International Federation of Journalists. These guidelines were then presented at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in December 2001 in Yokohama, Japan. This document, reproduced at the end of this book, aims to encourage journalists to adopt a correct tone in their reporting on children's issues. The code is at the heart of the public's concern about how the media treats children. These concerns most often relate to[2]:

• sex, violence or victim-centered programs and images that may strike children;

• stereotypes and sensationalism in journalistic materials;

• the failure of the media to consider the consequences of their articles and to try to reduce their adverse effects on children;

• respect for the privacy of children and protection of their anonymity unless it can be proved that the public interest is being proved;

• the need to give children a right of access to the media so that they can give their opinion;

• the obligation to cross-check the information before publishing it.

Codes do not guarantee ethical reporting; They do, however, pinpoint the dilemmas confronting journalists and the press when reporting on children. They challenge journalists and the media to become aware of their responsibilities.

[2] Journalist's Guide, Edited by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

## 1-CHILDREN‟S RIGHTS

### -Why children‘s rights?

CHILDREN‘S rights‘ are human rights for children and people under the age of 18. A separate set of rights has been established for children and young people in recognition of the fact that childhood is a special time in our lives. It's a time when we do a tutam of growing and learning; when we need others to look after us and help keep us safe; when we should be enjoying ourselves.

In 1989, the United Nations agreed that children need a special convention of their own. This set of rights for children and young people is called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It states that people under 18 have all the rights it contains, whatever their race, religion or abilities, whatever they think or say, and whatever type of family they come from.

### -Convention on the Rights of the Child[3] :

On 20th November 1989, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is now an international agreement that countries sign up to and, once they ratify it, are legally required to fulfil. It is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human Children‟s Rights and Journalism Practice – Student Guide rights. All the countries of the world have ratified it except Somalia and the United States of America. Somalia has been unable to proceed to ratification as it has no recognised government. By signing the convention, the United States has signalled its intention to ratify but has yet to do so.

Under the convention, children have the right to have their basic needs met: survival, protection, health care, food and water. They also have the right to opportunities to help them reach their full potential: education, play, sports, freedom to express opinions and involvement in decisions that affect them.

The convention emphasises that all children have the same rights and that all rights are interconnected and of equal importance. It also refers to the responsibility of children to respect the rights of others, especially their parents.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has 54 articles; each outlines a different right. These rights are divided into four groups; survival, protection, development and participation.

Survival rights recognise the child‘s right to life and the needs basic to existence. These include nutrition, shelter, an adequate standard of living and access to health care.

Development rights outline what children need to reach their full potential; for example, education, leisure, cultural activities, access to information, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Protection rights require that children be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation. They cover issues such as special protection for refugee children, safeguards for

[3] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:http://www.ohchr.org

children in employment, and protection and rehabilitation for children who have suffered any form of abuse or exploitation.

Participation rights recognise that all children should be enabled to play an active role in their communities and societies. These rights include freedom to express opinions and to have a say in matters affecting their lives. As their abilities evolve, children should also have increasing opportunities to participate in their societies, in preparation for responsible adulthood.

Four of the convention's 41 substantive articles have been given special emphasis because they are basic to the implementation of all rights contained in it. Known as the convention's 'general principles', these articles are:

Article 2: All rights guaranteed by the convention must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind.

Article 3: The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

Article 6: Every child has the right to life, survival and development.

Article 12: The child's view must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her.

Two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been created in recent years:

*The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, adopted 25th May 2000

*The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted 25th May 2000

The convention reflects a new vision of the child and childhood. Children are neither the property of their parents nor the helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and the subject of their own rights. The convention offers a vision of the child as a strong, competent individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognising children's rights in this way, the convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child.

**Problems in realising children's rights[4] :**

In every society, there are traditions and groups that oppose advocacy of children‘s rights. Sometimes, broad changes in society can threaten their rights. How are governments failing children or failing to implement effectively the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Often it is a failure to give children a high priority. Political leaders, politicians and government officials may not demonstrate understanding of the state of children‘s lives or show

[4] Children and media - a global concern, Mike Jempson, The PressWise Trust.

commitment to realising children‘s rights. For example, children are often not considered in government policy-making.

An important area is promoting children‘s responsible participation. Governments should seek children‘s views on policy, and take these seriously. But there are not always formal channels for consulting children. Legislation needs to reflect the convention’s requirement that children have a right to express views and to have them given due consideration in all matters concerning them.

Often there is inadequate co-ordination between government departments concerning policies affecting children. Good policies for children should be implemented effectively at a local level, and all legislation should be continually reviewed to ensure it is compatible with the convention and promotes children‘s rights.

Sometimes the failure can be that the limited resources directed to activities supporting children‘s rights are not used effectively. There needs to be careful management at both local and national level, in relation to budgets targeted for children‘s services. Impact assessments and evaluations within government also need to be implemented.

There can be problems in disseminating information on the human rights of children. Each country should have a comprehensive plan to disseminate information on children‘s rights to both children and adults. Research should be undertaken to evaluate the extent of knowledge of the UNCRC among children, those working with children and the public in general.

