

Media Coverage of Sexual Violence and its Implications on Educational Leadership

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Abstract

This paper presents the key findings from the content analysis of sexuality-related issues by the two most widely circulated dailies (the Daily Nation and the Standard), weeklies (Citizen Weekly and the Independent) and monthly magazines (Drum and Eve) in the second half of year 2005. The authors undertook the task on behalf of the African Regional Sexuality Resource Center which coordinates and promotes sexuality focused research and discourse in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. The purpose of the analysis was to determine how the Kenyan print media portray sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights issues. This paper also discusses the implications this is likely to have on educational management.

By the end of the exercise, the writers had painstakingly analyzed the content of 368 dailies, the majority of 50 weeklies and 12 monthly magazines. The sexuality-related issues included sexuality and sexuality education, sexual violence, HIV/AIDS, child marriages, reproductive health and rights, as well sexual orientation and identity. This paper however concentrates on the issues most frequently reported by the media.

On the whole, the coverage of the sexuality was found to be relatively general and lacking in detail. During the period in focus, the media seem to have assumed the basic role of information transmission and not of imparting education or raising the readership's consciousness to sexuality and related issues. Incidences of sexual violence received more coverage in terms of the number of articles featured. The dailies and weeklies consistently highlighted numerous incidences of child defilement and sexual violence. They also featured the findings of a few related research studies, which had concluded that fathers, gangs, teachers, teenage boys and significant family members are among the main perpetrators of sexual violence against male and female minors and women. Indeed, the analysis found that fathers are responsible for the defilement of two-fifths of the cases reported. Of the 717 reported cases involving girls aged between one month and four years, 43% of the perpetrators were fathers. Over four-fifths (83%) of the defilement cases reported to the police occurred at home and nearly five percent (4.9%) at school.

In this paper we seek dialogue in ways in which a tripartite partnership between the school, community and parents could be helped to work together to reduce sexual violence in Kenya.

Introduction

The role of the media is to convey information which is likely to influence its readership's perceptions, cognition, attitudes and behaviour. The media therefore have a role to continuously educate its readership. The publications selected for the study were those with the widest circulation. About a million people daily are reported to buy the *Daily Nation* and about 800,000 the *Standard*. The coverage of sexuality-related issues by these publications has the potential therefore to reach and educate a wide population nationally.

Print media is therefore an excellent channel for imparting sexuality education to facilitate and promote sexual health. It has the potential to assist its readership in the understanding and formulation of positive views regarding sexuality by transmitting accurate information about human sexuality. If media education is well imparted, it can equip its wide readership with adequate skills to take care of their sexual health and make informed decisions. The Kenyan media therefore has a responsibility for educating leadership within Kenyan institutions such as the school, home, and community.

The following is a commonly used definition of human sexuality:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors (WHO, 1991).

Using this definition, the researchers who are later referred to as ‘we’ sought to find out how the Kenyan print media portrays sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights issues.

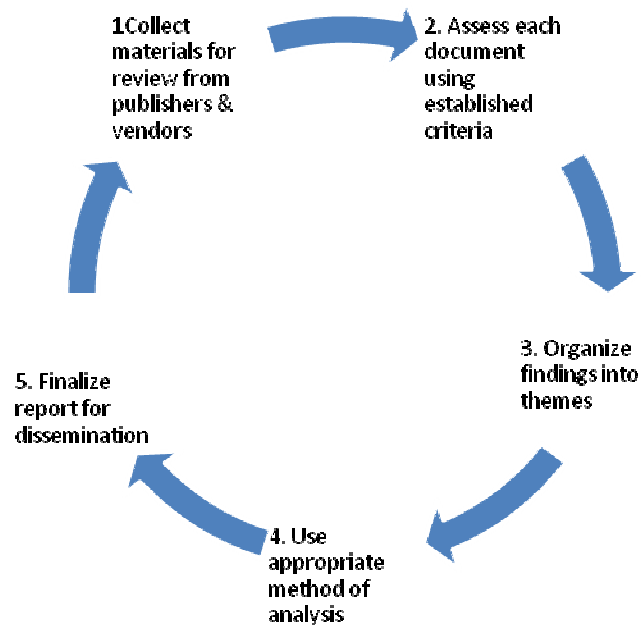
Research Approach

The research approach adopted involved an extensive content analysis of all sexuality-related content in the two most commonly circulated dailies – the *Daily Nation* and the *Standard*; weekly ‘soft’ publications - *The Independent* and *Citizen Weekly* newspapers, and monthly magazines - *The Drum* and *Eve*. Reports, stories, editorials, opinions and other articles printed in the last half of the year 2005 (1st July to 31st December) were analyzed in order to determine the quantity and quality of focus, as well as the incidences and extent to which the media contribute to information or misinformation and negative treatment of issues of the sexuality-related issues. We were also interested in identifying the factors influencing the inclusion and/or absence of articles on sexuality, sexual health and rights in the media, which could include, for example, the lack of knowledge and/or writers’/publishers’ biases.

