

Children in the Picture

Media Ethics and the Reporting of Child Labour

Prepared by Mike Jempson

Background Paper for the
International Conference on Child Labour
Oslo, 27-30 October 1997

International Federation of Journalists
Media For Democracy Programme

Contents

Introduction

1. Media, Children and International Law
2. The Double-edged Sword of Media Coverage
3. Setting Media Standards
4. Replacing Myths with Empowerment
5. The Challenge of Self-Regulation
6. Involving Children in the Media
7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Children aren't considered "hot topics" for the media, not unless children figure in a scandalous or heart-rending story or in some shocking data or statistics.

This conclusion by media and child experts in the United States holds as true today as ever. If child exploitation has figured prominently in the mainstream media in recent years, it has invariably been in the context of horrifying stories that present children as helpless victims.

American researchers have found that although children under 10 made up almost 20% of the US population, they represented only one in every 60 characters on prime time TV. Children's voices are not heard - especially not by the rest of the community. But then *the world of television is not like the real world. Its demography reflects its purposes: to produce audiences for advertisers. Looking at it through the prism of age reveals a population curve that, unlike the real world, but much like the curve of consumer spending, bulges in the middle years of life. That makes children and the elderly relatively neglected.*

This analysis of the impact of the free-market is one aspect of prevailing currents of control of media and information sources. Another is the tendency of some governments and state authorities to manipulate information, usually through tight state controls of broadcasting media, to meet political imperatives which often do not reflect the considered needs and rights of abused sections of the population.

It is in this context that media coverage of child labour, like the other aspects of children's lives, takes place. The media industry is either a commercial undertaking which exists to produce profit - never more so than today with the growth in media outlets, achieved through new technology, bringing ruthless competition for limited markets - or it may be subject to political and state controls. In either case, journalists and media workers struggle to maintain a professional centre of gravity. In reality, it is futile for them to ignore the economic and political conditions in which they work.

Yet the media are, unarguably, a major influence on cultural development throughout the world; with a responsibility, many believe, particularly in sectors like public broadcasting, to inform and to educate. The challenge facing media professionals, whether they own newspapers or broadcast media or whether they are employed to gather, edit and disseminate information, is to define rules and regulations by which they work and to articulate principles of performance which are transparent and can be tested in a public manner.

This paper tries to address the problems associated with media coverage of the exploitation. It demonstrates that the topic requires serious examination of the way the media works, of how existing principles of accountability apply, and how the media must be freed from reins of political and economic control which limit professionalism and undermine ethical standards.

The media's role in the exposure and eradication of child labour is complex. On the one hand, they tell the stories of child exploitation, through news reports, photographs, documentaries, and drama. On the other, they can themselves put children at further risk, for instance by identifying them or encouraging them to expose those who exploit them. Child witnesses may make compelling television, for instance - not least because of their self-evident vulnerability - but the media cannot be there to protect them when retribution occurs.

There are no easy answers to these complex and difficult issues, nor to ethical dilemmas. But there are standards to be set and guidelines which the media can adopt themselves in addressing the need for a public information policy which provides people with extensive, reliable and ethical reportage about the way children are treated in society. Some suggestions are included in this paper and in its recommendations.

Finally, although there is much that can be improved in media performance, the conclusions are intended to make the media more accountable, and journalists more responsive to systems of complaint and public scrutiny. They are also intended to encourage debate within the media about the portrayal of children and their exploitation. This is an issue which defines the good health of a just and decent society and is, therefore, a matter of profound professional concern for all who work in the media.

1. Media, Children and International Law

The international legislative and regulatory framework relevant to the role of the media and children's rights offers some important pointers for journalists, and the media in general. For example:

Article 11 (1) of the **International Labour Organisation Convention No. 29** concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (1930) indicates that *'only adult able-bodied males who are of an apparent age of not less than 18 and not more than 45 years may be called upon for forced or compulsory labour'*.

Article 1 of **ILO Convention 138** concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973) commits member organisations to pursue policies *'designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons'*.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) enshrines children's right to freedom of expression (Article 13); to protection of privacy and against attacks on his/her *honour and reputation* (Article 16); and also calls on the mass media *to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child* (Article 17). Articles 34 and 36 commit governments to protecting children from all forms of exploitation, including pornography.

The European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (1996) also emphasises children's right to express their own views in decisions affecting them, and calls on national bodies to provide information on children's rights to the media.

