

Print Media Coverage on Child Sexual Abuse and Children's Perception in Nepal

A Report

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Chapter I

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION:

The Hatemalo Sanchar has been publishing "Print media coverage on children's issues" since 2002, under its strategic programme of Media Monitoring. Till date, two reports have been published. This has drawn substantial attention of media houses, journalists, government bodies, stakeholders, civil societies and researchers on the pattern and trend of media coverage on child-related issues.

The main objective of publishing the report is to generate awareness about child rights and covering child-related issues by the media. It also intends to study and assess the media coverage on children's issues to stop the media-perpetrated violence against children and promote and ensure child rights through media. Its primary aim is to develop media as a child friendly means where children can have easy access to information so that they can express views and opinion for their overall development.

In this context, **Print Media Coverage on Child Sexual Abuse and Children's Perception: A Report** is an attempt of the Hatemalo Sanchar to bring a very sensitive issue directly affecting children to the limelight. The concept to carry out study on child sexual abuse in relation to media coverage is developed in reference to the second report of "Print media coverage on children issue: A report 2003". The study was conducted to see media coverage on the basis of four categories of child rights i.e., rights to survival, development, protection and participation. The findings of the report show that the media has given third priority while publishing issues of child sexual abuse under the category of child rights to Protection.

Since child sexual abuse is a very sensitive and concerned issue, it should be dealt with apt seriousness, especially by media. In such backdrop, Hatemalo felt the need to study print media coverage on child sexual abuse particularly rape cases, along with children's perception on the published news.

Hence the report has been prepared with the account of randomly chosen documented 105 news/articles from eight daily newspapers of the year 2003 to understand the pattern of print media on child sex abuse, and four focus group discussions were conducted with children to understand children's perception on the media in relation to child sexual abuse.

Objectives:

The primary objectives of the study are:

- To analyse the pattern of print media coverage on child sexual abuse, and
- To understand children's perception regarding news related to child sexual abuse.

The secondary objectives are:

- To know print media's portrayal of victims and culprits,
- To know the trend of repeated news and follow-up news, and
- To understand perception and opinion of children on print media coverage.

Methodology:

The study has been conducted and the report is prepared on the basis of the following strategies:

1. Study of documented news
2. Focus group discussion with children (FGD)

1. Study of documented news

For the study purpose, a total of 105 news clippings in relation to child sexual abuse, particularly rape cases, are randomly taken as sample data from eight mainstream daily newspapers of the year 2003. The sample newspapers taken are:

- The Kathmandu Post (English-language)
- Rajdhani (Nepali)
- Spacetime (Nepali)
- Kantipur (Nepali)
- Gorkhapatra (Nepali)
- Nepal Samacharpatra (Nepali)
- Himalaya Times (Nepali)
- The Himalayan Times (English)

The news clippings are then categorised under three heading in order to study systematically. The headings are:

- 1) News: event news published by each newspaper (hard news of the incident immediately after its occurrence)
- 2) Repeated news: same event news, which are published in more than one newspaper, in following days
- 3) Follow-up news on the particular incident by various newspapers in following dates.

Eighty of the 105 news items fall under the category 1; 16 news items are found to be published repeatedly; and nine items as follow-up news. The three categories have been analysed here independently for convenience.

The report is descriptive in nature, where findings are presented in both qualitatively and quantitatively. The statistical tools like graphs and charts are used for drawing inference and assuring the relation between the variables.

2. Focus group discussion with children

In course of the study, four group discussions involving children/students of the Kathmandu Valley were conducted. A total of 26 children of age group 12-16 from two schools and a club participated in the discussion, which also included 14 girls. The overall discussion sessions strived to extract views, opinions and feelings of young readers about the issue. During the discussion, the participants were informed at first about the issue and were given an article on the topic to read and analyse. The discussion was guided by the scheduled questionnaires based on the outcome of the study on documented news on child sexual abuse.

Chapter II

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF DOCUMENTED NEWS

In this chapter, pattern of print media coverage on child sexual abuse especially news of rape cases, has been analysed.

