

**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CHALLENGES OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS
IN GEORGIAN MEDIA**

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to present the results of the research: how the issue of under aged people is highlighted in Georgian media and what ethical violations we meet with this respect. Content analyze is used as a research method.

As the research showed, challenges concerning children and violence are one of the sensational topics. The main mistake the Georgian journalists make – victim children's identification is the name of their identity or residence place – with which children's rights are violated roughly and the ethical professional norms are broken too.

While covering the cases of minors it is necessary to keep confidentiality - it is the international demand that contributes avoiding stigma i.e. prevents attaching stigma of criminal. But in Georgian media presumption of innocence is violated quite frequently.

Key words: Children's Rights; Ethic; Georgian Media;

1.INTRODUCTION

Challenges concerning to children's rights and violence is one of the sensational topics which appear on the front pages of newspapers as loud headlines or the most actual information in everyday broadcasting news.

The goal of this paper is to present the results of researches on how Georgian media cover children's rights and violence problems in 2007-2012 years ("Version", "Alia", "Kviris Chronika" and "Kviris Palitra", "Resonance").

Basic research question is how well journalists observe ethics standards when they expose the issues related to juvenile problems. The main method used is content - analysis method.

Generally, it is very rare to see positive materials regarding the children's problems. The coverage of these issues doesn't seem profitable and they are pushed in the foreground just only when they regard to violence and killings. This is confirmed in this study.

It should be mentioned that compared with the studies conducted in recent years (Osepashvili 2008; Koridze 2008; Danelia 2011), the frequency regarding coverage of children's right and violence in Georgian printing media has significantly reduced. I wonder whether the ethics standards violated during coverage of the mentioned topic will be improved or not?

2.MAIN FINDINGS

The main mistake that Georgian journalists often make was publicity of the victim children's identities and place of their residences. The results of these studies showed that the basic violation is victims' identification problem. It is true that they have recently tried not to mention the victim children's names

but they only name school numbers, addresses, neighbours or family members as the source of information which actually make it possible to identify the child.

A parallel with the foreign media is too far interesting. As the study carried out by international organization "Media Wise" in 2003 witnesses totally 23 articles regarding the children's topic published in 2003 in British press among which only 2 articles were positive. The rest of the articles grossly violated children's rights (Children's Reporting, 2008. p. 35).

One of the most serious violations regarding the children's rights is sexual violence against them. Exact statistics are not available; however, if we judge in accordance to the frequency of coverage of the topic in Georgian media it seems that similar facts have been significantly increased.

The results of this study evidence that the Georgian press pays much attention to this topic, almost all of the publications are placed on the first page.

Coverage the issue regarding children's right and sexual violence makes knowledge of relevant ethical-legal issues imperative for the journalists working on these issues in order to minimize the damage that can be inflicted even more severe psychological stress in injured children and not harm them.

The problem is global and concerns not only the Georgian journalists. Consequently, the trainings are held from time to time in different parts of the world for the people working in various media organizations.

"The journalists should pay more attention to ethical problems, and more and more time and attention should direct to such issues and analysis as coverage of children's rights," writes Director of British ethics organization "Media Wise" - Mike Jempson. He reviews the following legal and ethical issues in the context of children's rights and sexual violence which are urgent to be considered by the journalists working on this project:

- *Identification;*
- *permit on taking photograph or tape record;*
- *personal life;*
- *"Public interest" determination;*
- *confidentiality and protection of sources;*
- *latent investigation methods;*
- *mass media relations with law enforcement agencies, accessible official sources;*
- *the use of official and unofficial sources including the Internet "* (Children's Reporting, 2008. p. 57).

How correct is coverage of mentioned topic in Georgian media? The fundamental mistake that Georgian journalists make is publicity of the victim children's identities and place of their residences. In this way, the victim can be identified as a serious violation of children's rights.

Television news and sensational articles published regarding the above topic in fact attract readers and viewers with loudly highlighted headlines or intriguing leads, but derogate from children's dignity and harshly violate their rights.

