VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD IS NEWS!
Engaging Media on Reporting from a Child Rights and Gender Equality Perspective

A Research Brief

Violence against children (VAC) is an issue that affects families and societies across the world and India is no exception. Children (0-18 years age group) experience violence in many interconnected ways that spill across multiple settings throughout childhood. Violence in childhood (VIC) is also interlinked with gender-based violence (GBV) as it is influenced by social factors that shape norms around masculinities and femininities, power relations between women and men, and structural factors that reinforce these dynamics. Violence experienced by children is gendered and intertwined with violence against women (VAW). In order to break this cycle of violence, it is important to **address GBV by influencing thought processes, attitudes and behaviors by starting young.**[1]

Data on VIC is limited and is located within the discourse of crime reporting. Existing evidence available is only from sources such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), that too, on some instances of VAC such as kidnapping and abduction, murder and cases of sexual violence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2005.

Given the paucity of 'official' records on VIC, media reports often become the only source of information for documenting its prevalence. The media, therefore, plays an important role in shaping the discourse on VIC. However, there is very little research that reviews the extent and nature of coverage on VIC.

The **Evidence Building and Media Advocacy on Violence in Childhood** study, funded by **the Oak Foundation** and the **International Development Research Centre**, is an attempt at bridging this research gap through an analysis of media coverage on VIC. It also aims at strengthening reporting on VIC from a child rights and gender equality perspective through evidence-based recommendations.

The study is part of a larger initiative to review existing policies and programs to address VIC in two states of India –

> At least three out of every four of the world's children – 1.7 billion – had experienced some form of inter-personal violence, cruelty or abuse in their daily lives in a previous year, regardless of whether they lived in rich countries or poor, in the global North or the global South.
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> (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017)
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> As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), in 2016, there were 1,06,958 reported cases of crimes against children in India.
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> (Crime in India Statistics, 2016)

Haryana and Jharkhand. The states were strategically chosen to advance the recommendations from the global **Know Violence in Childhood** (KVIC) study as well as to build on the **International Center for Research on Women**'s (ICRW) earlier work on GBV and violence prevention.

This research brief focuses on the **Media Advocacy** component of the initiative that aims at sensitizing as well as engaging news media professionals as stakeholders with respect to VIC.

METHODOLOGY

As part of the **Media Advocacy** component, a scan of the respective state editions of two prominent national newspapers each (in *Hindi* and *English*) from Haryana and Jharkhand was conducted. The selected newspapers were reviewed for reports on issues of and related to VIC. The newspapers – published copies as well as e-paper versions for both states– were screened for a 12-month period from May 2017 to April 2018. The *Hindi* newspaper from Haryana was an exception as the archives for the same were available only for the period of January-June 2018.

For Haryana, 315 *Hindi* and 241 *English* news reports/articles, and for Jharkhand, 380 *Hindi* and 255 *English* news reports/articles were selected and screened further under the VIC framework (see Figure 1), post which 224 *Hindi* and 240 *English* news reports/articles from Haryana, and 289 *Hindi* and 159 *English* news reports/articles from Jharkhand were selected for a detailed analysis.

Figure 1: VIC Framework Utilized for the Media Scan

VAC
Sexual Violence, Physical Violence (includes Murder and Corporal Punishment) and Emotional Violence

Witnessing Violence or Growing Up in an Environment that Exposes One to Violence

Violent Crimes
Kidnapping or Trafficking, Cyber Crime, Suicide and Witch-Hunting[2]

Violation of Child Rights
Neglect and Deprivation in Childhood, Child Marriage, Child Labor, Sex-Selective Abortions and Teenage Pregnancy[3]

Rights of Children in Conflict with Law

As part of the study, efforts were made to create greater awareness and sensitization on VIC among news media professionals and to support as well as promote reporting from a child rights and gender equality perspective through state-level consultations with editors and media workshops with journalists in both states.

Media Awards were instituted in partnership with the **National Foundation for India** to encourage and support journalists to research, write and publish field-based reports/articles on the issue of VIC using a child rights and gender equality perspective. Eleven journalists– six from Haryana and five from Jharkhand – were selected as fellows to attend an intensive workshop that reflected on current practices of reporting on issues of and related to VIC as well as encouraged a child-centered approach/perspective to coverage.

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[2] As per the **Prevention of Witch Hunting Act, 2016,** 'witch-hunting' includes branding of a woman as a witch, mostly after an *ojha* (village oracle believed to have powers to identify women using witchcraft) confirms that a woman is a witch, the process of prosecution and execution of that woman, often involving mass hysteria and lynching. In a 2014 report, Partners for Law in Development (PLD), stated "witch-hunting is rooted in patriarchy, financial disputes, superstition and other personal and social conflicts." **(Contemporary Practices of Witch Hunting: A Report on Social Trends and the Interface with Law, 2014)**.
[3] Adolescent pregnancy impacts girls' education, emotional and physical health, mobility and employability. UNFPA explicitly connects adolescent pregnancy with the failure to fulfill girls' rights to comprehensive sexuality education and to readily accessible sexual and reproductive health services. **(Motherhood in Childhood, 2013)**.