Trend of news on child sexual abuse in coverage

Media Coverage on child sexual abuse

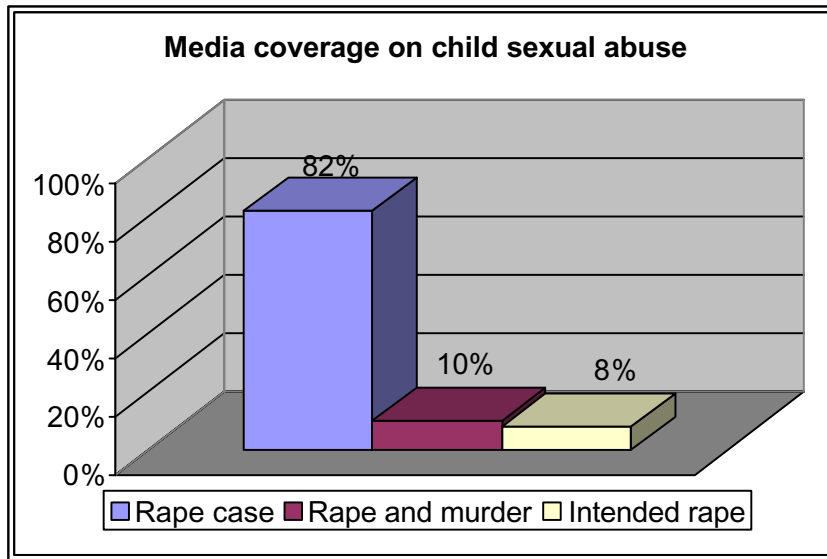


Figure1

The study has found that 82 per cent of the sample news of rape against children is published among the incident related to rape. It is followed by death in consequence of rape and intended rape. The data indicate that all victims are female in gender.

Configuration of media portrayal of child victims of sexual abuse

In this section, the study has highlighted some major issues to understand impression of victims in print media while covering the issue.

Disclosure of victim's name in reporting

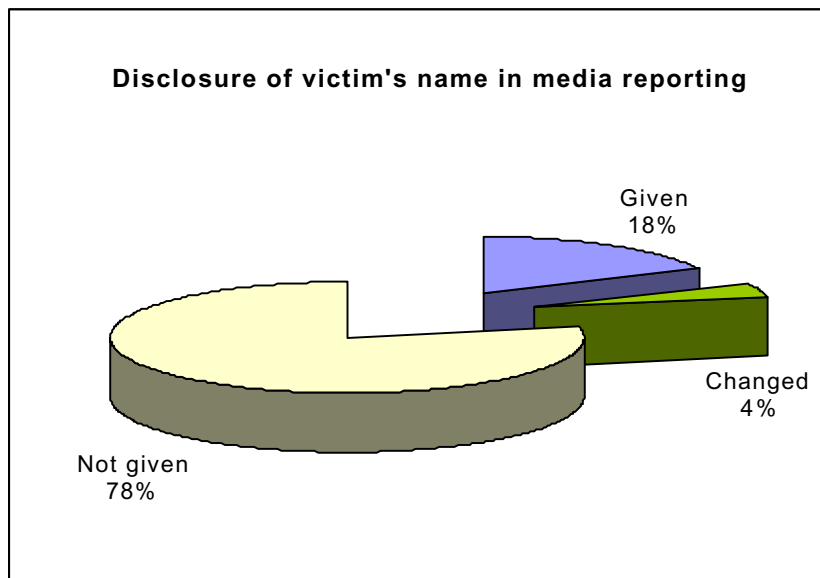


Figure: 2

Significant number of the news (78 per cent) hasn't revealed victims' names, whereas four per cent of the sample reports changed the names.

The graph reveals that media, in general, is in favour of victims' rights to privacy. However, the study found 18 per cent of the sample news items mentioning name of the victim. In cases of revelation of victims' names in the news, the victims have succumbed to the sexual assault.

The concept of closed bench for hearing of the cases related to sexual abuse of women and children, which has been endorsed in the 11th amendment of Muluki Ain (Civil Code), says that the victims' identity should not be exposed by any individual. However, law practitioners, victims, victims' guardian, permitted police officers and staffs of the court are allowed during the hearing of the case. In the reference of the law, it is questionable that before publishing the 18 per cent of the news/articles whether the concerned reporter/correspondent has taken approval from authority. Similarly, it is not clear whether names of victims who have succumbed to the assault can be disclosed in reporting.. The study found the issues ambiguous.

Disclosure of victim's caste

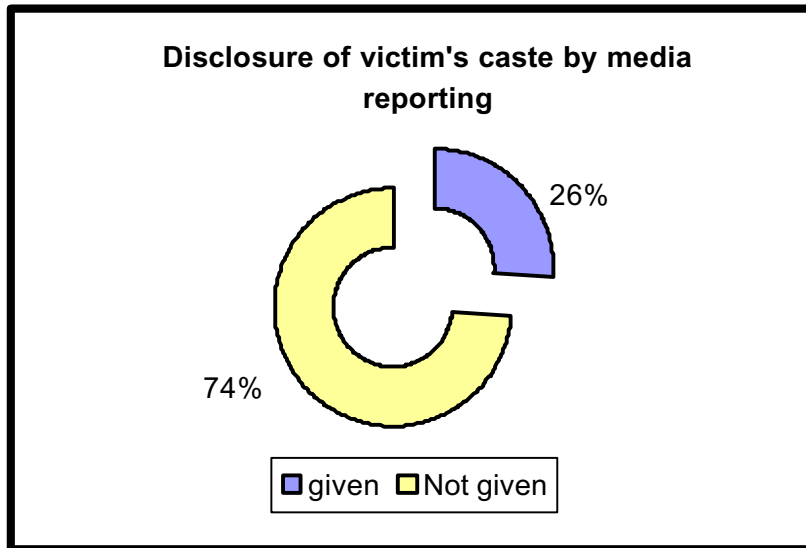


Figure:3

Finding shows that only 26 per cent of the news reports disclosed caste of the victims or parents.

