

Media Coverage of Children's Rights: A Comparative Analysis of English and Urdu language Dailies of Pakistan

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Abstract

Children are an integral part of the society since they cannot raise their concerns themselves, society as a whole is responsible for their rights. Rights of children can become part of political and social agendas in Pakistan if media also play its social responsibility role more effectively. The one year study of the leading newspapers of Pakistan aims to examine whether the rights of children were given any prominence in the coverage or not. The study yields that the coverage of Pakistani print media towards children's rights of education, health, safety, and development was given hardly any prominence. The findings also show a significant difference in the ways English and Urdu dailies had given coverage to the issues of children. Very few editorials, features, and columns were published on children's issues which depicts that there is no clear agenda or policy of the dailies to create awareness about the children's rights and it is not playing its role towards the society in this regard responsibly.

Keywords: *Children rights, Newspapers, Social responsibility*

Introduction

A major segment of any population comprises of children, and it is indeed a very sensitive segment on which the future of any society is dependent. It is important to preserve the basic rights of children so that they can become productive members of the society. Since children are often denied the right to be researched as a group and are not seen as rights holders, their rights are considered more complex than adults' rights (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). However, Burke summarizes the children's rights into three parts, right to

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survival, right to protection and the right to development (2007).

Children's rights issues are complex and deep in Pakistan. They require manifold services, at the social-cultural level as well as at the legislative level. Some of the issues and problems faced by the children, especially in terms of rights violation, are deep-rooted and so entrenched in the society that they need very serious structural and systemic changes. To address these violations is a big challenge for the Pakistani society. It requires strategic engagement at social, political, economic and institutional levels. As media is considered to play an important part in shaping public opinion as well as in affecting the process of policymaking and legislation, they can help draw attention towards this issue by giving the issues prominent coverage. Media needs to be engaged to achieve success in this area. Rights of children can become part of political and social agendas in Pakistan if these are covered in different forms of mass communication (Shrestha, 2002).

Back in 1978, UNESCO in its Declaration had pointed out to the fundamental contribution of mass media in educating the people in promoting human rights and other aspects of international peace (UNESCO, 1978). The Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) furthermore, emphasized the need to address the needs and concerns of children more holistically emphasizing the importance of media engagement in the promotion of children's rights (CRC 1989). There is a recognition of the critical role of mass communication in improving human rights consciousness within the general population and especially in promoting the children's rights agenda (Fayoyin, 2001). It is argued that the media needs to be mobilized to contribute to the human rights agenda, particularly

with reference to children's rights (Bhandari, 2005; Jonsson, 2003). Media has the power to highlight the issues, problems, and concerns of the people to enlighten the government about what it has to do for the people. Thus, media can serve as a bridge between the government and the people (Hiremath, 2013).

However, it is argued that media are not conscious of children's rights despite the strong probability that the way media represents, or even ignores issues of children, can influence decisions taken on their behalf and how the society perceives them (UNICEF:2006).

Although governments in developing countries are trying to improve the condition of children's rights, the overall attention of the media whether owned by the government or private sector is not in line with the policies of the government. It is interesting to observe that the coverage given to children's rights by the print media of developed and developing countries is very different. There is a complete absence of meaningful and relevant coverage to children's issues in the mainstream media of developing countries (Gram, 2010; Goonasekera, 2001). Staff and reporters who cover children's rights are not trained, as it does not fall into any specialized beat in a pluralistic media system which is running in developing states. Moreover, there are no specific ethical and moral guiding principles on reporting children's rights in developing countries (Internews Europe, 2014). It is also argued that though we see children in newspapers they are mostly presented as victims of crime, poverty, and exploitation. Pictures and descriptions of their misery are only highlighted for news value (UNICEF, 2007). However, what is of significance is that though coverage is given to

children related issues in the newspapers of developed countries, the issue still does not make its way to editorial content, which is only indicative of the need to change the policy of the dailies over the issues to children's rights (Afreen, 2014).

This study is an exploratory study to examine whether print media, in Pakistan, gives prominence to issues related to children's rights and tries to make them part of the political and social agenda for the public and policymakers or not.

