

How Thai Media Presents News about Children

Summary of Results



Tatri Taiphapoon, PhD.
Prapaipit Muthitacharoen

Research and Consultancy Institute, Thammasat University
Commissioned by UNICEF Thailand
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**Survey
on
How Thai Media Presents News about Children**

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The importance of “child rights” has gained global recognition and attention over the years. Various organizations around the world have strived to create concrete and universal mechanisms for the protection and safeguarding of children’s interests. In 1989, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an international treaty created by the UN Human Rights Committee. The CRC is by far the most widely-supported Convention in history. So far, 193 countries have ratified the CRC. Thailand became a signatory to the CRC on 12 February 1992 and the Convention entered into force on 26 April 1992.

The CRC set forth basic standards to which the children of the world are entitled. These norms rest on the Convention’s four underlying themes:

1. The right to survival;
2. The right to develop to the fullest potential;
3. The right to protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; and
4. The right to participate in family, cultural, and social life.

Under these four themes, the Convention spells out fundamental rights and standards to which children are entitled and which nations agreed to pursue and internalize on behalf of their children.

Mass media have the power to influence public opinion, set role models and affect behaviours of children and society. The issues of children in Thailand as represented by the media are both negative and positive, ranging from education to street children, stateless children, child labour and child prostitution, among others. Sometimes it is necessary for the media to come into contact with children in order to acquire necessary information for reporting on their situations. For this reason, the media have to be mindful of children’s rights in all their involvement with children.

In Thailand, the press and television remain the two main sections of the mass media with the most extensive reach and power to penetrate seamlessly and effectively into the everyday life of the Thai population. Such a situation provides a context for the study of news coverage of children in newspapers and television, and government policies relating to children and the media. It is hoped that the study will shed some light on the present situation and provide base-line data for further in-depth study on the subject of child rights and the media.

Objectives of the research

1. To gain knowledge on the amount of coverage and type of coverage of content relating to children in the mass media;
2. To gain knowledge on how content relating to children is depicted in the mass media;
3. To identify the differences between coverage of children in the front-page section and other sections of the newspapers;
4. To gain knowledge on the types of rights violations in the mass media;
5. To identify the differences between news coverage and other forms of coverage of children in the newspapers and television media; and
6. To gain knowledge of the opinions of academicians, media professionals, government representatives and NGOs staff on child rights and child rights violations in the mass media.

Scope of the research

This research analysed newspaper and television coverage of children during 2008. Three local language newspapers were chosen for analysis, covering the months of January, March, May, July, September and November. Three television channels were analyzed for the months of July, September and November. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain knowledge on government policies relating to child rights and the media. The research focused only on news pieces in which children were depicted as the subject matter.

Methodology

This analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

1. Content Analysis of newspapers and television coverage of content relating to children. Articles from three daily newspapers were analyzed for the period of 183 days in the months of January, March, May, July, September and November in 2008. Content from three television channels were analyzed, covering the period of three months in 2008, ten days for each month in July, September and November. Units of analysis for newspaper coverage included news stories, commentaries, interviews and news pictures relating to children in various sections of the newspapers. Analysis of television coverage focused on content relating to children from popular news programmes in the evenings.
2. In-depth interviews were conducted with academicians, media professionals, government representatives and NGOs staff, totaling 10 people.

Glossary of terms

Child means any person under 18 years of age as defined by the CRC.

Child Rights means basic human rights of children as defined by the CRC. These rights can be grouped into four main themes: the right to survival; the right to development; the right to protection; and the right to participation.

Violation of child rights means an act of violation of the rights of any person under 18 years of age committed by the media, either intentionally or inadvertently, through their reporting of the child's story, for example, by subjecting the child to interference with his or her privacy or attacking his or her honour and reputation.

The mass media refers to newspapers and television.

Content relating to children refers to any reporting or recounting of facts concerning a person under 18 years of age through the media.

News picture means a picture of a child with descriptions.

Picture in the news means a picture of a child as featured in an article, a news story or an interview.

Newspaper coverage includes editorials, news stories, one-on-one interviews, news pictures and pictures in the news.