Once the initial review was completed, we further analyzed each article featured, categorizing the relevant articles into several themes and finally grouping the findings into six broad themes: sexuality and sexuality education; reproductive health and rights; HIV and AIDS, sexual violence, sexual orientation and identity as well as child marriages. This paper however only reports about the media coverage of sexual violence, which was also the most commonly featured sexuality-related issue in the period under focus – July to December 2007.

The diagram below outlines the process we used to derive the findings.

Chart 1: Adopted Research Process



Results

Sexual Violence:

The sexual violence incidences most commonly reported by the media in the research period include rape, sexual defilement of minors and sodomy. These were the frequently featured sexuality-related issues in the two dailies selected for content analysis. The ‘soft’ publications also highlighted defilement incidences although the coverage was relatively minimal in comparison to the dailies. The two magazines gave the subject total blackout.

To enhance clarity, we classified the sexual violence coverage by the media under several sub-headings: the coverage of defilement, rape and sodomy incidences in Kenya, sexual harassment; sex for commodity exchange; incidences of school girl pregnancies and of child mothers, as well as of sexual violence using descriptive statistics.

Defilement, Rape and Sodomy:

Defilement refers to the sexual violation of a minor, inexperienced individual or one who has not had sexual intercourse before. The dailies featured numerous incidences of defilement and rape between July and December 2005 although the frequency of reporting varied from month to month. In the period under focus, the Kenyan population was nationally preoccupied with politics on the draft constitution, the referendum on 25th November 2005, the defeat of the government, and the consequent cabinet reshuffle. It is likely that these events took more of the

attention of the media as the year progressed than did sexuality-related issues. In the month of July, for example, the two dailies and *Citizen Weekly* reported a total of 84 sexual violence incidences (inclusive of sodomy cases), while only 15 and 36 were reported in October and December respectively. The decline in the number of incidences reported was most likely due to the history making national events and by no means the improvement of security.

Despite the fact that politics stole the limelight, the incidences reported highlight the seriousness and increasing risk of sexual violence to which children in Kenya are exposed. Indeed, the coverage of sexual violence translates on average to one sexual violence report every four days. The following chart highlights the defilement (sexual violence subjected to a child under the age of 18) and rape incidences reported by the media during the six months.

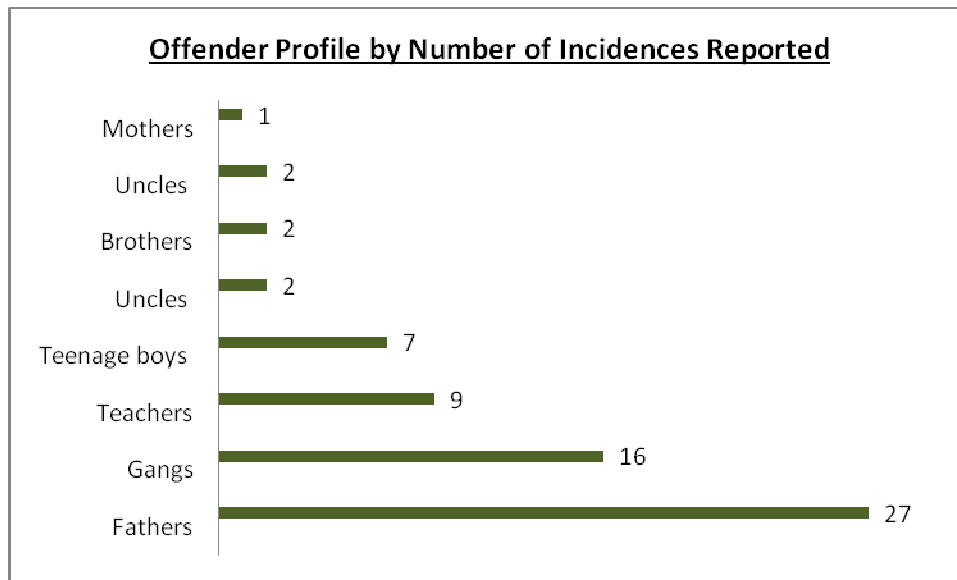
Table 1 Defilement and Rape case incidences reported by Media

Year – 2005 & month	Defilement and rape case incidences reported by Media	
Months	Defilement	Rape
July	51	33
August	22	10
September	28	3
October	15	0
November	18	7
December	27	6
Total	161	59

From the media reports, sexual violence seems to have emerged as a sub-culture and the girl-child was the target at infancy, teenage and adulthood. A total of 220 children and women were reported to have been victims of sexual violence between July and December 2005. It is obvious that what was reported is negligible in comparison to what was not reported. The boy-child however is not any safer than his female cohort. In the period covered by the analysis, 42 cases of sodomy were reported. Despite the magnitude of defilement, rape and sodomy incidences reported, few were considered important enough by the media to warrant editorial commentaries.