The Council of Europe Recommendation 1286 on a European Strategy for Children (1996) introduces the call for a change in the way children are viewed in society. The media should *promote children's right to a healthy and balanced development*, and all professionals who come into contact with children should have special training on children's rights (Article 8).

The publicising of children's rights is a first step to increase public awareness and promote change in the traditional view of the child, declared the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. It highlighted the negative effects of the media on children, and wanted to see more controls over new information and communications technologies.

The Council of Europe's **Recommendation No.R (91)11, concerning Sexual Exploitation, Pornography and Prostitution of, and trafficking in, Children and Young Adults** highlights the media's role in reporting this issue by inviting them *to contribute to a general awareness of the subject and to adopt appropriate rules of conduct*.

The Council of Europe **Recommendation No.R (85)11 on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure** draws attention to the interests of the victim, and the need to protect him/her *from any publicity which will unduly affect his (sic) private life or dignity*.

Meanwhile the International Labour Organisation is in the process of preparing a new International Convention dealing with the most exploitative forms of child labour. This Convention is expected to be promulgated in 1999.

2. The Double-edged Sword of Media Exposure

The media can play a vital role in raising public awareness of the facts and consequences of the economic exploitation of children and its elimination. But the issue is complex; media coverage can shine the spotlight on those individuals and companies or governments responsible, but all too often the innocent victims are also caught in the glare of publicity.

This problem was highlighted in respect of child sexual abuse in the report of the Council of Europe's Committee on Crime Problems, in which the experts emphasised

the responsibility of the media and their potential contribution to any policy aimed at preventing the sexual exploitation of children and young adults. The term media denotes here any means of expression transmitting a message for individuals or groups. In its broad sense therefore, the term covers means used for conveying information, such as the printed press, books, radio, television, videograms and advertisements; it also includes the "producers" who use such media (publishing firms, radio and television companies and advertising agencies etc).

The Committee of experts warned:

Often the mass media function as a two-edged knife in this area of concern. The unravelling of sensational sex and crime cases involving children and young adults tends to overemphasise the issue and to blur the picture. Sometimes, though, it is the media which help to uncover cases of sexual exploitation and to raise awareness of the problem... their co-operation and their orientation towards safeguarding the rights and the dignity of children and young adults is extremely important.

Eva Aurland, Youth Coordinator of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which has launched a major campaign against child labour, has condemned the use of sensationalised pictures of child victims.

It cannot be denied that the media play a crucial role in bringing the horrors of child exploitation into the public arena, and can be extremely influential. But there can be dangers in generating 'compassion fatigue' if coverage of child labour is focused solely on the plight of the victim without providing careful analysis of, for instance, the economic and social circumstances which have given rise to their plight.

Media researcher Nancy Signorielli sees two sides to sensationalism:

*Although child advocates may argue that sensational coverage distorts and exploits a serious problem - perhaps doing more harm than good - sensationalism solves several **editorial** problems; that is, it can be the response of reporters and editors trying to fulfil the responsibility to cover serious social issues, while continuing to turn a profit. Sensationalism permits an important but unpleasant topic to be covered in such a way that it still captures the readers' attention - and sells magazines.*

Eva Aurland would like to see the media place more emphasis on the role of the police, politicians, and other authorities in protecting the children, rather than the children themselves. Her colleague at the ICFTU Elsa Ramos agrees, urging more analysis of the social causes: "Media should not be so shy about putting the blame on the individuals responsible for the exploitation, and the governments who condone it", she says.

But media organisations must invest more time and effort into investigating such stories, if they want to avoid falling foul of defamation laws. It is easier to interview the children, who are hardly likely to sue. In a time of downsizing and falling editorial expenditure on training and investigative journalism generally, the outlook for more in-depth media coverage is bleak.

To examine how this can change requires a look at the professional freedoms which journalists require to work effectively. A summary of the principles or guidelines journalists and programme-

makers follows, with comments on the pressures - legal, financial, or cultural - which are standing in the way.

3. Setting Media Standards

The work of journalists, broadcasters, and media organisations is regulated at four different levels:

- i. **Codes of Conduct:** Most journalists usually have their own professional code of ethics, formulated by trade unions or professional associations. Usually a form of self-regulation;
- ii. **Guidelines:** Media organisations themselves, especially in the public service broadcasting sector, may draw up guidelines for professional conduct. Usually a form of self-regulation;
- iii. **Structures for Regulation:** certain regulatory bodies, such as press councils, may be established each with different powers and responsibilities and which may, or may not, have the force of law to support them;
- iv. **Legislation:** the law may be used to underpin notions of professional journalism and the systems set out above. The law may also support structures for licensing journalists and regulations providing penalties for breach of ethical conduct.