Television coverage includes news, news-talk, documentaries, live-interviews, and other forms of presentation, such as collection of images.

Depiction means how the media portray children in the reporting of their stories, categorized as negative, neutral and positive depictions.

Negative depiction means the portrayal of children as wrong-doers, setting inappropriate behaviours, boring, provocative, shameful, worth condemning, deserving admonition, etc.

Neutral depiction means objective reporting of children's situations based on facts.

Positive depiction means the portrayal of children in a favourable light - approving, praising, supporting and respecting them.

Media violations of child rights refers to violations through the use of language and/or description, and visual representation of various forms which may, for example, disclose a child's identity or sexualize them.

Findings

The amount of coverage and type of coverage of children in the mass media

Of all the content relating to children analyzed in this study, it was found that 1,244 items, or 83.8 per cent, were found in the newspapers; while 241 items, or 16.20 per cent, came from the television.

For the type of coverage, it was found that news articles accounted for the highest amount of content relating to children in the newspapers, totaling 577 articles or 46.40 per cent, followed by news pictures, special reports and one-on-one interviews, respectively. Content involving children was found mostly in the front-page section, sports section and minor news, respectively.

News also accounted for the highest amount of content in television coverage of children, totaling 122 items, or 50.60 per cent, followed by news talk, documentaries/special reports, and live-interviews respectively. Content relating to children were found mostly in the sports section, minor news, and news highlights, respectively.

Regarding the focus of content, the highest number was related to learning/life-experience/development. The second and third highest results were those concerning accidents and prize-receiving/achievement, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: The amount and percentage of coverage on children

Focus of content	Amount	Percentage
Initiatives/constructive activities	16	1.08
Good behaviours/good citizenship	59	3.97
Prize-receiving/achievement	213	14.34
Protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights	37	2.49
Learning/life experience/development	355	23.91
Expressing opinions	20	1.35
Health	47	3.17
children in conflict with the law	171	11.52
Victims of abuse/non-domestic violence	48	3.23
Accidents	220	14.81
Domestic violence	113	7.61
Disadvantaged children	45	3.03
Other	141	9.49
Total	1,485	100.00

Depiction of children in the mass media

Depiction of children in the news stories and news pictures in the newspapers was mostly neutral. Positive depiction in these categories was the second most frequently found result. As for pictures in the news, children were depicted most commonly in a positive light, followed by neutral depiction as the second most common result (Table 2).

Table 2: Amount and percentage of depiction of children in newspapers, divided by the type of depiction

Depiction	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total (%)
	Amount (%)	Amount (%)	Amount (%)	
- Depiction of children: news stories and/or descriptions	364 (30.38)	454 (37.90)	380 (31.72)	1,198 (100.00)
- Depiction of children: pictures in the news	31 (11.61)	64 (23.97)	172 (64.42)	267 (100.00)
- Depiction of children: news pictures	78 (20.69)	166 (44.03)	133 (35.28)	377 (100.00)
Total	473 (25.68)	684 (37.13)	685 (37.19)	1,842 (100.00)

Neutral depiction was the most commonly found result in the television coverage of children, followed by positive depiction (Table 3).

Table 3: Amount and percentage of depiction of children in television, divided by the type of depiction

Depiction	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total (%)
	Amount (%)	Amount (%)	Amount (%)	
- Depiction of children in television	63 (26.14)	117 (48.55)	61 (25.31)	241 (100.00)
Total	63 (26.14)	117 (48.55)	61 (25.31)	

However, divided by the focus of content, it was found that neutral depiction was the most commonly found result in news stories and descriptions involving children in the newspapers, except when they were about children in conflict with the law, domestic violence, abuse and non-domestic violence, accidents and disadvantaged children, in which depiction of children was mostly negative. For content that focused on initiatives/constructive activities, good behaviours/good citizenship, prize-receiving/achievement, protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights and learning/life experience/development, positive depiction was the most commonly found result.