VAC is defined as 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse' (UNCRC, 1989). VAC can occur in various settings such as home, school, community and over the Internet (UNICEF, 2015). These definitions, however, do not account for the various violations of the rights of children such as neglect, deprivation, child labor, trafficking and child marriage. They also do not acknowledge the overarching environment of violence, wherein children can be exposed to it by way of witnessing violent behavior and actions, nor do they recognize how women's experience of violence can have a lasting impact on children's health and well-being.

The framework of VIC, on the other hand, includes the direct experience of inter-personal violence by children and considers the impact as well as consequences of growing up in an environment where they witness violence in their surroundings. It also includes the phenomena of 'poly-victimization', whereby children could be exposed to more than just one form of violence and in more than one setting, throughout their lifecycle — beginning even before their birth and continuing up to late adolescence. Further, it establishes a link between violence experienced by children and by women as VAC often co-occurs with VAW through abuse often inflicted on mothers, siblings and women in their surroundings.

KVIC is arguably one of the first global initiatives that marks a shift from the current discourse of VAC and makes an effort with its first report (published in 2017) to the develop a holistic perspective on VIC.

STUDY FINDINGS

Preliminary findings of the media scan and analysis were shared with news media professionals at state-level media consultations and workshops in order to ensure the engagement of the media as a stakeholder with respect to VIC as well as to get their insights to contextualize the findings.

Concerns around unavailability of reliable data; difficulty in quick access of information while developing and writing reports/articles; and absence of platforms and avenues for synergies between media and the civil society resonated among media persons from both the states.
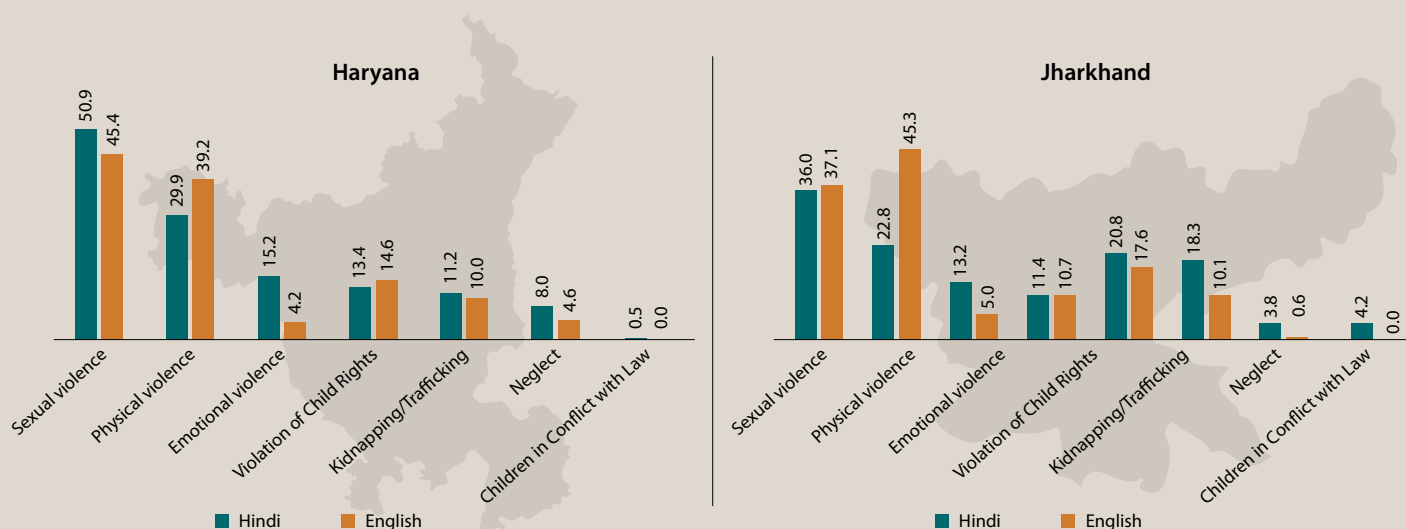
The views expressed by news media professionals during the state level media consultations and workshops have been used to inform the analysis and findings.