Disclosure of victim's age

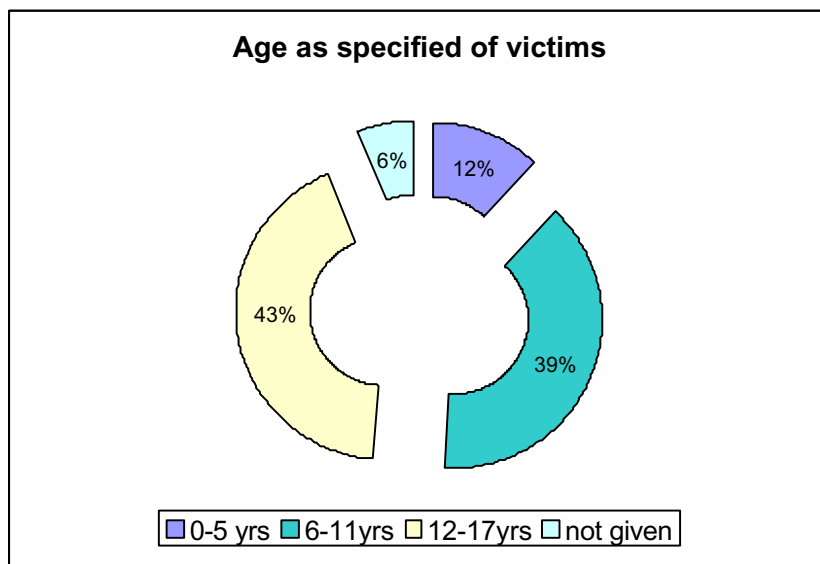


Figure 4

The study has found that the majority news reports stated victims' age . According to the news coverage, the most vulnerable age group is 12-17, which included 43 per cent of the

total abuse cases. The study shows that even children and toddlers below the age of five are not safe from being abused.

Disclosure of victim's occupation in reporting

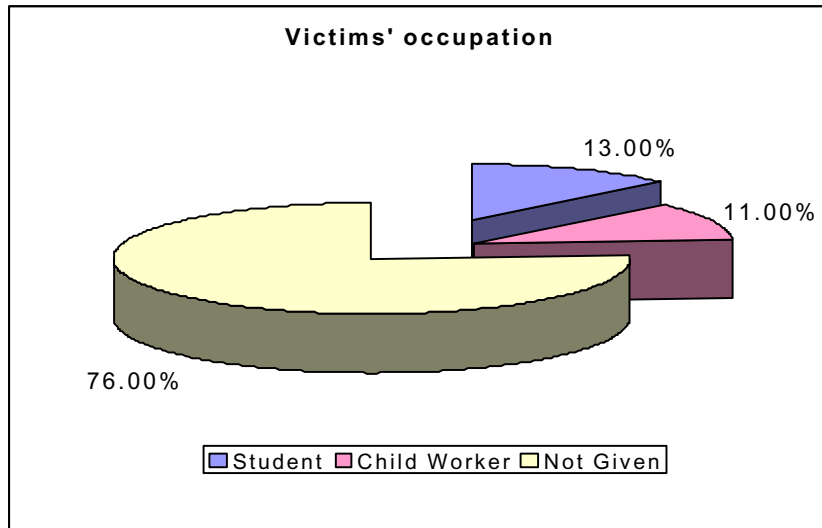


Figure: 5

Among the 80 sample news items, 76 per cent of the reports has not specified victims' occupation, whereas 13 per cent of the reports identified "student" as victims' occupation and 11 per cent as child workers which includes domestic workers, child labourers and street children.

Disclosure of identity of victims' parents

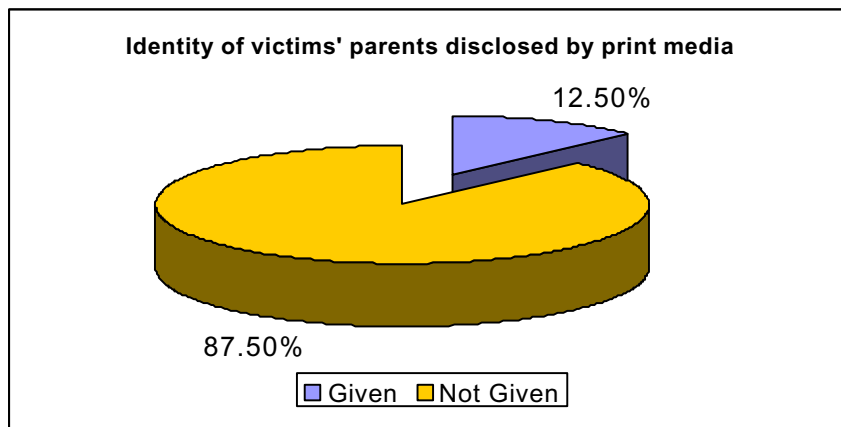


Figure: 6

Findings show that only 12.5 per cent news items has disclosed the identity of victims' parents.