Issues relating to Children's Rights

In Pakistan children below 19 years of age comprises more than half of the total population (MOH, 2008). Though Pakistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) in 1990 and since then different laws have been made for the development of children, Pakistan is still far behind to meet its commitments in this regard (Sadruddin, 2011). The conditions of children are still not satisfactory and issues concerning children's rights are still under examination (Sadruddin, 2011). Basic children's rights such as health, education, protection from violence (sexual exploitation, corporal punishment, killing, kidnapping, abduction, and trafficking), birth registration and eradication of child labor need serious policy decisions. The irony is that in South Asian region Pakistan stands in the line of those countries where no systematic research work has been done for the protection of children's rights (Jabeen, 2014).

In the developed countries, the democratic system is much strong and children have access to all the basic rights. Whereas, in the developing world, as identified by Basu and Van (1998), financial crisis within the poor families is a major cause of child

labor. Although parents belonging to poor social status know that child labor is against the laws, they find themselves helpless in the face of financial crisis and therefore send their children to work in order to meet the basic needs of the household. In developing countries, almost 250 million children are working as child laborers. The types of work vary according to the area that they belong to. In cities, children are engaged in construction work in factories and households. While in rural areas they work in fields as domestic servants. Although, governments and child welfare organizations in the developing countries are trying to uproot this problem (Patrinos, 2007). The issue of child labor is an undesirable phenomenon in global human rights context. In Pakistan, a large number of children are forced to work because of the financial crisis of their families before they even enter school (Zaidi, Javed & Khan, 2013).

Health and education are two major sectors that are constantly ignored and practically no systematic formula exists that can ensure health and education rights to children. Health problems in Pakistan are at its extreme. Infant mortality rate is high due to inadequate health facilities in government hospitals. An increase in the infant mortality rate has been witnessed due to the inadequate health facilities in government hospitals. According to the 2011 National Nutrition Survey (NNS), the health facilities to the children in Pakistan are very poor. Survey also mentions about sub-standard health facilities provided to the children in Pakistan. The nutritional status of children is not satisfactory either. Although the government of Pakistan has worked a lot in the last one and a half decade, a lot of effort is still required to address the child

malnutrition issue in particular (Arif, Farooq & Sathi, 2014).

Basic education facilities are not in the reach of children belonging to the poor class. Education has been divided into different standards. The public and private sector have different curriculum, standards, and facilities. Public sector schools fail to meet the international standards of education. Therefore, almost 47% of children are out of schools at the primary level as they cannot afford the expenditures of private schools. There is no proper access to basic facilities such as clean water for drinking, electricity, and toilets in primary schools. The government of Pakistan has failed to provide a proper system and infrastructure in schools for children. Allocation of resources for children education is extremely low and is the major cause of illiteracy rate in Pakistan (State of Human Rights, 2014).

Child sexual abuse and corporal punishment are also very common in Pakistan. Macro risk factors, such as poverty, poor legal protections, illiteracy, large family size, and unemployment, create an enabling environment for violence against children. The magnitude of the issue cannot be properly assessed as there is a lack of empirical data (Hyder, and Malik, 2007). In the last few years, many incidents show a terrible violation of children's rights.

Theoretical Framework

According to the Social Responsibility Theory, it is the duty of the press to cover all the important information round the clock with a sense of accuracy and objectivity in its work (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). Social responsibility theory justifies the view of private ownership of media in the public interest. For the privately-owned media, the theory defines different ethical codes of

conduct and professional standards in various types of tribunals and councils and also through different commissions to deal with the individuals' complaints against media groups. But all this process of accountability of media corporations should be self-regulated and it is the main feature of the theory (McQuail, 1987). In this the role of the media is not to promote government or political parties they like but to promote social change through, for example, promoting ethnic tolerance, women's rights, health, education and, the dissemination of healthy political ideas. In this context, media professionals should provide the right information at right time and must remain objective and unbiased while covering children issues. Journalists must pay considerable attention to different aspects of national interest like peace, social progress, human rights, and democracy while providing news (McQuail, 1987). Media must perform with reference to the notion of social responsibility because its capacity to influence the society has increased tremendously over the last two decades.