Children were most commonly depicted in positive and neutral manners, respectively, in pictures in the news and news pictures, except when the content dealt with health, children in conflict with the law, abuse and non-domestic violence, and disadvantaged children, in which the depiction of them was most commonly negative (Table 4-6).

Table 4: Amount and percentage of depiction of children in newspapers by focus of content in the news stories and descriptions

Depiction of news stories/descriptions involving children in newspapers	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)	Total (%)
Focus of content				
Initiatives/constructive activities	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	16 (1.34)	16 (1.34)
Good behaviours/good citizenship	1 (0.08)	14 (1.17)	35 (2.92)	50 (4.17)
Prize-receiving/achievement	2 (0.17)	43 (3.59)	119 (9.93)	164 (13.69)
Protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights	0 (0.00)	7 (0.58)	10 (0.83)	17 (1.42)
Learning/life experience/development	3 (0.25)	127 (10.60)	159 (13.27)	289 (24.12)
Expressing opinions	0 (0.00)	3 (0.25)	6 (0.50)	9 (0.75)
Health	11 (0.92)	20 (1.67)	4 (0.33)	35 (2.92)
Children in conflict with the law	99 (8.26)	49 (4.09)	2 (0.17)	150 (12.52)
Victims of abuse/non-domestic violence	27 (2.25)	13 (1.09)	2 (0.17)	42 (3.51)
Accidents	117 (9.77)	63 (5.26)	4 (0.33)	184 (15.36)
Domestic violence	58 (4.84)	34 (2.84)	2 (0.17)	94 (7.85)
Disadvantaged children	22 (1.84)	7 (0.58)	1 (0.08)	30 (2.50)
Other	24 (2.00)	74 (6.18)	20 (1.67)	118 (9.85)
Total	364 (30.38)	454 (37.90)	380 (31.72)	1,198 (100.00)

Table 5: Amount and percentage of depiction of children in newspapers by focus of content in the pictures in the news

Depiction of children: Pictures in the news	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)	Total (%)
Focus of content				
Initiatives/constructive activities	0 (0.00)	3 (1.12)	10 (3.75)	13 (4.87)
Good behaviours/good citizenship	0 (0.00)	10 (3.75)	20 (7.49)	30 (11.24)
Prize-receiving/achievement	0 (0.00)	4 (1.50)	34 (12.73)	38 (14.23)
Protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights	1 (0.37)	1 (0.37)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.75)
Learning/life experience/development	0 (0.00)	24 (8.99)	89 (33.33)	113 (42.32)
Expressing opinions	2 (0.75)	1 (0.37)	5 (1.87)	8 (3.00)
Health	5 (1.87)	3 (1.12)	0 (0.00)	8 (3.00)
Children in conflict with the law	2 (0.75)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.75)
Victims of abuse/non-domestic violence	0 (0.00)	1 (0.37)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.37)
Accidents	5 (1.87)	2 (0.75)	1 (0.37)	8 (3.00)
Domestic violence	0 (0.00)	2 (0.75)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.75)
Disadvantaged children	11 (4.12)	3 (1.12)	0 (0.00)	14 (5.24)
Other	5 (1.87)	10 (3.75)	13 (4.87)	28 (10.49)
Total	31 (11.61)	64 (23.97)	172 (64.42)	267 (100.00)

Table 6: Amount and percentage of depiction of children in newspapers by focus of content in the news pictures

Focus of content	Depiction of children: News pictures			
	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)	Total (%)
Initiatives/constructive activities	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.27)	1 (0.27)
Good behaviours/good citizenship	2 (0.53)	3 (0.80)	8 (2.12)	13 (3.45)
Prize-receiving/achievement	1 (0.27)	38 (10.08)	66 (17.51)	105 (27.85)
Protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights	0 (0.00)	4 (1.06)	2 (0.53)	6 (1.59)
Learning/life experience/development	0 (0.00)	83 (22.02)	39 (10.34)	122 (32.36)
Expressing opinions	2 (0.53)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.27)	3 (0.80)
Health	13 (3.45)	3 (0.80)	0 (0.00)	16 (4.24)
Children in conflict with the law	4 (1.06)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (1.06)
Victims of abuse/non-domestic violence	22 (5.84)	4 (1.06)	0 (0.00)	26 (6.90)
Accidents	20 (5.31)	4 (1.06)	0 (0.00)	24 (6.37)
Domestic violence	7 (1.86)	1 (0.27)	4 (1.06)	12 (3.18)
Disadvantaged children	7 (1.86)	26 (6.90)	12 (3.18)	45 (11.94)
Other	78 (20.69)	166 (44.03)	133 (35.28)	377 (100.00)