Key findings from the media scan and detailed analysis have been highlighted in the following sections.
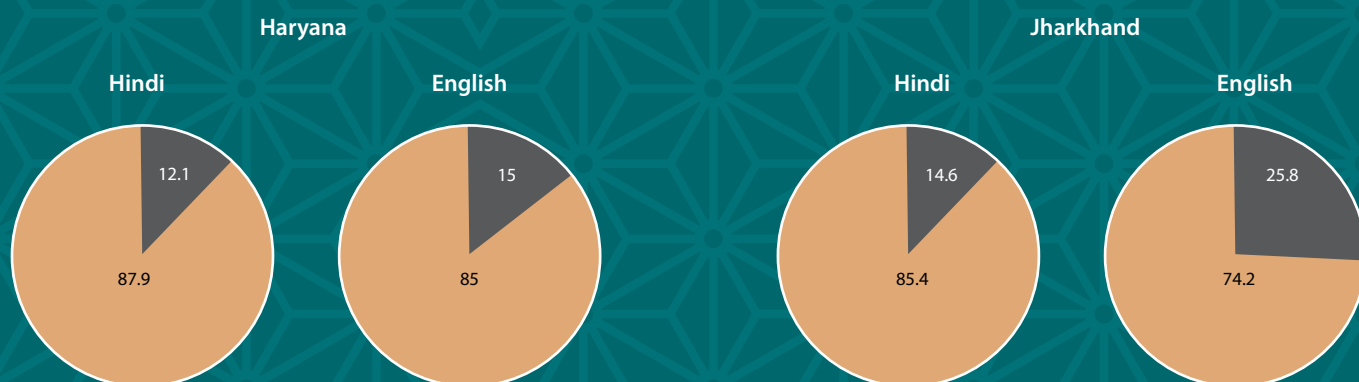
COVERAGE

• The wide media coverage that incidents/ reports of VAC receive cannot be understood as a marker for sensitivity of media. Most of the instances scanned were treated as **'routine crime stories'**, thus contributed very little toward educating or informing readers about issues of VIC. For instance, several articles on sexual assaults against children were covered by papers in a few lines and there were no follow-up articles/reports on the same. This illustrates how **reports on VIC are not prioritized and violence as an issue is normalized through routine coverage.**

• Lack of social context in news reports/articles was found to be a common feature across *Hindi* and *English* newspapers in both the states. **Over 80 percent of reports/articles were treated as mere incident-based news and relied heavily on the police or other government sources,** known to provide mostly episodic information. Treating incidents of VAC as one-off or isolated incidents impedes the ability of audiences/public/ readers to relate to the **social context in which the children experience violence.**

Figure 2: Coverage of Different Forms of VIC

Haryana

Form	Hindi	English
Sexual violence	50.9	45.4
Physical violence	29.9	39.2
Emotional violence	15.2	4.2
Violation of Child Rights	13.4	14.6
Kidnapping/Trafficking	11.2	10.0
Neglect	8.0	4.6
Children in Conflict with Law	0.5	0.0

■ Hindi ■ English

Jharkhand

Form	Hindi	English
Sexual violence	36.0	37.1
Physical violence	22.8	45.3
Emotional violence	13.2	5.0
Violation of Child Rights	11.4	10.7
Kidnapping/Trafficking	20.8	17.6
Neglect	18.3	10.1
	3.8	0.6
Children in Conflict with Law	4.2	0.0

■ Hindi ■ English

- Only a **small proportion of the reports were followed up,** most of which pertained to children from influential socio-economic and political backgrounds, from urban areas, incidents of gangrape, murder of students in government-run and/or private schools, and harassment of students by wardens in residential schools. Another category of follow-up reports/articles was one with statements issued by government authorities in response to some notable incidents such as death of students in residential schools or gangrape.

- There were no reports/articles highlighting the **lack of services, infrastructure or monitoring mechanisms on response or prevention of VAC** such as counseling, violence prevention and awareness programs. Few reports that highlighted system-level lapses were reported after a major incident occurred and, that too, specifically within the context of the site where the incident took place. For instance, there were reports/articles on child protection systems post the investigation of child's murder in a private school.

Figure 3: Proportion of Follow-Up Reports/Articles

Haryana

Hindi

12.1

87.9

English

15

85

Jharkhand

Hindi

14.6

85.4

English

25.8

74.2

TRENDS OF VIOLENCE REPORTED

- Media reports largely capture **cases of severe forms of VAC** such as sexual violence and extreme forms of corporal punishment and/or physical violence (murder, attempt to murder, assault, etc.) and incidents of children in conflict with the law. Other forms of violence that children face on a regular basis, such as emotional violence or acts that are relatively 'milder' forms of physical violence faced at home, school and in the community in the name of discipline, were rarely the focus of media reports.

- **Less than 30 percent** of the reports from both states highlighted that a single incident of violence was accompanied by **multiple forms of violence.** For example, an article about a girl who experienced sexual violence also reported about her simultaneous experience of physical violence at the hand of the perpetrator. In Haryana, around 20 percent of the reports analyzed from the *English* newspaper and 33 percent of reports analyzed from the *Hindi*

newspaper highlighted multiple forms of violence. In Jharkhand, 24 percent reports analyzed from the *Hindi* newspaper and 28 percent reports analyzed from the *English* newspaper mentioned multiple forms of violence.