The study examines the social responsible role of the media through frame analysis of news items on issues of children's rights (Entman, 1991). It tries to identify whether newspapers framed the issues of children's rights in a positive way with suggestive steps to create awareness among the public or just sensationalized the issues without proposing any solution.

Research Questions

RQ1. Did newspapers give more prominence to crime against children compared to other issues?

RQ2. Is there any difference in the coverage in the English and Urdu dailies?

RQ3. Whether newspapers gave positive coverage with suggestive steps or just critically analyzed the issues without stating any solution?

Research Methodology

The study considers all news reports, editorials, features and columns published in the four leading English and Urdu dailies i.e., Dawn and The News (two English language dailies), Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt (two Urdu dailies) from Jan 01, 2015 to Dec 31, 2015, a time period of one year.

The researchers used probability sampling and selected the sample from the population through composite sampling by selecting 1st week of January, 2nd week of February, 3rd week of March and 4th week of April. After every 4th week loop began again. It is through this formula that all the days of the week, all the weeks of every month, and all the months of the year could be included.

Conceptualization of Categories

The issues were divided into five categories: child education; crime against children, child health; child labor, and child budget. All news contents related to primary education, free education and facilities available in government schools was considered for 'child education' category. Content about any violence against children's such as child sexual abuse, physical punishment, kidnapping, and trafficking and child abduction was put in the category 'crime against children'. In the 'child Health' category all news content about health of children such as Polio campaigns, food shortage, malnutrition, infant mortality rate and facilities available to child in government hospitals was considered. All contents about child labor such as children are working as a forced labor and all stories

was put in the 'child labor category' and all content regarding allocation of funds for children's in the annual budget was put in the 'child budget' category

The coverage of children's rights issue is studied in three ways: frequency, prominence, and direction. Frequency was measured as number of time news items appeared which related to children's rights issues. Prominence, is measured within news items into three ways, the page, placement on the page and pictures. A score of four was given to the news item on the front page. Likewise, a score of three, two, and one was given if the news was on the back, city and other page respectively. If the news was placed on the upper half of the page a score of two and if on the lower half a score of one was given. If any picture was placed with the news, a score of one otherwise, no score was given.

Index score of maximum prominence was calculated to be seven and of least prominence was calculated to be two. Hence, if a score was greater than five it was being considered as high prominence and if less than five then of less prominence.

Direction of content were measured in editorials, features and columns on two-point scale positive and negative. Any editorial, feature or column that talked about positive steps taken to address the issues of the Children's Rights with suggestive steps to resolve the problems being faced by children in Pakistan was considered as positive. However, any editorial, feature or column, which only pointed towards the issues of children without mentioning any definite solution was considered as negative.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: English and Urdu Language Dailies-Wise Frequency & Percentage of News Items

| Type of newspaper | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| English | 225 | 42.8% |
| Urdu | 301 | 57.2% |

N=526

Table 1 shows that out of total of 526 news items, in the leading English language dailies 225 (42.8%) and in the Urdu language dailies 301 (57.2%) news items were published.

Table 2: Issue-Wise Frequency and Percentage of Children's Rights

| Issues of Children Rights | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Child Education | 58 | 11.0% |
| Crime against Children's | 266 | 50.6% |
| Child Health | 78 | 14.8% |
| Child Labor | 110 | 20.9% |
| Child Budget | 14 | 2.7% |

N= 526

Table 2 shows that out of the total 526 news stories covered in the year 2015, 266 (50.6%) news were published on issue "Crime against children" which is highest compared to all other categories. The "Child labor" issue is the second most covered issue with 110 (20.9%) news items. 78 (14.8%) news were published on the issue of "Child health", 58 (11.0%) news were published on "Child education" and least covered issue was "Child budget" with 14 (2.7%) news items.

Table 3: Overall Prominence Score of an Individual Issue

| Children's rights Issues | Prominence Score |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Child Education | 4.13 |
| Crime against Children | 3.45 |
| Child Health | 4.60 |
| Child Labor | 3.81 |
| Child Budget | 4.78 |

The finding in the Table 3 show that prominence score of Child Education is 4.13, Crime against Children is 3.45, Child Health is 4.60, Child Labor is 3.81 and Child Budget is 4.78. The findings clearly show that none of the issues was given prominence.