In television, neutral depiction of children was the most commonly found result, except when the focus of content was about initiatives/constructive activities and learning/life-experience/development, in which coverage was most commonly positive, and when the focus was on children in conflict with the law, domestic-violence, accidents and disadvantaged children, in which coverage was most commonly negative (Table 7).

Table 7: Amount and percentage of depiction of children in television by focus of content

Depiction of children in television Focus of content	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Positive (%)	Total (%)
Good behaviours/good citizenship	1 (0.41)	0 (0.00)	7 (2.90)	8 (3.32)
Prize-receiving/achievement	0 (0.00)	9 (3.73)	20 (8.30)	29 (12.03)
Protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights	1 (0.41)	19 (7.88)	0 (0.00)	20 (8.30)
Learning/life experience/development	3 (1.24)	26 (10.79)	27 (11.20)	56 (23.24)
Expressing opinions	0 (0.00)	9 (3.73)	2 (0.83)	11 (4.56)
Health	6 (2.49)	6 (2.49)	0 (0.00)	12 (4.98)
Children in conflict with the law	12 (4.98)	4 (1.66)	0 (0.00)	16 (6.64)
Domestic violence	5 (2.07)	1 (0.41)	0 (0.00)	6 (2.49)
Victims of abuse/non-domestic violence	13 (5.39)	21 (8.71)	0 (0.00)	34 (14.11)
Accidents	9 (3.73)	5 (2.07)	0 (0.00)	14 (5.81)
Disadvantaged children	10 (4.15)	1 (0.41)	3 (1.24)	14 (5.81)
Other	3 (1.24)	16 (6.64)	2 (0.83)	21 (8.71)
Total	63 (26.14)	117 (48.55)	61 (25.31)	241 (100.00)

Differences between depictions of children in the front-page section and other sections

News articles and descriptions and news pictures involving children in the front-page section were most commonly negative in their depiction of children; while those found in other sections were most commonly neutral in their depiction of children.

Depiction of children in pictures in the news was mostly neutral in the front-page section, and mostly positive in other sections of the newspapers.

The highest number of negative depictions of children were found in the crime section of the newspapers, in news articles/descriptions, news pictures and pictures in the news.

Depictions of children in television were mostly neutral, except in special reports/interviews and international news in which negative depictions were most commonly found, and in entertainment/art and culture, sports and environment, where positive depictions were the most frequently found result.

Type of child rights violation in the mass media

Of all the 1,485 content involving children covered in both the newspapers and television combined, 534 items, or 35.96 per cent, were found to violate children's rights in some way (Table 8).

Table 8: Amount and percentage of coverage of children in the mass media and rights violations

The mass media	Rights Violation		Total (%)
	Violated (%)	Not violated (%)	
- Newspaper 1	87 (16.29)	133 (13.99)	220 (14.81)
- Newspaper 2	81 (15.17)	185 (19.45)	266 (17.91)
- Newspaper 3	285 (53.37)	473 (49.74)	758 (51.04)
- Channel No. 1	20 (3.75)	42 (4.42)	62 (4.18)
- Channel No. 2	34 (6.37)	69 (7.26)	103 (6.94)
- Channel No. 3	27 (5.06)	49 (5.15)	76 (5.12)
Total	534 (35.96)	951 (64.04)	1,485 (100.00)

When considering the proportion of content which violated child rights by type of coverage in the newspapers, it was found that violations occurred most frequently in news articles (49.91 per cent of all the news articles studied), followed by editorials (40 per cent) and news pictures (27.02 per cent). Violations were least frequently found in one-on-one interviews (Table 9).