Configuration of media portrayal of culprits

Disclosure of culprit's name in reporting

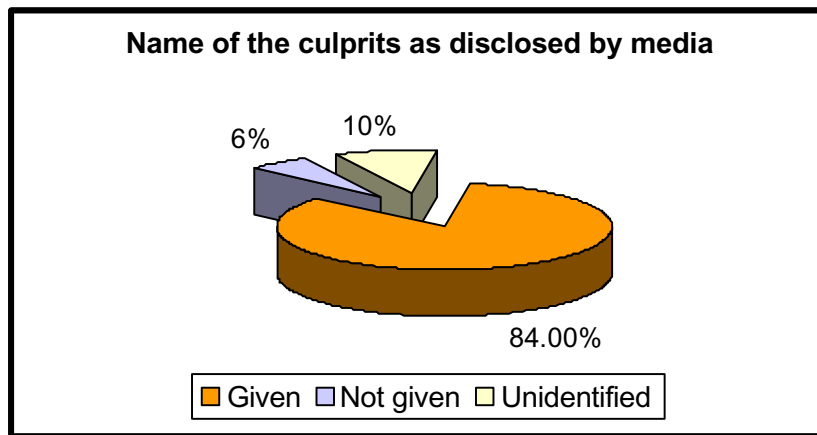


Figure: 7

The study has found that significant number of news has exposed culprits' identity. Eighty-four per cent of the news has disclosed name of the abuser, while 10 per cent has reports about sexual abuse, generally rape case, but perpetrators are reported to have been at large; hence their identity remaining a secret.

Disclosure of culprits' caste

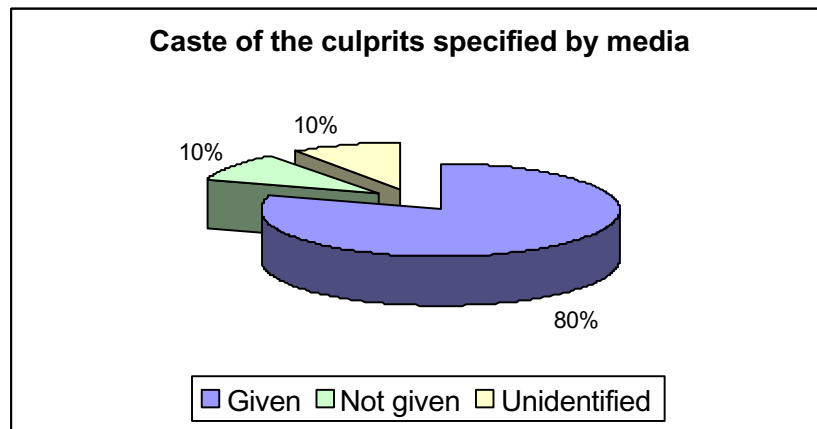


Figure: 8

Majority of the news (80 per cent) has specified known/identified culprits' caste. And in the case of 10 per cent, culprits' caste has not been disclosed; but the reasons are not clear. Likewise, in the case of 10 per cent of the culprits, their castes have not been disclosed due to their unknown whereabouts after committing the crime.

Disclosure of culprits' age

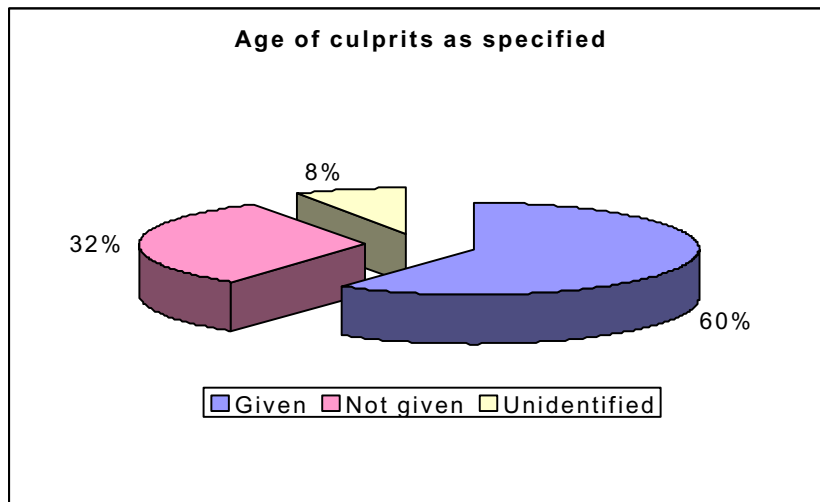


Figure:9

Of the 60 per cent of the news reports documented for the study purpose, age of the culprits has been mentioned. Thirty-two per cent has not mentioned the age owing to unclear reasons; while age of eight per cent of the culprits could not be known due to their disappearance. One of the significant findings is that age of culprits is under 18 in six per cent of the sample reports.