Legislation circumscribing media coverage of children concentrates on the withholding of information identifying children in court cases, in care, or as victims; laws to protect children from moral corruption; laws restricting pornography; and general laws on freedom of expression. Codes of professional conduct tend to reflect this concern to protect the most vulnerable children.

It must be said that although journalists are conscious of a values-related system in which news and information is reported, many of them are ignorant of the form and exact content of the codes of conduct to which they work.

There are no clearly established international standards, although the **IFJ's International Code of Principles on the Conduct of Journalism**, agreed in 1954 and now under review, contains the key elements of a journalist's ethical responsibility.

Any code will reflect standards of journalism according to understood values within society. It will also deal with questions of enforcement and disclosure, often accepting that openness enhances accountability, credibility and, ultimately, freedom.

These codes are a helpful starting point when attempting to resolving the ethical dilemmas which will arise in particular cases of reporting. There are four closely-allied ethical dilemmas surrounding professional conduct and investigation of child labour:

- Confidentiality of sources;
- Undercover journalism and use of subterfuge to obtain information;
- Co-operating with, and making information available to law enforcement agencies; and intervening in events under observation;
- Identification of individuals.

a) Confidentiality of Sources

The right to safeguard the anonymity of sources of information is crucial to the journalist's ability to investigate. In Sweden and other Nordic countries, this right is enshrined in law. An Act passed in 1993 in France laid down that: *Any journalist who appears as a witness concerning information gathered by him in the course of his journalistic activity is free not to disclose its source.*

The law also controls searches of media premises, which must not obstruct journalists in their work. However, in most countries journalists have to fight to defend this right, often risking fines or imprisonment in the process. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in its Journalistic Standards and Practices, for instance, upholds the principle of freedom of information and considers the protection of a journalist's sources to be an important element of this principle, but it reminds journalists that 'protection of sources is not a legal right'. CBC says it will not advise employees to defy a court order, but will provide legal counsel.

Lars Bruun, in his review of ethical codes, found that 42 journalists' organisations around the world made mention of professional secrecy. For instance the Nigerian Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct reads: *It is against the ethics of the profession to divulge information received in confidence, no matter what the consequences.*

This principle was given backing in law in 1981, when the High Court of Lagos State ruled that the Senate of the National Assembly had exceeded its authority in summoning a journalist to disclose the confidential sources of an article. Often, the court's decision as to whether a journalist may legally withhold the identity of sources depends on the circumstances surrounding the case. In Japan the Sapporo District Court interpreted the Code of Civil Procedure as allowing journalists to treat sources as 'an occupational secret', unless the information was required to ensure a fair trial.

Journalists recognise that betraying sources not only inhibits their own ability to investigate; it also makes it more difficult for every journalist to work, and may even put their lives at risk, as well as the safety of the informants.

The exploitation of children is such a sensitive issue that many abuses would never be revealed unless the people who provide the information - children, parents and many others - could be confident that their anonymity would be preserved. Strengthening the journalist's rights in this area should be an element in any strategy aimed at creating the best professional conditions in which to cover issues related to child labour.

b) Undercover Journalism

Sometimes genuine conflicts arise between the values expressed in codes of professional and ethical decision-making is required: it takes training, time and effort to become good at it.

The classic conflict of values comes when a journalist believes it is necessary to abandon the rule of truth-telling, by telling lies or using subterfuge in order to obtain or confirm information, especially about illegal activities.

In her review of 28 codes of ethics in 26 European Countries, Tiina Laitila found that 86% made reference to the use of fair means in information collection. However, the definition of 'fair' is open to debate. Clause 5 of the Code of Conduct of the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland) states:

A journalist shall obtain information, photographs and illustrations only by straight-forward means. The use of other means can be justified only by over-riding considerations of the public interest.

Deciding when the public interest becomes 'over-riding', and what 'other means' are permissible, is left up to the conscience of the journalist, or often to the employer. This clause affirms that journalists are *entitled to exercise a personal conscientious objection to the use of such means.*

The conditions in which "other means" apply need to be carefully monitored. It must be borne in mind that the pressure of commercial competition, and the consequent imperative to be first with sensational news, often contributes to a climate in which subterfuge and 'cheque-book' journalism become standard practice, not for reasons of public interest but primarily to improve circulation and commercial advantage.