- News reports highlighted that **children experienced violence in various settings** – their homes, child-care institutions, schools and places of work across both rural and urban areas. Girls were more vulnerable in public places or while commuting between home and schools or places of work. There were more reports of girls' experiences of violence within the family in Haryana.

- Coverage on abuse and violence faced by children showed that perpetrators are family members, teachers, caregivers, guardians or other adults responsible for their safety and security. In most cases, the **perpetrators were known to the children experiencing violence.** There were fewer cases where the perpetrators were strangers.

REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN

- In the reports/articles scanned, **children were largely portrayed either as helpless 'victims' of violence or demonized as 'delinquents';** thus, portraying a binary view of children instead of capturing their nuanced experiences of VIC.

- Many reports/articles, particularly those about children's experience of sexual violence, **questioned the credibility of accounts of children in implicit ways.** One of the examples of such practices was a report on a minor girl's complaint to the police asking them to rescue her from a forced marriage arranged by her family. The journalist used a 'reliable source' to comment on the girl's alleged affair with a boy, which implicitly contradicted her complaint, thereby highlighting that **children's experiences are often disbelieved and belittled.**

IMPLICIT 'VICTIM BLAMING' AND USE OF INAPPROPRIATE TERMS

- **Implicit 'victim blaming' is a routine way of treating the incidents/reports related to VAC in the media,** often done through sensational headlines that cast aspersions on the 'character' or behavior of the child experiencing violence.

- Many news reports also used **inappropriate terms to refer to incidents of sexual violence,** particularly in *Hindi*. Terms such as '*dushkarm*' (misdeed) are often used to refer to rape and/or sexual assault. Such practices trivialize the issue of sexual violence and do not link such instances to GBV, which is driven by structural inequities and patriarchal social norms.

Playing truant, Boy found dead near school

Grocery trip ends in rape for minor

Killed by Parents for Daring to Love

बर्थडे मनाने गई जंगल में, हुआ गैंगरेप
(Girl goes to celebrate birthday in a jungle, faces gangrape)

शिक्षक ने किया बच्ची से दुष्कर्म का प्रयास
(Teacher attempts 'misdeed' with girl)

MEDIA'S ROLE IN SHIFTING NORMS AND ADDRESSING VIC: RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

Focus Reporting on VIC, not just VAC: Media reporting on VIC should move beyond just covering it under 'routine crime stories' to highlighting the social context in which it occurs.

Represent Diverse Voices: Given the paucity of 'official' data on VIC, journalists should explore and seek information from other credible sources, such as medical practitioners, legal experts, voices from the community, families, child rights activists, non-governmental/non-profit organizations and survivors,

for bringing in different perspectives, ideas and filling data gaps in reports.

Use Existing Data: Greater and informed use of existing data while covering issues of VIC can help strengthen reporting. It can also build public opinion for demanding attention and accountability from various stakeholders. Sources may include NCRB, micro-studies, and national and state surveys by government and non-government entities. Online and social media platforms could be utilized for sharing latest evidence-based resources from research organizations, not-for-profits, listservs, etc.

WHAT CAN MEDIA HOUSES DO?

Institute Dedicated Efforts for Reporting on VIC: Media houses should allot dedicated slots for opinion pieces on VIC issues. Running campaigns on various aspects of VIC could also be a strategy for highlighting the extent of VIC and making it a priority with respect to coverage. Incentivizing journalists for rights-based and gender-responsive reporting could be another strategy toward increasing coverage and expanding the discourse. This could include placement of VIC reports/articles on prominent pages, providing media fellowship opportunities and making coverage on VIC a dedicated news beat.

Strengthen Platforms for Continuous Engagement with Stakeholders: Collaborative efforts and creating joint platforms with various media groups, child rights organizations and research organizations should be encouraged in order to facilitate the continuous exchange of information and data. This can help improve VIC-related coverage from a rights and gender perspective.

Media Campaign on Awareness Building on Child Sexual Abuse

A month-long campaign called बाल यौन—शोषन अब बस (#StopChildSexualAbuse) was organized by a prominent *Hindi* daily newspaper in Haryana. The initiative highlighted not only experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse but also generated awareness on how in most such instances, the perpetrators were known to the children experiencing abuse/violence. It also challenged the commonly held belief that home, schools and child-care institutions are safe spaces for children. This is an instance of good practice with respect to reporting on VIC.

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This brief is based on the report, *Violence in Childhood is News! Engaging Media on Reporting from a Child Rights and Gender Equality Perspective,* developed under the study.

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