Disclosure of culprit's gender

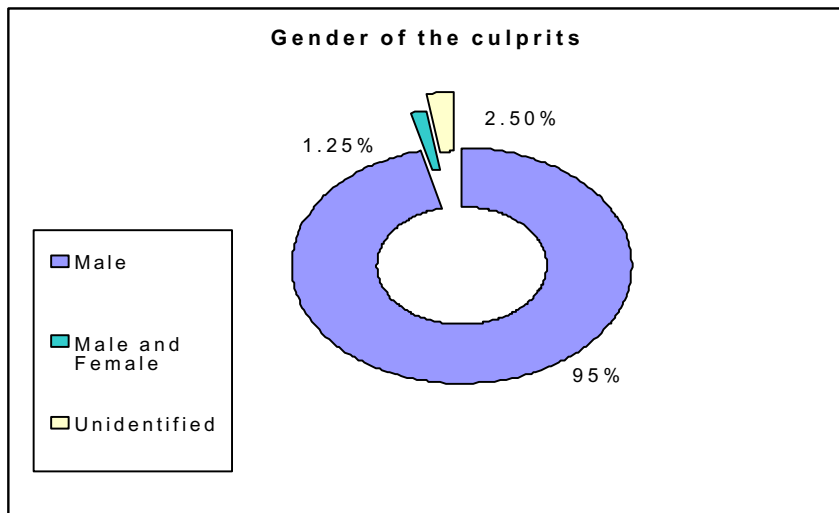


Figure:10

Whopping 95 per cent of the perpetrators, as reported in the sample news items, are males. In one case, a man together with a woman (husband-wife) has been identified as the perpetrator for taking pornographic pictures of children. In 2.5 per cent news, the gender of the culprit could not be ascertained.

Disclosure of culprits' profession

Of the total 80 news/articles, 50 cases have not mentioned the profession of the culprits. In the rest, media has stated occupation of the culprits. The finding reveals that professionals like teachers, doctors, armed cops, soldiers, government officers, shopkeepers, farmers, *Sadhu* (saints), driver, labourers, and singers are identified as culprits. This shows that whatever profession the people take up, they can equally be potential perpetrators.

Disclosure of identity of culprits' parents

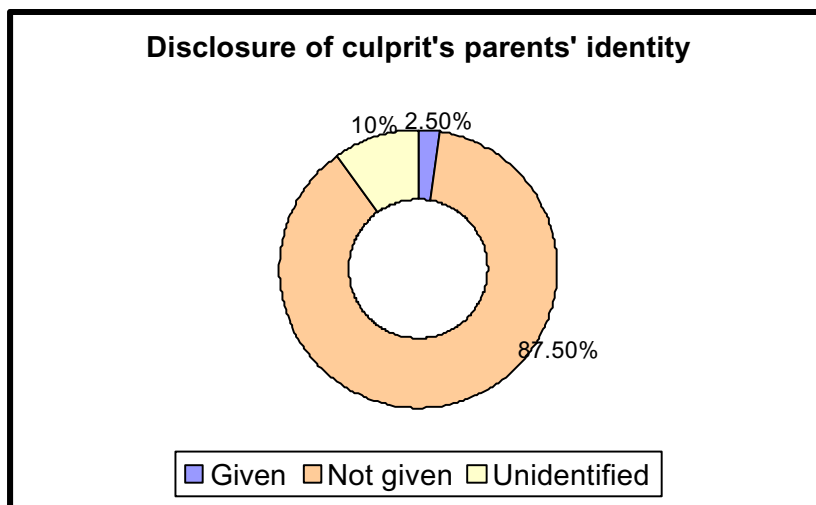


Figure: 11

Maximum number of news (87.5 per cent) has not revealed identity of culprits' parent. Only 2.50 per cent has disclosed identity of perpetrators' parents.

Culprit's relation to victims

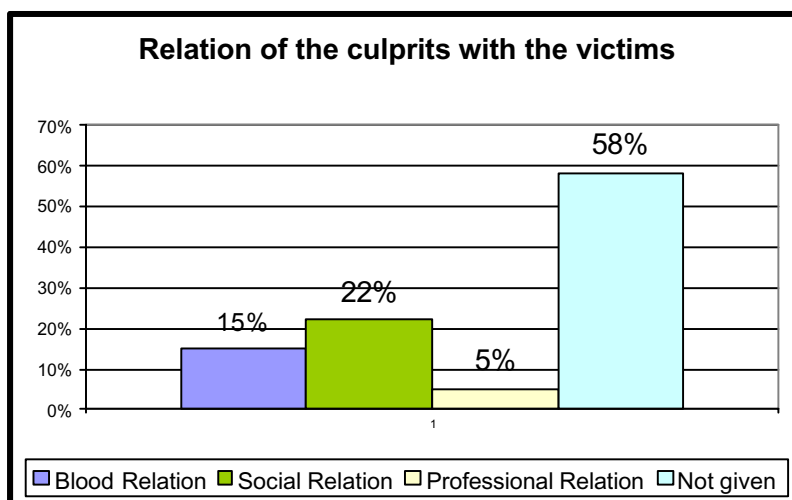


Figure: 12

Findings show that most of the reports (58 per cent) don't mention the type of relation between victims and culprits. Social relation means, victim has social relation with culprit, where culprits are landlord, tenant, and neighbour. Blood relation means, victim has blood relationship with culprit, where culprit could be father, grandfather, uncle, and cousin of the victim