However, the task of protecting children‘s rights must engage not just governments but all members of society. The standards and principles articulated in the convention can only become a reality when they are respected by everyone– within the family, in schools and other institutions that provide services for children, in communities and at all levels of administration.

Children need to be accepted as people now, and not merely as ‗people-in-themaking‘. They are complete human beings with rights of their own. They will change and develop over the years, but a society needs to value childhood in its own right and not just as a step towards adulthood. This principle has implications for social programmes and services; it shifts the emphasis of work with children to the here-and-now of their experience.

However, policy responses to children‘s issues often convey little sense of urgency or awareness of how short and influential childhood is. Childhood does not stand still while another strategy is being developed. In the nearly two decades since the UNCRC was approved, at least one generation of children have lived out their childhood.

## 2. CHILDREN‟S RIGHTS & THE MEDIA[5]

### -Media exploitation of children:

Another crucial question is whether media encourage children to become, or seem to become, prematurely sexually active, especially though coverage of pop music and fashion.

[5] World Association of Newspapers (WAN): http://www.wan-press.info/

On the one hand, news media tell the stories of abused and abuser, through news reports, photographs, documentaries and drama. On the other hand, they can themselves become the exploiter, by creating sexually provocative images of children in news or advertising.

Media professionals are well-placed to keep children‘s rights on the news agenda, by scrutinising efforts to protect those rights, and challenging those who fail to meet their commitments to children. But commercial pressures can force media to avoid this responsibility. An uncomfortable balance of interests prevails where ethical standards can be sacrificed to commercial imperatives.

**-Participation of children in the media**

Examples of young people‘s participation in the media attest to their interest in the world around them, especially if given the chance to express themselves meaningfully on issues affecting them. A growing number of interest groups and media organisations are creating numerous opportunities for young people to participate in media.

**MEDIA PROJECT EXAMPLES** [6]

Examples of the growing number of successful media projects and programmes for and with children and young people:

ANDI – The Brazilian News Agency for Children‘s Rights monitors media coverage of children and youth, and trains and works closely with journalists in their reporting on children and youth-related issues. ANDI‘s efforts have led to greatly increased and improved coverage of children and youth issues in the Brazilian media. The model is now being applied in eight other Latin American countries.

TROC – The Young Reporters of Albania. Dozens of young people, aged 13 to 18, from all over the country receive training on this weekly TV news magazine programme. Students learn all aspects of video news production and are responsible for planning and producing the programme, with limited adult guidance. The programme is very popular in Albania and in neighbouring countries among young viewers who value TROC as the first socially responsive TV show that provides perspectives from all over the country.

-Response to the challenges of children’s rights[7] :

Following ratification of the UNCRC, states are required to ensure that all legislation, policy and practice conform to its principles and standards. Where necessary, law reform should take place; for example, to protect children from violence in the home and in educational settings. The Committee on the Rights of the Child also recommends that governments establish independent mechanisms to ensure that the convention is monitored and reviewed, through the establishment of children‘s rights commissioners or ombudsmen.

[6] World Association of Community Broadcasters: http://www.amarc.org/

[7] The State of the World‟s Children 2006, UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/

An increasing number of independent offices are being established as countries implement the convention. While these offices are in almost all cases established by government or parliament, the essential characteristic is their independence: their ability to advocate independently for children. Establishing these institutions is a demonstration by governments of good will towards children, that they take seriously their commitments under the convention and are willing to be held accountable for their treatment of children by an independent office.

Governments are required to analyse the proportion of budgets allocated to children to ensure that investment in young citizens is proportionate to their numbers and needs. Often governments merge social expenditure, thereby masking the relatively low allocation of resources to the promotion of children‘s welfare and human rights.

Countries are required to promote the principles and standards of the convention among all members of the public, including children. Governments are obliged to increase social awareness of children as rights-holders. They must ensure also that all professionals working with children, including those in health and penal settings, are trained in how to apply the convention in everyday practice.

## 3. MEDIA VİOLATİON OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

### -Violation of children‘s rights[8]

There are a number of ways in which the rights of children may be violated by inappropriate exposure and media stereotyping. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) promotes the right to respect for the family and private life; Article 14 of the ECHR promotes the prohibition of discrimination.

Children‘s rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) include:

Article 12: the child‘s right to express views freely in all matters affecting them

Article 13: the child‘s right to freedom of expression, which is restricted by law when necessary for the protection of national security, or of public order… or of public health or morals‖

Article 16: protection against interference or attack on privacy, family, home or correspondence… honour or reputation‖

Article 17: recognition of the importance of the media, and encouragement ofthe dissemination of material of social and cultural benefit to the child‖ and the development of appropriate guidelines for the prot ection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being.

[8] Children's Rights and Media: Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children, International Federation of Journalists, 1998:http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?index=192&Language=EN

These articles clearly establish rights for children that could be violated by irresponsible media practices. In particular, UNCRC Article 17 states that the media are responsible for promoting the welfare of the child. Violation of children's rights includes insensitive reporting and misrepresentation, or denial of space for their opinions on various issues.