'TV producers want to illustrate issues with particular human stories in order to exploit the special qualities of the medium. But... TV literally trades on the expectations of its potential audiences. This is the recipe for... 'Tabloid TV'. If a programme can attract huge ratings it is regarded as successful; the techniques employed to win those audiences becomes a secondary issue. When the end justifies the means, ethics go out the window.'

The challenge facing journalists and those who support high standards of journalism is to create the conditions for sound professional judgement. Sometimes decisions may coincide with commercial advantage, often they will not.

Most ethical guides would acknowledge that it may be ethical to lie, but any journalist who faces such a dilemma must be convinced of the relevance and weight of the public interest, conscious of the harm it might do to credibility, and willing as soon as possible to face a "publicity test" - public scrutiny of the circumstances. Journalists investigating child labour, should consider carefully whether it is justifiable to lie to, or deceive, either the exploiters, or the victims, in order to uncover the facts.

In her analysis of honesty in investigative journalism, Jennifer Jackson calls for an 'emotional allegiance to truthfulness: a hatred of lies.

Yet our allegiance to truthfulness needs also to be in part rational; it needs to be reflective, judicious. While it will not normally even occur to people of honest disposition that the end they seek might justify telling a lie, such people can recognise that in quite exceptional circumstances, the end they have in view does justify their lying. They will, of course, reach such a decision reluctantly and with caution...

Journalists can apply the 'publicity test' in advance of an investigation by assessing whether the public would regard the deception as justified. But they should consider whether there are alternative routes to the story which do not involve lying.

Jackson concludes:

It may be suggested that investigative journalists who are prepared to lie to get their stories (and the editors who print their stories) are hypocrites, lying in the name of truth. Yet... lying in order to detect and expose lies is not necessarily hypocritical; sometimes it may be morally necessary or permissible for a journalist to lie, and then the journalist's lie will (when revealed) appear justified even to those who are really honest, who genuinely care about truthfulness.

Nevertheless, an assumption that media are *always* licensed to deceive in order to get a story, undermines the moral authority of journalistic ethics.

In the context of the child labour there are important distinctions to be drawn, particularly because it is not just the local employers - and multi-national companies to which many are contracted - who are involved, but the children themselves.

There is always a risk that media professionals in pursuit of a 'good story' or an award-winning documentary may damage, even unintentionally, the dignity and self-esteem of children.

There is an ethical line to be drawn between subterfuge required to uncover the activities of exploiters, and investigation of the children themselves. This may not be easy, given that working 'undercover' generally means total secrecy. But the fact that many children are eager to find someone they can trust and who will listen to them, underlines their vulnerability. Experience of deception will further damage their self-esteem, and their relationship with others.

Journalists and media organisations need to apply the highest possible standards of honesty and openness when dealing with exploited children. In practical terms, this means a greater emphasis on ethical questions in journalists' training, to encourage 'a more finely tuned moral sense'. This should focus on concrete examples of specific dilemmas, including the coverage of child labour. It also requires a constructive and supportive debate within newsrooms about these issues, as well as a greater awareness and sensitivity within the media about public attitudes towards child exploitation.

c) Co-operation With The Authorities

Just as journalists are committed to "truth-telling" they are, as citizens, called upon to respect notions of community. Should journalists work hand-in-hand with the authorities and law enforcement officers in reporting on child exploitation? It is a complicated question, on which little guidance is given by formal ethical codes.

It is important to recall that there is a newspaper tradition behind most ethics codes and sometimes this does not address the problems of broadcasters. Occasionally journalists involved in "live" coverage may, unthinkingly transmit material which causes harm, because the technology robs a television producer of the time for reflection which is vital to sound ethical decision-making. However in the current review of statutory guidelines for broadcasters in the UK, for instance, there has been an attempt to address some of the problems associated with such collaboration.

It is vital that journalists do not become identified in the public mind with security forces, for exactly the same reasons which apply to the protection of sources. But does this mean that journalists who discover evidence of illegal exploitation of children should not pass it on to the authorities?

Convincing arguments can usually be marshalled for and against almost every case. It is not an unusual dilemma and its resolution will depend upon the circumstances, and the conscience of the individual journalist.

Journalists see themselves as neutral observers, but there may be times when the offences they see being committed are so appalling that they must intervene. Again this is a question for individual conscience, bearing in mind all the factors referred to above, but it may be a legitimate role for media to play in certain circumstances.

The British journalist Ed Vulliamy who agreed to take part as a witness in the war crimes trials in the Hague draws a distinction between 'objectivity' - a journalist's duty to report the facts - and 'neutrality':

At a certain point, the perpetration of atrocity crosses a line, and breaches not only international law but the bases of civilisation.