Report on condition of the culprits after sexual abuse

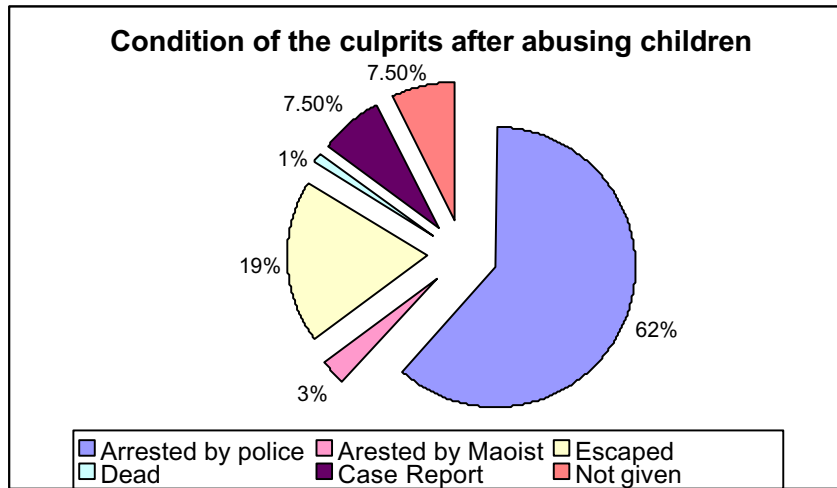


Figure: 13

Study has found that, barring 7.5 per cent of the news items, most of the news reports have stated condition of culprits. The finding shows that 62 per cent of the reports have mentioned that culprits were arrested by police. Likewise, 19 per cent is about the culprits at large. Likewise, in three per cent of the reports, the culprits were arrested by Maoists while 7.5 per cent news items are about the culprits whose reports have been registered in police offices but no action has been taken against the alleged culprits.

Trend of Repeated news on child sexual abuse in coverage

This section deals with only 16 repeated news (out of 105 clippings) i.e., same event news, which are published in more than one newspaper. The cases, which were repeatedly published by newspapers, are described below:

Case I

This is a case about a girl, aged five, who was raped by her teacher in Dachhaini, Dhudh Pokhari, Dolakha. The girl was living with her maternal grandmother, aged 63. It was because her mother had eloped leaving behind the girl with in-laws and her father was living with physical paralysis (pachheghat) in Kathmandu. The victim party had filed a case in Charikot, the district headquarters, and the grandmother had solicited help from media to in support of the victim girl who had nobody near and dear after her grandie's death.

Case II

It is about a case where a raped victim had received legal justice from an appellate court after five years of the crime being committed. The victim girl, then aged 14, was raped by a group in Mahelpur VDC-4, Surkhet.

Case III

It is about death of a perpetrator who had attempted to rape a girl (16) in Abukhaireni VDC-7, Vorge Village, Tanahun. The culprit, who was sternly beaten by local villagers, succumbed to his injuries.

Case IV

It is about a 2-year-old girl who had been raped by her own grandfather (53) in Masyam VDC-8, Palpa district. The culprit has been imprisoned.

Case V

It is about a 6-year-old Nepali girl, who was raped and murdered by a group of four Indian nationals in Nainital, India.

The study has found that these repeatedly published news items in more than a single newspaper are of diverse nature and the crimes are committed in different circumstances/contexts. It shows that print media is publishing news where victim has poor family background who need support, where victims are struggling for justice, where victim's and culprit's age differences is high, where unexpected incident happened with culprits or victims like death of culprit and news of Nepali people living in foreign country. Likewise, the study has found that, different print media has concealed victims' real name, which are generally replaced by imaginative names. In this case, it is found that a same victim has given different names in different newspapers, which may be odd for readers and some time for victim too.

Trend and impact of Follow-up news on child sexual abuse in coverage

It is found that print media is publishing follow-up news of child sexual abuse, when sexual abuse has happened due to abuse of authority, negligence of state and issue concern for all. During the study period of documented news clippings, mainly two cases were frequently found being followed up by same newspaper or other newspapers. The cases have been described below:

Case I

This is about a case of a 11-year-old orphan girl who had been frequently raped and sexually abused for 4 months by three boy mates living in the Child Welfare Home, which was under the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare in Birgunj. The Ministry had sent an Investigating team, who interrogated witnesses and concerned officials. Though the team

prepared a report on the case, instead of providing rehabilitation and justice, the victim was sent to Thori with her relative (mother's elder sister). Not only the victim, all girls who had been living in the Home were expelled.