When considering the overall number of violations of child rights in the newspaper coverage of children, it was found that news articles had the highest occurrences of violations, or 63.5 per cent.

Table 9: Proportion of type of coverage of children and child rights violations in the newspapers

Type of coverage	Child rights violations		
	Violated (%)	Not violated (%)	Total (%)
- Editorials	2 (40.00)	3 (60.00)	5 (100.00)
- News articles	288 (49.91)	289 (50.09)	577 (100.00)
- Special reports	55 (22.09)	194 (77.91)	249 (100.00)
- One-on-one interviews	1 (5.88)	16 (94.12)	17 (100.00)
- News pictures	107 (27.02)	286 (72.89)	396 (100.00)
Total	453 (36.41)	791 (63.59)	1,244 (100.00)

For television, it was found that of all four types of coverage of children, live-interviews had the highest number of occurrences of rights violations, totaling 66.66 per cent of all live interviews analysed, followed by news talks (38.02 per cent) and special reports (37.77 per cent). See Table 10 for the break down of the result.

When considering the total number of violation occurrences in television, it was found that news stories/minor news accounted for the highest number of occurrences of child rights violations, or 43.2 per cent.

Table 10: The proportion of type of television coverage of children and rights violations

Type of coverage	Rights violations		
	Violated (%)	Not violated (%)	Total (%)
- News stories/minor news	35 (28.69)	87 (71.31)	122 (100.00)
- News talks	27 (38.02)	44 (61.98)	71 (100.00)
- Special reports	17 (37.77)	28 (62.23)	45 (100.00)
- Live-interviews	2 (66.66)	1 (33.33)	3 (100.00)
Total	81 (33.61)	160 (66.39)	241 (100.00)

Child rights violations in media coverage of children by news sections

Analysis of media coverage of children by news sections revealed that the crime section had the most frequent occurrences of child rights violation (69.38% of all crime articles); while the sports section had the least number of occurrences (5.24 %), as shown in Table 11.

When considering the overall number of occurrences of child rights violations, it was found that the front-page/news highlight/new lead section accounted for the highest number of occurrences, 32.7%.

Table 11: The proportion of child rights violations in the media coverage of children by news section

News section	Rights Violations		Total (%)
	Violated (%)	Not violated (%)	
- Front-page/news highlight/new lead	175 (61.19)	111 (38.81)	286 (100.00)
- Minor news/news in brief	120 (59.11)	83 (40.89)	203 (100.00)
- Politics	5 (13.16)	33 (86.84)	38 (100.00)
- Economics	5 (62.50)	3 (37.50)	8 (100.00)
- Education/religion	8 (10.39)	69 (89.61)	77 (100.00)
- Children/women and children	15 (12.82)	102 (87.18)	117 (100.00)
- Special reports	42 (30.66)	95 (69.34)	137 (100.00)
- Entertainment/art and culture	8 (16.67)	40 (83.33)	48 (100.00)
- IT	1 (11.11)	8 (88.89)	9 (100.00)
- Sports	14 (5.24)	253 (94.76)	267 (100.00)
- International affairs	39 (44.83)	48 (55.17)	87 (100.00)
- Public health	7 (43.75)	9 (56.25)	16 (100.00)
- Society	6 (15.79)	32 (84.21)	38 (100.00)
- Crime	68 (69.39)	30 (30.61)	98 (100.00)

Rights Violations News section	Violated (%)	Not violated (%)	Total (%)
- Environment	1 (14.29)	6 (85.71)	7 (100.00)
- Bangkok Metropolitan news	2 (28.57)	5 (71.43)	7 (100.00)
- Regional news	18 (42.86)	24 (57.14)	42 (100.00)

When looking at the focus of news content and rights violations, it was found that right violations occurred most frequently in the coverage of accidents involving children, in both newspapers and television, followed by coverage of disadvantaged children, domestic violence, abuse, and children in conflict with the law, respectively. News content under the initiative/constructive activities category had no occurrence of rights violations. (Table 12)

Analysis of overall occurrences of rights violations revealed that content involving abuse/non-domestic violence accounted for the highest number of occurrences of rights violations, 28.6%.