Beyond this point, he argues, 'neutrality' becomes complicity. The same criteria can very well be applied to child exploitation. The International Federation of Journalists - although respecting the rights of conscience of individuals - notes that by taking sides, journalists not only endanger their own safety, they can put their colleagues at risk.

d) Identifying the Victims

If journalists have a duty to the truth in their reporting and to independence in their work they also have a responsibility to minimise harm from their actions, particularly to people who are themselves the victims of injustice and exploitation.

Where children are not specifically protected by law, it is the journalist or editor who must take the decision on whether to identify them. There are some who are even prepared to flout the law for the sake of a 'sexy' or sensational story. This is particularly damaging in countries with strict contempt of court rules, where the media revelation of unauthorised details in advance of a court hearing can lead to the case collapsing. Even when children themselves are not named, details may be given which endanger them.

The issue of identity is at the heart of journalistic endeavour. It is in the nature of journalism, from the first lesson in journalism school onwards, to provide facts, including personal details about whoever is involved in a story. The decision to suppress information has to be carefully considered, but when covering child labour issues journalists should always respect the rights of the victim.

4. Replacing Myths with Empowerment

If the media are to expose child labour without exploiting or victimising the children in their coverage, and confer on children the dignity they rightly deserve, media professionals will need to re-examine old habits.

Peter Almond points out that a collection of myths 'contaminate' the public's, and the media's, perception of children.

The media cling to these myths; they are familiar, convenient, easily adapted to conventional formats of news and entertainment. In short, myth is easier to report than the more subtle and complicated reality.

Such myths can lead journalists to mould exploited children into typecast roles as sinners or victims. Families in developing countries, people living in poverty, or victims of war and disaster, lose their individuality and their humanity. Victims are portrayed as helpless sufferers, unable to act, think, or speak for themselves. Whole countries and communities become categorised under generalised headlines.

In 1995, Dr Magda Michielsens of the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands analysed the portrayal of victims, in the news output of seven TV channels across Europe. She concluded that victims generally are given low status. Victims of violence, disaster, and human rights abuses in developing countries, (she collected examples from Africa), are much less likely to be identified as individuals and offered the chance to speak, than those from Europe. This form of racism reinforces the sense of distance, of 'otherness', experienced by the European or northern viewer.

Gerbner also discovered that a high proportion of children on TV appeared as victims.

Disproportionate preoccupation with even sympathetically presented or "accidental" victims in an underrepresented population, relative to exhibiting their own share of numbers and exercise of power, diminishes and degrades that group.

Fierce commercial competition is one factor leading the media to exploit victims, suggests Dr Michielsens. Emotive stories and sensationalised events attract audiences and sell news. Cash-conscious media organisations apply greater pressure on news teams for productivity.

Journalists, therefore, sometimes take the ill-considered, easy route to news-gathering, perpetuating - whether consciously or unconsciously - the sorts of myth and stereotype identified by Peter Almond. In this process individuals and groups are not treated with respect and their needs and views are not properly appreciated.

Some media organisations are becoming aware of the danger of dehumanising victims in far-away places. James Boyle says the BBC now has clear rules, which apply even to dead bodies. *"Human beings have the same dignity all over the world"*.

There are a range of approaches being developed, to avoid stereotyping and victimising exploited children while telling their story accurately and vividly.

Roberto Mader felt that all the programmes he saw about children's exploitation in Latin America and other southern countries, while strongly denouncing important human rights abuses, left the impression that nothing could be done.

All you feel at the end of the programme is depressed. Now all my work is about trying to show, not that life in Brazil is wonderful - we have our problems - but I work in areas where I know there are people doing very positive things to change the reality in which they live. That is the most important thing: to show how people are getting empowered."

Mader believes language is another obstacle to the documentary format. Subtitles are expensive, and often unpopular with audiences. Broadcasting organisations tend to avoid them. *"It's an*

excuse not to listen to people at all - you just have a voice-over soundbite. Yet people are amazed when they see ordinary people speaking".

Aart Zeeman traced abused children back to Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Philippines, but avoided identifying the former victims he interviewed. *"I don't think it adds anything to show their faces, unless they are grown up now and choose to tell their story. Children don't understand the impact being on TV can have. I think you have to be very careful to protect the children - the film might be shown in the countries where they are living and could easily get them into trouble".*

Altering the names of people and places is one obvious answer for newspaper journalists. But for the documentary maker, the dilemma between using images which will keep the audience's attention, and not endangering or victimising the children, cannot be easily resolved.