Regarding these problems there are number of cases in Georgian media that can be mentioned. For example, how published one of the popular channels the incident which took place in one of the villages in Samegrelo district – where the 14-year-old boy was raped by violator guys where the victim's identity

and place of residence and interviews with relatives of the victims and even with himself was published and, moreover, the latter was seen even in report; as an Ombudsman Sozar Subari, who held this position for that time, recalls this incident in an interview with the newspaper "Resonance": "As we were taking the child for expertise one of his relatives hid him under his jacket but the cameramen tried to record the child's face under the jacket" ("Resonance", July 21, 2007).

We should remember the two most high-profile and scandalous facts of the 2012 Autumn topics on children's rights and violence which were released in Georgian media.

Fact N1. On September 19, torture and rape of minors in prison was released by the 9th Channel. Depending on the severity of the topic, a number of ethical standards were required. It is true that the identity of the child was not announced and even his face was covered, but his voice was well heard, which family members or relatives could recognize easily. Also, the violator's face who beat a teenager was not covered. It was easy to identify him which could put his innocent family members at risk.

Of course, it should be criticise what the law enforcement did, but journalists are not judges and they can't decide who is guilty and who is not.

Fact N2. The second story, which was also very hard to see was an incident which took place in the village Kolagi in Kakheti region. This is how was a tragic death of 10 month old child reported. The face of dead child was not hidden and the details how the baby was taken out from the pitcher and even cry of their parents was clearly shown. All of this of course is a gross violation of journalistic ethics. This is nothing more than an interfere in personal life. Ethics Charter, Article 10: The journalist must respect the privacy and does not interfere in a person's personal life, if there is no particular public interest (The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, 2010).

Of course, the public interest was great directly regarding the fact but not regarding the parents' mourning and, in any case, the ethical norms in this report on the one hand, and the law which protects privacy, on the other hand was violated.

Such samples, unfortunately, are infrequently found in the Georgian press as well. For example - one paper suggests a journalistic investigation in one school in village in Kakheti region - where a person accused in raping of 6-year-old girl was released on the basis of false notification.

A journalist represents a fairly extensive history and offers interviews with victims of violence, her mother, as well as the suspect's mother. Moreover, the author of this investigation introduces another fact by the same offender, a boy of the same high schools raped the victim's classmate girl in the classroom during a long break with the support of their classmate boy. These disgusting facts are presented in sensational style, but the most serious error which journalist produces is when the latter announces her name during the start of the story. ("Kviris Chronika" "/Weekly Chronicle"/ 2007, No. 23). We deliberately keep the title of the publication anonymous not to circulate this fact and do not prejudice the dignity of child victims of violence.

Every journalist must reflect the facts objectively and impartially without any decoration. Especially when talking about such delicate and sensitive topics, such as child's raping and don't make the victim of violence as an abuser under his/her publication. Let take the article from Georgian print media for illustration with the headline - "35 teenagers are accused of raping the girl in 7th grade." (Newspaper ("Kviris Chronika" "/Weekly Chronicle," 2007, No. 7).

This article tells the story which happened in the basement of one of kindergartens in Vazisubani districts. The publication mentions the named of the victim girl, specified the school, and the interviews with the parents of the boys suspected in sexual violence were involved, so it was easily to determine the girl's identity. The journalist presented a rather strange story, where according to his/her description the girl's parents and the police were joined together and as if they received two thousand dollars from

each of the accused boy's family. Author of the publications, mentioned that this is only version, however, the girl was described as not a victim of violence but as a subject, who took pleasure by herself. I think no comment is needed on the fact as we are dealing with such dignity violation.

As our research shows the publications on this topic can be divided into two groups: adult violence on children and the sexual abuse committed by minors.

How correctly are topics coverage? Reporting underage matters their confidentiality defense is international requirement and supports to avoiding of guilty punishment.

According to the "News Guidelines" of Misuri Journalism School: *"Regardless of the stigma forever attached to the juvenile offender's name and the embarrassment if his or her parents and family, some worry that in some groups a youth's notoriety will encourage other young people to violate the law. Others argue that the prospect of public humiliation will make other juveniles think twice before committing crimes"*. (Brooks., B. Kennedy ., G. 2007. p.505).

In spite of these different point of views, under the international law there are several key guideline instruments referring to children: "Children's Rights Convention", "Minimal Standard Rules of Underage Law Administration of the UN" (Pekin Rules 1985) and "Treatment Rules with Imprisoned Underage of the UN" (1990).