It was noted that positive news, such as that relating to initiatives/constructive activities or prize-receiving/achievements, were found to have some occurrences of rights violations, although very minimal. Some of the violations involved the use of inappropriate language which depicted children in a sexually provocative light, exploited children for commercial purposes, and the reporting of inaccurate information, among others.

Table 12: The proportion of news coverage and rights violations by focus of content

Focus of content	Rights violations		Total
	Violated	Not violated	
Initiatives/constructive activities	0	16	16
Good behaviours/good citizenship	6	53	59
Prize-receiving/achievement	4	209	213
Protecting rights/demanding rights/preserving rights	3	34	37
Learning/life experience/development	24	331	355
Expressing opinions	5	15	20
Health	18	29	47
Children in conflict with the law	112	59	171
Domestic violence	36	12	48
Abuse/non-domestic violence	153	67	220
Accidents	91	22	113
Disadvantaged children	35	10	45
Other	47	94	141
Total	534	951	1,485

Types of child rights violations in the media coverage of children

Disclosing children's identity accounted for the highest incidence of rights violations in the newspapers, followed by emotional violations through the sensationalization of news to arouse a sense of pity or excitement, and the demeaning of children's dignity.

More or less similar results were found in the television coverage of children. In terms of the disclosure of children's identity, it was found that revealing the names of children's guardians or relatives accounted for the highest incidences of violations in this category; while sensationalization of stories accounted for the highest incidences of violations in the category of emotional violations.

Overall, it was found that disclosure of children's identity was a more commonly found form of rights violations than emotional violations (65.09 % compared to 33.43 %). Revealing names was the most frequently found result in the category of disclosing

children's identity; while sensationalizing the news to arouse a sense of pity and excitement was the most frequently found result in the category of emotional violations of children.

Analysis of overall violations in relations to focuses of news content revealed that content relating to abused children had the highest number of incidences of rights violations through disclosure of the children's identities, followed by coverage of accidents, also through disclosure of the children's identities, and content relating to children's children in conflict with the law, through demeaning of dignity, respectively. No incidence of violations through the use of inappropriate language was found in the categories of initiatives/constructive activities, and expressing opinions.

Differences between news coverage and other forms of coverage of children in the newspapers and television

It was found that, of the three newspapers chosen for this study, news stories accounted for the highest number of content relating to children, or 78.22 %, compared to 21.78 % of other types of coverage. Of all the three television channels analyzed, news coverage ranked only a little higher than other types of coverage of children, or 50.62 % compared to 49.38 %, respectively. For the purpose of this study, "news" was strictly defined as factual reporting of situations. Therefore, programmes such as "news talk" were considered to be in the "other type of coverage" category.

Views of academicians, the media, government representatives, NGOs staff on child rights and violation by the media

It was felt that there has not been a significant change in the overall situation of children in Thailand. However, the problems faced by children have become more complex, notably those relating to sex, violence and drugs. It was felt that the media have paid more attention to children, judging from an increase in television programmes for children. However, it could not be established if these programmes were what the children really wanted as they were produced by adults for them.

The interviewees felt that there is a need for the media to represent children's issues in a positive and creative light, including reporting positive stories of children and exploring creative solutions to the existing problems faced by children. It was felt that the media should pay more attention to finding out what the children want to see in the media and not make this decision for them. It was also felt that the media gives a very limited voice to children and tend to focus on negative news in order to attract more attention from the public.

In general, it was felt that media violations of child rights occur on a regular basis, particularly through the disclosure of children's identity. Other types of violations commonly found include negative stereotyping and generalization; judgmental reporting;

discrimination and prejudice against disadvantaged children; and emotional violation through the use of inappropriate language.

The reasons for the violations stem partly from carelessness and partly from a greater focus on commercial gains rather than respect for child rights.

In regards to policies on children, it was felt that despite having a host of government organizations dedicated to child right promotion, their works remains uncoordinated. There is no central body responsible for child rights promotion. Lack of personnel and effective mechanisms for enforcing standards remains a problem. It was felt that most of policies on children are passive in nature and not pro-active enough.