For ***The Care Connection***, a Channal 4 presentation about child prostitution in British cities, programme makers 'invented' different ways of getting round the problem. Cameras were positioned at unusual angles -- above interviewees' heads or by their ears -- or shots were cut away to focus on the movements of their hands, which also registered the emotional impact of their words.

The technique of "pixilating" - blurring a small portion of the screen - was rejected. *"It's always associated with criminals, or somebody who deserves what they get"*, explained researcher Simon Cooper.

Other broadcasters have sought different, less controversial approaches to the topic, such as a dramatisation, followed by a studio debate. Belgian director Gil Verhaert proposed the fictional formula for a six-part series ***on La femme, l'enfant, et la prostitution***, in Africa, Asia and Europe. *"We have a lot of information, but we cannot feature the real people because they are all either afraid of the Mafia, or are involved in court cases"*, he explained. *"Audiences are interested in dramatic events. But it does not have to be sensational. If you keep to the truth, it's more than dramatic enough."*

But when Peter Kosminsky made ***No Child of Mine***, a drama-documentary based on one woman's recollection of childhood abuse, it was the casting of a young teenage girl as the central character that roused public controversy about child exploitation in Britain.

It is especially important that media workers should not perpetuate myths or further stigmatise the victims of exploitation, because their products may be employed by local NGOs or used by campaigners as educational materials.

5. The Challenge of Self-Regulation

Journalists tend to be wary of regulators. They have much evidence to support the view that intervention in the affairs of journalism inevitably leads to forms of censorship.

However, it is a legitimate question whether media self-regulation is a sufficient answer to public concern over standards of journalism in an age when the changing media landscape, and particularly the growth of global media enterprises appears, in theory at least, to put media beyond the range of national public accountability.

Effective self-regulation, by which the errors of media professionals are dealt with by their peers, may not be so convincing when media organisations appear to use professional codes to support their particular interests, which in a commercial system of mass communication by no means necessarily coincide with those of journalism or the public interest.

There has been in the past criticism that self-regulation has been used to provide what might be called a "social alibi" for the mass media industry, that is to prevent society from taking more definite (legal) measures.

This argument goes to the heart of the uncomfortable balance of interests which prevails in today's media - that ethical standards are being sacrificed in defence of commercial interests. One of the principle problems lies in the implementation and enforcement of rules. Very often even regulatory bodies lack the power to enforce sanctions which bite. In Canada in 1990, the CBC's Equity Task Force found that, with regard to equitable employment and portrayal, *self-regulation and incentive measures have failed to accomplish desired and anticipated results.*

Some professional codes aspire to the very highest moral standards, as in Chile, where *journalism and journalists must be in the service of truth, social justice, human rights and the ideals of the improvement of society and of peace among peoples.*

And there is no doubt that many individuals, like those quoted above, are committed to exposing and condemning sexual exploitation. Sadly, many more choose to reflect the commercial or political interests of advertisers, proprietors, or political parties.

This control seldom takes the form of direct intervention or censorship, but far more often of self-censorship by the media professionals themselves - who may not even be aware that they are exercising it.

In an Indiana University School of Journalism study in the 1980s, 88% of the journalists questioned said they acquired their ethical values from the newsroom itself. Aidan White identifies several extra factors which encourage "*the tendency towards self-censorship and self-denial of social responsibility*" among media professionals, including:

the growth of new technologies, which threaten to overwhelm existing regulatory structures, or the unaccountable nature of transnational media corporations which evade terrestrial control of media standards, or the increasingly insecure working environment in which journalists work.

Journalists' unions who have tried to enforce their own ethical standards through disciplinary proceedings, have found themselves in the tricky if not impossible position of attacking individual workers they exist to support.

Despite all this, codes and guidelines still have a crucial role to play, in raising awareness and providing a model of good practice. In Spain, in 1993, for example, regional and national broadcasting organisations joined with the national and regional Education Ministries in agreeing ***Self-regulation Principles for Television Channels concerning the specific content of their programmes with regard to protecting children and young people.***

The document recognises *'the significant role which television plays in Spanish society and its influence on society, particularly children and young people'*.

Specific guidelines on reporting child labour could be drawn up by professional associations to accompany their general ethical codes, along the lines of guidelines for reporting AIDS published by the NUJ (UK and Ireland).