Table 4: Frequency of Coverage to Children’s rights issues

| News item | Frequency (Positive/Negative) | Percent |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---------|
| Editorial | 3 (2/1) | 37.5% |
| Feature | 3 (3/0) | 37.5% |
| Column | 2 (2/0) | 25.0% |

N=8

Table 4 shows that three editorials, three feature articles and two columns were published on the issues of Children’s rights in the national dailies in year 2015. However, most of them were positive, suggesting solutions to the issues faced by children.

Table 5: Issue-wise analysis of English and Urdu dailies

| | Child Education | Crime against Children | Child Health | Child Labor | Child Budget |
|---------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| English | 47(20.9%) | 64(28.4%) | 56(24.9%) | 45(20.0%) | 13(5.8%) |
| Urdu | 11(3.7%) | 202(67.1%) | 22(7.3%) | 65(21.6%) | 1(0.3%) |
| Total | 58(11.0%) | 266(50.6%) | 78(14.8%) | 110(20.9%) | 14(2.7%) |

English n1=225 Urdu n2=301

Findings in Table 5 show comparison in the coverage of English and Urdu dailies on the selected issues of children’s rights. Out of 225 news items covered by English newspapers, 47 (20.9%) news were published on issue of “Child Education”, 64 (28.4%) were published on issue of “Crime against children”, 56 (24.9%) news were published on “child health”, 45 (20.0%) were published on “Child labor” and only 13 (5.8%) news were published on “Child budget” issue while on the other hand among total of 301 news covered by Urdu newspapers just 11 (3.7%) news were published on issue of “Child education”, 202 (67.1%) news were published on “Crime

against children”, 22 (7.3%) news were covered the issue of “Child health”, 65 (21.6%) were published on “Child labor” and just 1 (0.3%) news is on “Child labor”.

As expected news reports on crime against children were far more than all the other issues on children’s rights. Least news reports were on the budget allocation for the development of children. Even frequencies on health and education were also marginal. The findings show that the prominence given to all the issues was very nominal and compared to all other issues most prominence was given to the budgetary allocation for children’s development. As far as the coverage in the editorials, features, and columns was concerned though it was very nominal, they were mostly positive, suggesting steps to resolve the problems faced by children.

Findings show that there is not a significant difference between English and Urdu dailies as far as the number of news reports on children is concerned. However, there is a significant difference in the frequency of children’s rights issues news against children in the Urdu dailies as compared to English. The frequency of news reports on crime against children in Urdu dailies is far more than English dailies. English dailies had more news reports on children education and health and on budget allocation for children’s development.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, children’s rights issues are complex. To address them fully very serious structural and systemic changes are required. Social, political, economic and institutional level engagement is required. International development institutions emphasize that

media has a critical role in gauging public support for human and particularly children's rights issues (Fayoyin, 2001). Media can play a very effective role in providing information that can empower audiences/ readers to act. If the media plays its role of informing and educating the public responsibly it can be quite pivotal in bringing social change for the rights of the children.

The purpose of the present study was to identify the role of Pakistani print media towards issues of children's rights in Pakistan. The findings show that coverage on the issues of children in both English and Urdu dailies was quite insignificant. Children's rights issues on education, crime, health, child labor, and child budget were given neither any prominence in the news reports nor in the editorials, features, and columns. The dailies did not have any clear agenda and position to raise awareness about the violations of children's rights. It is not playing any role in shaping public opinion as well as affecting the policymaking and legislation.

To promote the children's rights agenda in the country, media has the characteristics to work effectively in influencing public and political agenda. Requirement is to develop and implement a strategy that integrates media in promoting the rights of the children and address the ingrained dimensions of children's rights violations. Media is expected to play a more socially responsible role toward this segment of the society and as a powerful institution of society may help to draw attention towards this issue by giving the issues of children's rights more prominence. Furthermore, it is recommended that to meet the needs and services of the children, and to protect them from any further exploitation, certain ethical standards be maintained while reporting about their issues.

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