On the subject of policies relating to the media and children in particular, it was felt that policies are in placed but efforts need to be made make them more widely known. As there is no single responsible oversight agency, many of these policies are not enforced. The interviewees also touched on the issue of societal change and general lack of cooperation to make the society a better place to live.

Presentation of findings

In the newspapers analyzed, new stories accounted for the highest amount of coverage of children, followed by news pictures, special reports and one-on-one interviews, respectively. The findings indicate that coverage of children in the newspapers was more passive than pro-active, as news stories and news pictures are by their very nature a straight forward presentation of situations as they occurred. Special reports and one-on-one interviews, on the other hand, have an agenda-setting purpose and involve a pro-active effort on the part of the media to raise certain issues for public debate or mobilize the public to act in a certain way, regardless of whether the situations in question exist at the moment of reporting or not. The latter type of coverage is still rare and inconsistent in the Thai media.

Another interesting finding is that editorials in the newspapers rarely cover issues related to children. This finding indicates that newspapers still give little importance to children's issues in the editorial arena, where each newspaper makes its stance on issues deemed the most important of the day. The fact that this study found very few editorial pieces on children's issues leads to the conclusion that newspapers do not prioritize children's issues.

The study found some differences between newspaper and television coverage of children by news section. Content relating to children was found highest in the front-page of the newspapers, followed by the sports and crime sections, respectively; while in the television, content on children were found highest in the sport news, followed by crime and special reports. Since news that makes the front-page of any newspaper is news that is considered important, this finding indicates that newspapers hold children's issues in higher regard than television.

In regards to the focus of content, learning/life-experience/development related stories accounted for the highest amount of coverage of children in both newspaper and television media, followed by accidents and prize-receiving/achievement. This is mainly due to the fact that Thai society considers learning/life-experience/development and achievements worthy of recognition. Coverage of children as victims of abuse or other forms of inappropriate treatment is seen as part of the duty of the media to report in its role as a “watchdog” and it is a type of content that is found frequently in the Thai media.

The study found that both newspaper and television media tend to depict children most commonly in a neutral and a positive light, a finding that is consistent across focus and type of coverage. This indicates that the Thai media have improved their views on the coverage of children’s issues as compared to the past. In the study by Ubonrat Siriyuvasak and Metta Vivattananukul in 2000, it was found that the ratio of positive to moderate news coverage and negative coverage was 9:7. This study found the ratio of neutral depiction and negative depiction to be 24:1. This marked change in the media depiction of children indicates that the Thai media have become more responsible in their reporting of children’s issues, due to a combination of training and the guidelines on media conduct that are in place. At the same time, the audience has also exerted its demands and has voiced its concerns on the standards and conduct of the media.

It was found that negative coverage of children is highest in the front-page of the newspapers, as news stories and news pictures. It is the section that is the most read by readers. As the main feature of a newspaper is news coverage, and as people tend to remember negative stories more than positive stories, the general perception of readers tends to be that newspapers present negative news. However, it was noted that the crime section is the only section in which content tends to be depicted negatively most of the time, either in the form of news stories, news pictures, special reports or interviews. This is partly due to the fact that content in this section emphasizes detailed narratives or pictures, and therefore tends to have higher tendency to be negative than other news.

Overall, the nature of violations of child rights occurred in both media tends to involve disclosure of identity more than emotional violations. Almost all of the topics or the focus of content that had the highest incidence of violations are negative in nature, such as abuse/non-domestic violence, accidents, wrong-doing, and disadvantaged children. Even though, violations of child rights in the television media was lower than that of the newspaper media, television has greater power to reach mass audiences and therefore can have a greater impact, especially since television messages do not require as intensive an interpretation as do newspaper messages.