Under Minimal Standard Rules of UN upon implementation of underage justice (so called Pekin Rules), underage person's rights on private life inviolation should be respected in order to avoid damage and "any information as a result of which identification of underage offender was followed must not be principally published" (Article 8).

The international standards forbids publishing the information which gives opportunity for identification of underage offender. In the TV program the face of the offender must be covered by all means and name and surname must not be mentioned

So reporting underage matters, their confidentiality defence is international requirement and promotes to avoiding marking stigma on the guilty.

During the coverage of juvenile events, protection of their confidentiality is an international demand and helps to avoid to bear stigma as an offender. Such is an international approach, but in our society juveniles committed the crimes are not only considered as a victim, but also the presumption of innocence is frequently violated in Georgian media and suspected teenagers are often mentioned as guilty who are not proved as guilty and even their names are published to society.

It is a violation of professional ethics as well as children's right - humiliation of personal life. Journalists might say face a kind of dilemma – offer an audience a scandalous story regarding the adults' crimes or think about their rights. So, what outweighs the public interest whether to know the fact or minors' interest itself.

Generally, journalists are known to operate in accordance to the principle of "Bad news is good news", but they don't seem to think that the information provided by them will negatively influence the youth and the human psychics. Furthermore, information reported in media can make irreparable effect on victims of the crime.

Pursuant to the principles of the International Federation of Journalists, coverage of child-related publications must be made under consideration of their unprotected statement. Media should do their

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best in order not to deviate highest ethical standards and rules while reporting children's issues. In particular, we offer only a few requirements from professional standards related to this problem.

During coverage of children's issues, they should try to protect the accuracy and correctness, to avoid the publication of photographs and information especially in media, which would be detrimental for them. Avoid reporting the problems related to children in sensational and stereotypical nature for their popularity;

Carefully consider the expected results from publication of any material concerning children and minimize the damage factor.

If this is not required by public interest protect a child's identity and did not publish his/her photographs;/ www.unicef.org/media_tools_guidelines.html/

This is general standard which journalists must take into consideration, however, the Georgian media often violates this standard.

As mentioned above, there is some danger during coverage of the problem of sexual abuse of children to violate the presumption of innocence and offer readers or viewers scandal history by using of sensational narrative style.

For example, in one newspaper heading "A terrible story," we see an article under the title "14-year-old child with 23 wounds," which in one of a school incident / "New Version", N 517 / As the subtitle says: "The defendant is a wounded classmate Girl", and apparently this incident happened on the lesbian ground when she and her victim got in love with the same girl.

As far as the topic is strange and declared taboo in Georgian reality the publication is done in a sensational style. Journalist, though, didn't argue that the crime actually occurred on this ground, but he/she reviews exactly this version based on the exclusive interviews with classmates.

It should be noted that we meet too many comments, but there is no comment made by the girl's lawyer. The most serious mistake made by the journalist is a coverage of a suspected girl's identity. (Also, he/she mentions the school, where the crime occurred). We deliberately keep her name and surname anonymous not to circulate this fact and do not prejudice her dignity once again.

A few months later, during the trial, the newspaper returns to the same fact, and offers the publication according to which the girl will be considered not as a criminal but a witness. / "Underage girl is waiting for the verdict ", "New Version ", N 564 .

However, the newspaper did not acknowledge that they violated the presumption of innocence. Just it notes that the girl might be by the court.

We think that the situation is alarming. Indeed, great care is required while reporting of juvenile problems. It is true that in recent years they try to keep victim children's name anonymous, however, it is still possible to identify them by their home address or interview given by their relatives or neighbours.

3.CONCLUSION

Thus, the fundamental error that journalists make is publication the victim children's identities and places of residence. In this way, the victim is identified as it is violation of children's rights. Although, sensational articles or television news published regarding this issues attract the readers and viewers

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with their loud headlines and intriguing leads, but violates the children's rights and dignity. So, it might harm and inflict psychological trauma on them.

So violation of the presumption of innocence and confidentiality of the suspected teenager as well as the victim children is one of the serious violations of children's rights.

However, we would like to emphasize one thing that the aim of the research was not a critic of any particular newspaper or TV channel, but exhibition of general trend, which is typical for contemporary Georgian journalists. In our opinion solution to this problem is protection of professional standards.

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