Perpetrators and Victims of Sexual Violence:

Fathers and gangs led in the list of perpetrators of sexual violence as the following sex offenders profile drawn from media reports shows. Family members and teachers are also among the perpetrators as can be seen in the following chart which shows the perpetrators' profile by the number of times the incidences were reported by the media.



The data portrayed in the above chart indicates that victims of sexual violence are unsafe in the presence of the very people they trust most and to whom they would run for help – the parents and teachers. The list demonstrates an emerging trend of perpetration of sexual violence at home, school and community and highlights the fact that nowhere in Kenya is her child safe.

The reality is, some of the stories in the media read as follows:

- *A 5 year-old girl infected with STD by father*
- *A 7 year-old girl defiled by father*
- *A 10 year-old girl repeatedly defiled by her 40 year-old father to settle scores with her mother*
- *A 17 year old girl now pregnant by her father*

Above statements confirm that neither the young girl-child, nor the pre-teenage girl or the older teen is safe from her father – the man responsible for her upbringing and the head of his household. The dailies effectively covered the findings of a survey conducted and disseminated by the Chamber of Justice, Care Kenya and Cradle dubbed “*Defilement Index: Status report on trends in sexual abuse of the girl child in Kenya’s urban areas*”. Of the 100 defilement cases sampled, 40% were carried out by fathers, 43% of 717 sampled cases involved girls aged between one month and four years. Over four-fifths (83%) of the defilement cases reported to police occurred at home and nearly five percent (4.9%) at school. The same publication (1st July *Standard*) also carried out an editorial entitled, “*Rape and the Law: The State must act tough on all sex offenders*’. The editorial’s strongly worded condemnation of the defilement of children described the vice as ‘*moral depravity*’ and ‘*sheer cruelty and betrayal of the girl child*’, at the same time faulting the Kenyan society for not doing enough to fight the crime. The *Standard* editorial concluded thus:

Yet, by using the judicial system, this country is capable of stemming this tragedy. We should not compromise on defilers. They should be handed a life sentence for this dastardly crime against our young ones'

These sexual violence features are examples of a media's commitment to lead in the education of the public about the seriousness of sexual violence and to advocate for tougher laws against sexual offenders.

Teachers are included in the list of sex offenders and the two dailies analyzed reported nine incidences of defilement involving them:

- *'Five pupils defiled – now pregnant: teachers suspected'*;
- *'Eight children aged between 6 and 7 years defiled by a teacher'*,
- *'A secondary schoolgirl pregnant by a teacher.'*

It is obvious that there are many more unreported incidences.'

Gang rapes exacerbate the increasing insecurity in the Kenyan community and the victims cut across age groups and gender. Between July and December 2005, for example, the two dailies reported 16 (10 by *Daily Nation* and 6 by *Standard*) incidences of gang rape. These included reports of the gang-rape of a 75 year old woman, a 17-year old woman and an 8-year old girl.

Sexual violence – rape, defilement of a minor, sodomy - shatters forever the dreams and entire life of a victim, as well as of the parent or spouse who watches helplessly as a loved one is subjected to the painful ordeal. Victims of rape and defilement include minors, pre-teenage and teenage children, young and older adults. Media coverage of sexual harassment is negligible. Indeed, only one such incidence is reported.

Sex for Commodity Exchange:

In the period between July and December 2005, the dailies and *Citizen Weekly* refer to five sex abuse incidences under the banners *'sex for grades, for jobs or for promotions'* – in reference to universities, a high school and industrial institutions. The media has however given relatively little attention to these abusive practices. None of the newspapers editorialized or wrote a commentary specifically on the practice.

Media Reports about Rape and the Law:

The media has the potential to educate its target population about any subject of interest to them. It has the capacity to take a lead in the fight against a vice like sexual violence. One then wonders whether the Kenyan print media has the will to undertake such tasks.