Case II

It is a rape case by a group of Armed Policemen in Mahadev Gaun, Bardiya. The group had raped two girls (aged 15 and 16 respectively) hailing from Tharu family. The case had also been followed up by newspapers. And on the basis of available news clippings, it is learnt that the culprits had been taken under custody for trial .

These cases had been found to be followed up by more than four national newspapers. With regard to the first case, it shows that though newspapers raise the voice, the girl contradictorily had to leave the Home without any justice and support. It reveals that print media has good sympathy toward the victim. And it also reveals the reluctance of the local administration and government authorities, which failed to ensure justice to the poor despite mounting public pressures. In the second case too, it is understood that follow-up media coverage has positive impact in putting pressure on the concerned authorities to deliver justice.

Chapter III

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH CHILDREN

This chapter deals with the children's feedback received from focus group discussion on the issue of Media Coverage on Sexual Abuse. The discussion was based on the result of documented news clippings on sexual abuse against children. A total of 26 children of age group 12-16 from two schools and a club participated in the discussion, which also included 14 girls.. The main aim behind the whole discussion session was to extract views, opinions and feelings of young readers about print media coverage on sexual abuse.

The findings and feedbacks of the children on the following scheduled questionnaires are as follows:

Reading behaviour and reflection of children on news related to child sexual abuse:

The discussion had revealed that almost all children read news related to the sexual abuse. And those who don't read know this kind of information from their friends and colleagues. It shows that children have deep concern on the subject and like to discuss with their mates.

All the participants expressed negative feelings after reading such news. They perceived sexual abuse as most disgracing, unethical, humiliating act on the parts of selfishness and one of the worst inhumane acts.

Children's views on publication of news related to sexual abuse

During the discussion we asked following questions to the groups:

Do you think newspapers should print such news? And Why?

Responding to the question, most of the participants of the groups agreed that such news has to be printed. Their reasoning for necessity of such issues to be published are:

- To spread awareness about such issues still prevailing in our society
- To spread education among children so that they can be aware and make themselves safe so as not to be next victim
- Create positive outlook
- Ignorance should be rejected
- To create openness and come out of conservative society
- To spread knowledge about the law relating to it so that other dare not think of doing it.

Almost all the children assume and believe that newspapers print issues of sexual abuse to generate awareness in the general mass. The children had some different views too, which are follows:

- It makes one aware on how even our near and dear ones, who could be family members, neighbours, friends, among others, can commit such immoral acts
- Teaches us not to have trust and full faith on anyone easily
- Educate readers about it
- To give true facts
- It is a duty of newspaper to write what is happening
- To add spice to their paper so that public have interest and curiosity in reading

Children's opinion on print media coverage on sexual abuse:

This section deals with the opinion of children in relation to the findings of documented news clippings:

Opinion on disclosure of victim's name or identity

Majority of children did not want to publish or disclose victim's name/identity. They thought that:

- It creates a bad reputation
- They are disgraced from the society
- If the victim's name/identity is not disclosed, victim's career and marriage won't be affected
- It labels bad mark on the child victim's future, as a child is our future and dreams of a child are big

However, some of them have different views that are:

- The newspaper should disclose victim's name only if the victim is dead.
- Identity should be disclosed because if one does not take stand, this act will continue for years till somebody is bold enough to face it.
- Disclosure gives a complete proof of the incident

Argument for

Need to disclose victim's identity	Need to hide victim's identity
Newspapers should give full identity; as well as the victim's versions should also be included with the situation. The report should be described in detail, including how the incident took place. Otherwise, the news will look like a cooked one. Giving real situation can make public aware of the tactics culprits use to take hold of the victim and thus other girls will be aware about such incidents.	In contrast to the opinion, it is argued that just for some kind of proof, the newspaper cannot ruin the victim's life. Victim (she) already has to deal with her own physical and psychological problems and publishing victim's name will add more problems and anxiety. It will re-victimise her, hence her identity should be hidden.

While discussing with children on the trend of print media to publish changed name or imaginary name of victim instead of real identity, the participants forwarded mixed opinion. Half of the participants said this is fine because:

- The original identity is still hidden
- It does not cause harm to the victim's future

But in other side, half of the participants has opinion that, it (imaginary name) could create confusion because the newspapers provide the address too and it could be that in the same area, a girl (or other person) with that changed name could exist which can cause disturbance to her.