In the UK, following a national multi-disciplinary Forum on Child Exploitation and the Media, the media ethics body PressWise and the charity Action on Child Exploitation have successfully lobbied statutory regulators for broadcasting to take into account the special concerns of children when revising their Guidelines and Codes. However there has been resistance from the print sector which dislikes making concessions to pressure groups and is governed by a voluntary code.

In the final analysis, the support of media employers and regulators is crucial to improving newsroom values as highlighted by Cheryl Lai:

Much of the biased or sensationalist coverage, especially headlines, is created by editors, and it will be difficult to gain improvements given Taiwan's patriarchal society unless high-level media editors and managers implement such a policy from the top down.

Attitudes to censorship and freedom of expression vary widely from country to country and culture to culture. In all countries, broadcasting tends to be more highly regulated than newspapers and magazines. The importance of the right to freedom of expression cannot be under-estimated, yet it is not without boundaries. Both **the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and **the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** draw attention to the responsibilities accompanying this right, including 'respect for the rights or reputations of others'.

The issue of rights to freedom of expression cannot be ignored, but should be turned around to focus first on the rights of the child to freedom from fear and exploitation.

6. Involving Children in the Media

There is increasing alarm in a number of countries that the way children are portrayed by the media today may increase the risks they face particularly in the area of commercial sexual exploitation. Controversy continues internationally about how far children's behaviour is influenced by what they see on television - particularly with regard to violence.

This question is particularly relevant to the fashion industry. The use of child models by the British designer Vivienne Westwood to demonstrate the supposedly innate 'sexiness' of her 1997 collection raised alarms about the wider implications of such casual exploitation of children.

The solution may be simple to see, but not so easy to achieve. That is, to give a voice in the media to children themselves, to *listen* to their views and aspirations. And to educate them to be knowledgeable and critical about how the media work.

International conventions and recommendations already emphasise the right of children to have a say in decisions affecting them, and call for a change in the way children are regarded.

Why should children not also have more say in the media? Dr Ulla Björnberg proposes documentary programmes on young people's lives in different countries, with the aim of giving children aged from 7 to 18 - including poor and migrant children - an opportunity to air their opinions.

Children are rarely regarded as reliable sources because they are not trusted to distinguish accurately between fact and fiction -- a belief that also applied to children giving evidence in court until recently. New means of giving children access to the media as sources should be investigated.

Given the size of the constituency and its importance for the future, should not news media have specialist 'children's correspondents', with a brief covering all aspects of children's lives, and specific training to enable journalists to express the child's point of view? Maybe this would do most to 'promote change in the traditional view of the child'.

In its report on implementation of the Council of Europe Recommendation No.R (91)11, the British government suggests the sort of training that would be appropriate for 'all professionals who come into contact with children', including:

self-awareness, children's sexual terminology, child growth and development, child abuse, risk factors, the law, interviewing techniques, communication with children, and video recording.

Governments or NGOs might consider making good practice videos for editors and journalists. Another measure to assist journalists in covering children's issues seriously and accurately would be for NGOs in each country to compile a directory of reliable experts on different topics, which could be available on every news desk.

But children, from primary school upwards, also need media literacy training, to help them understand and decode the messages they receive from both programmes and advertising, so as to become critical and well-informed media consumers. In Canada, for instance, the organisation Mediawatch and the Federation of Women's Teachers' Associations have developed a curriculum for schools on stereotypes and gender issues.

Media education can play a crucial role in counteracting the impact of these messages. Helping children to understand that media construct - as opposed to reflect - reality; that they communicate implicit and explicit values; and that they can influence the way we feel and think about ourselves and the world, are vitally important lessons.

In France, an initiative aimed at implementing the UN Convention, proposes 'associating adults and children to analyse and explain the programmes on television, "the only medium generally accessible to children of all socio-cultural backgrounds".'

The ultimate objective is best summarised by George Gerbner again, who calls for media professionals to 'break the constraints that now bind them to markets that use but have little use for children':

The need is for action towards creating a culture, and television system, that can afford to address itself to the nation's future, its children... Citizens, writers, actors and producers must work towards a system of popular storytelling whose culture-power cannot devalue and hurt children any more.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The International Federation of Journalists has called for action to ***encourage media professionals to develop strategies which strengthen the role of media in providing information of the highest quality, reliability and ethical standards concerning all aspects of the child labour.***

The following recommendations are designed to strengthen the key role of journalists in revealing instances of abuse, and also in monitoring the performance of national and international bodies, both in honouring their commitments and working to end the use of child labour.