The print media undoubtedly highlighted the increasing insecurity and incidences of rape, defilement and sodomy in Kenya in period under review-2005. As a result, there followed

numerous calls from the public for the enactment of laws to protect the population from sexual violence. The two dailies feature 'letters to the editor' by their readers in which the latter air their views on various current issues of concern and interest. During the period under review, insecurity appeared to be a major concern to the public and this came out clearly from the various calls for and comments on the *Sex Offences Bill* which in 2007 became law – *Sexual Offences Act 2007*. The two dailies also carry weekly magazines (Saturday Nation Magazine and *Standard's Standard Interactive*) that occasionally feature reports and commentaries on the increasing insecurity in the country.

The *Standard* carried a detailed and educative *Commentary and Analysis* article in October 30 2005 on the challenges of eradicating rape and sexual exploitation by UN troops on peacekeeping missions. The article blamed what the author called a "hyper-masculine" culture and a tradition of silence among soldiers. The paper (July 1) also carried an editorial commentary calling on the State to act tough on all sex offenders.

Incidences of Schoolgirl Pregnancies and Child Mothers:

For more than a decade, reproductive health issues have taken a back seat seemingly as far as the media is concerned. In a country with a quarter of its population in its teens and a similar proportion under the age of 10, teenage fertility cannot be taken for granted because of its social, economic and health-related impact on the entire nation's development. The dailies and *Citizen Weekly* reported 69 incidences of schoolgirl/ teenage pregnancies during the six months under review. It is likely that many more incidences are never reported.

Sexual Violence Statistics:

Occasionally the newspapers provide statistics of sexual violence incidences to highlight the rising insecurity. Following the sexual violence survey report in July 2005 (referred to earlier), both dailies provided various revealing statistics on the rampancy of sexual violence. For example, the *Daily Nation* devoted a full page on Statistics and comparative crime figures 2002-2005 - indicating the weight of the crime (July 18); Statistics at provincial level from 2000-2004 on sexual violence sourced from Kenya National Human Rights Commission (July 27). The *Standard*, on 1st July devoted two pages on sexual violence in which rape statistics were described as 'shocking'. On July 8th, the cover page of the *Standard* carried a bold headline, '*Kenya's shame as rape tops list of crime*' in which Cyrus Ombati, a former Kenya Police spokesperson cited statistics of rape incidences reported to the police. In its *Commentary and Analysis* the same day, the paper cited rape statistics under the heading '*Crime: More attention must be given to rape*'.

Conclusion:

In the period under review, more women were raped in Kenya than people murdered and vehicles stolen. Almost every day, the media carried reports of the insecurity throughout the country. During the first half of 2005, the police received a total of 1,314 rape-related reports, but unfortunately, similar figures for the second half of the same year are not available. Five percent of the women treated at Nairobi Women's Hospital were reported to be victims of sexual

assault. Every week, Naivasha Police received reports of at least two incidences of rape in Maela.

The media is an important education tool and channel with a national captivating audience. It is a fact that it has educated its readership about the dangers encountered by the girl and boy-child. It has the capacity to mould the opinion and behaviour of its wide readership. As a socialization agent, it undisputedly has a powerful educative influence on society and conversely, in promoting socio-economic development, well-being and good health of target populations. The media is a powerful tool and as such, must be aided to present and disseminate factual and balanced information that will engender behavior change. This is especially critical for the largely misunderstood and emergent fields of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights.

Implications to Educational Leadership:

Most public and private institutions in Kenya subscribe to the most widely circulated dailies. It is almost a school managers' ritual to begin their mornings by quickly perusing through the dailies. Radio stations also create awareness to its audience by reviewing the coverage of the common dailies in the mornings. A majority of school heads, teachers and counselors therefore have regular access to media reports daily. It is also possible that some of the incidences reported in the dailies occur within the school environs. Schools management therefore is aware of any local incidences affecting the learners. What could be lacking is knowledge and motivation on how to engage the school management in a non-partisan way when an incident that affects a student from the school occurs.

At policy level, school heads in Kenya are aware of the *Sexual Offences Act of 2007* that criminalizes all forms of sexual offences in addition to the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission policy on the *Ethics and Moral Conduct of Teachers*. However, matters of sexuality and sexual violence in particular are hardly addressed openly by the families of the victims to avoid stigma and in a bid to protect each other under the guise of '*not washing dirty linen in public*'. Most families of the perpetrators often prefer the matter to be settled out of court. These secretly derived solutions affect the administration of justice. We therefore recommend the strengthening of a tripartite partnership of the school, community and parents, which currently exists in the form of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Boards (SMBs). These school structures need strengthening with the aim of equipping the members with skills and attitudes that would help reduce and address sexual violence in Kenya particularly as it affects school children.

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