Opinion on disclosure of culprit's identity

Majority of children opined in favour of publishing culprit's name and identity in the news so that:

- The culprit will be identified and be humiliated by the people
- Others learn a lesson and never dare do so
- If even the culprit's life is ruined, others can learn a lesson

Some different views on the topic are:

Printing culprits name means humiliating him (culprit); it may destroy culprit's future instead of improving his behaviour/social life due to social labelling. In this case, print media should do follow-up and if that person has changed then they should again print about him with respect. Print media should give culprit a chance to improve with warning.

Opinion on disclosure of victim and culprit's parent's identity

Majority of the children were against of disclosing victim's parent's identity because:

- Parents have no fault
- Our society humiliates parents
- It becomes difficult for the parents to earn their living

Similarly, majority of the participants were not in favour of publishing identity of culprit's parents for following reasons:

- They have no involvement hence no need to involve them
- They are in no way related to the incident
- It is not their fault as they always want their children to act morally

However, a few of children have opinion to publish parent's name in such case where parents are trying to hide their offspring's (culprit) fault, helping them to run away or blaming the victim for the whole incident, then their identity should be definitely printed.

Children's suggestion to newspapers while portraying news related to sexual abuse:

Children have shown very positive attitude toward print media coverage and reporting on sexual abuse, especially on cases of rape. Various suggestions were brought out which are as follows:

- News should be published in a way that spreads awareness and for education
- Laws and legal frameworks should also be published to let the readers know
- Even punishments meted out to culprits should be printed along with the news
- Not only news but information and articles regarding the issue should be published even in the editorial page
- Follow-up should also be conducted
- The articles and news on this topic should be given priority for example, printing in the front page.
- Give awareness raising articles on child sex abuse in papers and magazine that children read like Kopila, Bal Jagat, Batika, Sunkesra, Muna, Balak etc
- Equality for all: print media should publish such news without any prejudice and biasness on the basis of statues like caste and class, authority and positions.
- The journalists should follow the laws and rules while giving news
- Never learn to hide it rather learn to discuss it, a participant said during the discussion.

Chapter IV

Suggestions and Recommendations:

On the basis of study on documented news clippings on child sexual abuse and considering the feedback of children on the topic, the following suggestions and recommendations have been drawn:

- Media reports cases with basic facts but the readers also need to be informed about the level of legal punishments the culprit is likely to get. The readers also need to be well informed about national and international laws and legal frameworks on the issue.
- It needs to make the general mass aware that not only women but also children of both sexes are vulnerable. It should also aware people about the vulnerability of their children and the need of creating a safe environment for them.
- Very little follow-up news on sexual abuse is found. Such follow-up news should be increased in order to be a voice for the voiceless.
- Many of the coverage lack reporting on the condition of the victims. It should be made public in order to create positive and favourable attitude of the society through media for victim because it is not their fault.
- The print media should also inform its readers about the prevention of such exploitation of children and also provide views to family/guardians about their role as a protective shield against exploitation of children.
- Media should publish articles to inform and encourage the victims and the guardians of the victims of sexual abuse that they should not feel threatened by culprit and tolerate it but give necessary punishments to them by reporting the case.
- Media has occasionally mentioned the identity of the victims or their parents. In this case print media should think critically on the consequence to victims and at the same time they should pay attention to the laws and media ethics.
- While adding analytical views on the issue, journalists should disapprove the acts of the culprits as unethical. It is yet to show that these incidents still occur at large scale in our society and only a small portion of them are brought out and actions are taken.
- Print media needs to recognise opinion and views of children in relation to print media coverage. The media should respect the children's views and materialise the children's relevant suggestions as much possible for the best interest of children.

Limitations:

- Child sexual abuse is a vague term, the study has taken only news items of rape cases.
- Limited numbers of news items from newspapers are studied as source of information/data.
- Eight daily newspapers are only taken for the study purpose.
- News items are collected randomly.
- Children groups are taken from city area i.e. Kathmandu for Focus group discussion. It may not give children' perception in large scale and of remote areas.

Conclusion:

Information, awareness, motivation and entertainment can be considered the basic objectives of the mass media. While dealing with serious issues like sexual abuse, media should be very concerned and should act responsibly. Such issues should be published for mass awareness so as to prevent the public from being abused and to motivate general public to create safe and favourable environment for victim. In addition, those news should be covered in such a way that the readers and especially young readers who are not so aware of these issues should know that these acts are immoral and hostile . This does not mean that one should create an anxious environment regarding this issue but be well informed and conscious of it.

Although in a traditionally developing country like ours, media sometimes fail to conquer its goal to root out superstitions and violence/abuses faced by women and children but awareness and realisation is slowly creeping into the minds of the people through different media. The media, though cannot create a safe environment by itself, it can suggest and give ideas on creating a healthy, secure place as we all know that media has proved itself as a medium of moulding our society.

Last but not least, the report shows that print media is doing very commendable job on the issue of "Child Sexual Abuse". It also shows that the print media respects privacy of victim. However, the challenge for the print media is to publish such news following the interest of mass public, especially with the best interest of children and respecting the child rights. In this context, children's views and opinion on print media should be respected.