

Child Abuse and Neglect in the Media

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Introduction

Childhood is a period when memories form, emotional, social, and cognitive development happens, and when children become sensitive to their surrounding environments. Their experience later shapes up who they become as adults and influences their well-being career, and life, in general.

Child abuse and neglect are considered some of the leading causes of fatalities and death in the world. Most often, there is no single contributor to child neglect stems from multiple factors such as environment, communities, parents, inadequate policies, and poverty, societies and communities experience higher rates of crime and violence through an increased number of cases related to child abuse and neglect.

The media plays a vital role in reporting on child abuse and neglect and the operation of the child production system. Media coverage helps to raise awareness of this issue of great public interest among victims and parents; it has an important role in prevention and in highlighting new and emerging issues and the media can also hold agencies and policy makers to account when necessary. However any media scrutiny of a situation involving the death or injury of a child should also respect the rights and dignity of the children and families involved.

What is Child Neglect?

Globally speaking, about 2/3rds of reports coming to child productive services constitute and neglect, according to community surveys in 2006. Child neglect has substantial long-term effects on a child’s mental health and physical/cognitive development.

Simply put, child neglect is when a child undergoes abuse related to having their basic needs not met such as a lack of adequate healthcare, the deficit in nutrition and educational needs ,and a lack of personal safety/security.

Some Issues and Questions Around the Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

What’s the reality of the danger children face from abuse and neglect?

Death in childhood is an increasingly rare event and the death of a child from abuse or neglect is very rare. Over the past 40 years, the numbers of children who die from abuse and neglect have decreased significantly as a result of better public awareness and a more robust and responsive child production system. In spite of everyone’s best efforts, it may not be possible to predict, and therefore prevent, every incident that might result in a child’s death. However, professionals have a duty to reflect on whether there may be learning to be gained about the way parents can be supported to care for their children and how professionals work together to keep children safe when families are known to be experiencing difficulties.

When are Children taken into Care?

While some children are admitted to care for a variety of reasons, the vast majority of child production problems are dealt with in the community with children remaining with their families. The children order 1995 requires that children are only taken into care when they are at significant risk of harm and directs professionals to early preventive interventions.

How difficult is it to protect children from harm?

Everyone has a role to play in keeping children safe, including parents, extended family, the wider community and professionals. Every day staff in health, social care, education and criminal justice have to make evidenced-based decisions about risk and put in place measures to protect and manage this risk to children. Careful judgment needs to be exercised in balancing a parent’s right to care for their own child alongside a child’s right to be safe. Official comment provided from health and social care trusts or the DHSSPS. Some media coverage will be short and to the point while other outlets will be able to give more time, space and thought to their articles. It is in the public interest for wider issues of concern related to some individual cases to be highlighted and brought to the fore.

Learning from Practice Experience

The current child production system has evolved over the past four decades as a result of the learning gained from a range of sources including inquiries, research and service improvement processes such as audits and inspections. Professional organisations have contributed much to this learning and subsequent development, resulting in better informed staff and more effective responses to the needs of children and families. Identifying whether aspects of the child production system need refined and developed can take place when tragedies occur.

The Media and Child Abuse

While it is undoubtedly selective with the news, the mass media has had a powerful influence in augmenting children’s rights within civil society, simply by reporting child abuse. Survivors of child abuse become the spokespersons-’the child’s voice’ as victims of adult power (Ryan Report, 2009; Deetman, 2011). Their narratives enable us to assemble an account of the child’s historic experience in care. Inevitably, the presentation of the issues shapes the public response-demanding more effective services for children. But there are also deeper issues involved, notably the use and abuse of adult power over children that tend to be framed in terms of accountability within the public realm. Justice must be done and seen to be done. This is, of course, right and proper. There is, however, a missing link in this nexus, which centres on the role of civil society in framing social and moral discourse of adult-child power relations. The socio-cultural context of the debate is often lost in the public discourse of condemnation and denial.

However, civil society is not monolithic. There are various strands within civil society: conservative, liberal and radical (powell,2013). The conservative strand defends traditional values, organised religion and class interests. It finds its media voice through populist newspapers. These national organs have many local imitators. liberal civil society on the other hand tends to be more progressive, reflecting the liberal views of the middle class intelligentsia, through broadsheet newspapers like The New York Times, The Guardian, etc. These are very much the minority in terms of newspaper sales, but they are highly influential in terms of shaping elite public opinion. On the other hand, the voice of radical civil society tends to be expressed through the fringe media and protest. Television and radio, which have a much larger audience, present news to mass audiences in increasingly tabloid form. However, there are key programmes, such as the British Broadcasting corporation(BBC) Radio 4 Today programme, the BBC Two programme News night, the RTE television programme primetime and channel 4 News, which offer deeper news analysis and discussion of current affairs aimed at the intelligentsia.

Conclusion

The complexity involved in finding child abuse reminds us that it is a socially constructed concept. Child abuse is not stable in its ultimate meaning but influenced by media and popular discourse. The media played a key role in the construction of child abuse as a major social problem during the latter part of the 20th century. From a largely unacknowledged issue (prior to the 1960s) reportage of child abuse has now reached saturation point (Kitzinger,2004:36). Moreover, the issue has been covered across a range of genre (including news programmes, television drama, films, call-in shows and soap operas) thereby reaching a diverse range of audiences. While acknowledging the importance of the media in raising awareness, a number of commentators have also noted that the media’s interest is very recent and has generally relied on others (example, activists, professional groups) to lay the groundwork. Rather than being in the vanguard, the media has generally brought up the rear.

Web Sources

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