There are some simple but practical points to bear in mind here. The media can, without doubt, influence the decision-makers. But to do this effectively, media professionals must choose how and when. For broadcasters, for example:

Time is critical... First, the reporter needs enough air time to present the subject properly. Second, the story must be broadcast at a time when the people who ought to see it will see it. Finally, a sense of social timing is essential. Just as some entertainment shows will sell one year and not the next, so too with news stories; audiences are not static in their responsiveness to social issues.

Matters relating to children have traditionally featured more often in women's magazines and programmes. If children's exploitation is to be given the priority it demands, it must be highlighted in all media, particularly those that reach opinion formers and people taking decisions. This is an issue that touches on the economy, society, education, development, and the environment and it is one occasion when editors must, as American journalist John Mack Carter admits, '*strive to present material that not only captures the imagination but also prompts action*'.

Recommendations for further action

1. Training for journalists

- a) Ethical questions should have a higher profile in journalists' training, particularly with regard to standards of conduct in reporting issues like children's rights, child labour and the commercial exploitation of children.

2. Codes of Conduct and Self Regulation

- a) Codes of conduct and guidelines may not always appear to be effective, they can be useful weapons in the hands of journalists and campaigners willing to take up issues about children's rights with editors, publishers and broadcasters.
- b) Specific guidelines on reporting children's rights and child labour could be drawn up by professional associations to accompany their general ethical codes.
- c) Further study on this issue is required by media professionals in the regions.

3. Media organisations and Media Professionals

- a) Journalists and programme-makers have a duty to increase public awareness of the commercial exploitation of children. However, reporting needs to be carried out with enormous care.
- b) Journalists and programme-makers should adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct when confronted with dilemmas such as professional secrecy, the use of subterfuge, and the identification of victims, in the course of their duties.
- c) They should avoid, or challenge, the myths and stereotypes which surround children, and particularly children from developing countries.
- d) Media professionals should recognise that freedom of expression must go hand in hand with other fundamental human rights, including freedom from exploitation and intimidation. They should give careful consideration to the facts when weighing up the relative merits of the different claims, and not allow themselves to be swayed by commercial or political considerations.

- e) Journalists should never publish details which help exploiters to find their victims, or which undermine the safety of child victims. Journalists should take particular care not to reveal information which could lead to the collapse of criminal proceedings against exploiters.
- f) Journalists and programme-makers should look for innovative ways to respect the dignity of child victims, and avoid identifying them, while at the same time telling their stories in a compelling and newsworthy way. For instance, by consulting them on the content or showing ways in which they can escape from their situation. They should try to focus attention not solely on the victims of commercial exploitation, but on the employers, companies and officials connected with it.
- g) It is important that coverage of child labour is placed in an appropriate context. It does not take place in a vacuum and it is vital that journalists ensure that they are aware of the social, economic and political circumstances in which it occurs, and be prepared to subject justifications to careful analysis and challenge.

4. The Need for Newsroom Debate

- a) A constructive and supportive debate should be encouraged between media professionals, about how this issue should be investigated and reported.
- b) Media organisations should consider appointing specialist 'children's correspondents', with responsibility for covering all aspects of children's lives. Specific training to help journalists to express children's points of view. This might include: child growth and development, child abuse, risk factors, the law, interviewing techniques, communication with children, etc.
- c) New means of giving children access to the media, as 'sources' or commentators, should be investigated. Children should know that information or opinions offered in confidence will be protected as such.

5. The Role of Management

- a) Media editors and managers should implement - from the top down - a policy which makes clear their opposition to sensationalist coverage of child labour issues, and their support for high ethical standards among journalists and programme-makers. This could be done through the elaboration, in consultation with media professionals, of ethical guidelines on this and other issues, which should be seriously implemented and monitored.

6. Governments and NGOs

- a) Governments or NGOs should support efforts by media organisations and journalists' associations to raise awareness. In this regard, good practice videos for editors and journalists would be useful.
- b) In particular, support should be given to national women's media associations, such as those existing in many African countries, which are taking up the issue of media coverage of violence and violations of the rights of children.
- c) National NGOs should consider compiling a directory of reliable experts on child labour and children's rights, to be distributed to media. Such information could also be accessible on computer data banks.

7. Children and the Community

- a) Children, from primary school upwards, should receive media literacy training, to help them understand and decode the messages from both programmes and advertising, so as to become critical and well-informed media consumers.
- b) The public should recognise and use their power, as audiences and consumers, to affect media policy, for instance through lobbying and consumer boycotts.

Brussels, 17 October 1997