**-Protecting children**[9]

Although few people would approve of state interference with independent media, the need to protect children has provoked intervention in some areas. For example, under section 39 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, UK law prevents the identification of young people involved in court cases. This law recognises that young offenders deserve an opportunity to reform themselves out of the glare of the media and public stigmatisation. However, in some circumstances even these safeguards have not been enough; the media have substituted direct identification of children with stereotypical labelling of offenders. Despite efforts by organisations such as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which launched in 1998 its own initiative to encourage responsible coverage of children, this pattern of stereotyping children remains evident on every continent.

However, coverage of children rarely features in journalism training because, by and large, journalists deal with adult themes in an adult world for an adult audience. It is unusual to see stories about how new social or fiscal policies might affect children, unless they are about child benefits or schooling, for instance. It is rarer still to find newspapers soliciting comments from young people themselves about the issues of the moment. After all, they are not the primary market for most magazines and newspapers.

Children, therefore, may not be taken seriously by media professionals because their main target is the adult market. The predicament is that children are consumers of mainstream media products which are not created specifically for them. News is regarded as something primarily for and about adults.

An additional danger is that, in this adult market, children have access to potentially harmful material, including the depiction of violence, sex and sexualised' images of children. The development of new forms of communication such as the internet has raised concern, particularly because there is little or no control of material on the internet. While debate continues about the extent to which such material directly influences the behaviour of children, it should be a priority among media producers to ensure that children are not brutalised or put at risk by easy access to certain material, including imagery that appears to condone or encourage violence or inappropriate sexual activity.

Attention must also be given to the issue of media literacy among children. It is as important that children should appreciate the role of the media in civil society and be able to view it critically as that journalists should be aware of the needs, concerns and rights of children.

According to UNICEF, the failure to teach modern media criticism is the biggest missed opportunity in education‖. British MP Tessa Jowell has suggested that media literacy,

[9] Putting Children in the Right, IFJ Guidelines for Journalists, 2002: www.unicef.org/magic/resources/childrights_and_media_coverage.pd

combined with effective media regulation, is the best way to empower children in their dealings with the world as represented by the media.

**-Media the Professional responsibility** [10]

Journalists are understandably reluctant to allow anyone to dictate the terms under which they operate. They resent external pressure and are sceptical about the intentions of powerful elites. Journalists have lost their lives and their personal liberty in seeking to expose wrongdoing that might otherwise have remained hidden because of restrictions on press freedom.

Media professionals see it as their duty to call to account those who hold sway over civil society. They guard their independence. Their most important role in civil society is to act as a watchdog for the public interest and to promote debate, awareness and public recognition of issues crucial to the exercise of democracy and respect of human rights. The ability of journalists to fulfil this role is weakened by the extent to which they become subservient to vested interests.

**Internal regulation**[11]

Journalists subscribe to a code of conduct, published by their media union, professional association or employer. However, in practice most journalists have a hazy idea of the detail in the codes and rely on a general understanding of their principles. Children, on the other hand, require precise protocols if their human rights are to be protected.

Journalists and media organisations should strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children's affairs. In particular, they should:

1. strive for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues involving children;

2. avoid programming and publication of images which intrude on the media space of children with information which is damaging to them;

3. avoid the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving children;

4. consider carefully the consequences of publication of any material concerning children and minimise harm to children;

5. guard against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest;

6. give children, where possible, the right of access to media to express their own opinions without inducement of any kind;

[10] Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People, Dr Maurice Devlin, NUI Maynooth, 2006.

[11] The Media and Children's Rights (2005).

7. ensure independent verification of information provided by children and take special care to ensure that verification takes place without putting child informants at risk;

8. avoid the use of sexualised images of children;

9. use fair, open and straightforward methods for obtaining pictures of children and, where possible, obtain them with the knowledge and consent of the child or

a responsible adult, guardian or carer;

10. verify the credentials of any organisation purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children;

11. not make payment to children for material involving the welfare of children or to parents or guardians of children unless it is demonstrably in the interest of the child.

Journalists should also critically examine the reports submitted and the claims made by their governments on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Media should not consider and report the conditions of children only as events but should continuously report the process likely to lead or leading to the occurrence of these events.

## CONCLUSION

The responsibility of journalists and the media towards children is now a new priority. It is shared by all professional communities, in surveys and reports carried out in their respective countries abroad. The child is a human person in the full sense of the word.

But media must not just report fairly, honestly and accurately on the experience of childhood; they must also provide space for the diverse, colourful and creative opinions of children themselves. Whether in news and current affairs or the complex world of creative and performing arts, all media professionals, and the organisations for which they work, have a responsibility to recognise children‘s rights and reflect them in their work.

Moreover, he is most often placed in a situation of weakness and therefore of vulnerability. It can not be regarded simply as good journalistic "material", presented in the form of clichés which, in every imaginable sense including the worst, could "crack" the reader or the viewer. The child is not an object. One can only leave the last word to the philosopher Emmanuel Kant: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity as well in your person as in the person of any other always at the same time as an end, and never simply as a means ". The child, in information as in life, is always an end, never a means…..

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