Based on the analysis of violation of child rights in the media, the study identified the following conditions and factors that may lead to a violation of child rights:

First, a focus on sensational news for commercial pursuit;

Second, the basic “5 W’s and 1 H” style of news reporting, which may be in conflict with the protection of child rights;

Third, too great a focus on access to information at the expense of potential impact on children;

Fourth, the tendency to portray children as victims;
Fifth, social norms which regard children as inferior beings;
Sixth, unclear media policy and guidelines on the reporting of children; and
Seventh, lack of awareness and understanding of child rights and ethical standards in the reporting of children's issues.

It was found that coverage of children in both media in the form of news stories was significantly higher than other forms of coverage, particularly in the newspapers as, by nature, newspapers place the greatest focus on news reporting. Therefore, based on the results of the analysis, which showed the highest number of violations in news coverage of children, it is important that newspaper media pay more attention to child rights when carrying out this news coverage.

Coverage of children in the television media was found mainly in the news and news talk formats, in similar proportions. Television is a popular medium for news, and therefore should receive equal attention from the media authorities in the promotion of responsible conduct when reporting children's affairs.

Recommendations:

1. Media executives should establish clear guidelines of conduct for reporting on children's issues;
2. Media executives should place much greater importance on providing appropriate training for media practitioners on child rights and ethical standards in the reporting of children's issues;
3. There should be regular meetings amongst media organizations to discuss case studies of ethical reporting of children's issues;
4. Media organizations, civil society and the government should cooperate with each other in establishing ethical standards relating to child rights.

MEDIA RELEASE

Rights of children still being violated in media coverage

BANGKOK, 19 November 2009 – The rights of children are still regularly violated in Thai newspapers and television news coverage, according to a UNICEF Thailand-supported media study released today.

The study, *How major Thai print and electronic media present news about children*, was conducted by the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University and found that 36 percent of the newspaper reports and 34 percent of the TV reports violated children's rights.

The researchers sampled 1,485 items of newspaper and TV coverage from three leading Thai-language newspapers and three TV stations in 2008. Of the sampled items, 1,244 were from newspapers and 241 were TV coverage.

Most violations were related to privacy issues, such as disclosing the identities of children who were either victims of crimes and accidents or suspected of criminal activities. Numerous media reports revealed the children's names and/or addresses and names of schools, parents and other relatives. Other forms of violations included using sensational, provocative and/or inappropriate languages when referring to children or their behaviour.

Tomoo Hozumi, the UNICEF Representative in Thailand, said that “although the media is more aware of and shows more respect for children's rights than was the case a few years ago, it is clear that more needs to be done to educate the media on the need to be more sensitive when it comes to reporting on children”

Of the violations, most were found in hard news reports, mainly on the newspapers' front pages and during the preview of the headline news on the TV. The highest number of violations was found in reports related to children and violence and child abuse, including sexual abuse.

A large number of violations were also found in items related to crime, according to the study. Other subject areas with numerous violations were accidents, disadvantaged children, domestic violence and children in conflict with the law, according to the study.

(please turn)

MEDIA RELEASE

In addition, the study found that most of the reports in both newspapers and TV portrayed children in a neutral way, except reports related to subjects on children in conflict with the law, violence against children and child abuse, when children usually were portrayed in a negative way. It also noted that news coverage on the front pages and in the crime pages also mainly portrayed children in a negative way.

Hozumi noted that 20 November this year is the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the UN General Assembly. Thailand ratified the CRC, which sets international standards for the care, treatment and protection of children, in 1992. To date, 193 countries have ratified the CRC, making it the most widely adopted human rights instrument in history.

“The Convention calls upon the media to respect children’s right to privacy and to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to children” Hozumi said. “The best way to mark the anniversary of the CRC in Thailand would be for the media, which has great power in this country, to help promote better public understanding of children’s rights and ensure that the media itself respects those rights when reporting on children and children’s issues.”

END

About UNICEF

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has been working in Thailand for 60 years, helping children to survive and thrive from early childhood through adolescence. UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories around the world, supporting child health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation and HIV/AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

For further information, please contact:

Nattha Keenapan, UNICEF Thailand, 02 356 9478 or 086 616 7555 or nkeenapan@unicef.org

Dr. Tatri Taifahpoon/Ms. Prapaipit Muthitacharoen, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University, 085 148 9321 and 081 695 7634