



Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics

**“Ethical Reporting on Children- Media
Monitoring”**

**Monitoring Period:
June 1 - September 1
2013**

Tbilisi

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1. Project Overview

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, under the aegis of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), has conducted a project entitled “Ethical Reporting on Children – Media monitoring”. The project consists of two parts: media monitoring and public discussions of the monitoring results.

The objectives of the monitoring were to analyze and study child-related materials published in various types of media including electronic, online, and printed and their compliance with the generally recognized Children’s Rights and the ethical and professional standards.

When any violations were identified the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics addressed the relevant media’s self-regulatory bodies to respond to its request.

This report represents a summary of the results of the monitoring from June 1 to September 1 2013 and evaluates the specificities of the different media outlets. It provides a detailed analysis of clear violations, responses and recommendations.

1.2. About the Authors

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (sometimes referred to as “The Charter”) is an independent non-government organization that unites hundreds of journalists from across the country based on mutual ethical principles. The objectives of the organization are: implementation and support of professional and ethical standards; raising media literacy; and increasing public confidence in media. In order to achieve these objectives the Charter conducts activities in several areas including media monitoring.

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics was established in 2009 and currently has a membership of over 250.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 and received a mandate to protect Children's Rights, assist children to satisfy their basic needs and help them to reach their full potential.

UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish Children's Rights on the basis of strong ethical principles and according to the best international standards.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is an impartial organization and its activities are free from any kind of discrimination.

1.3. Project Goals

- Inform the public on how well media is protecting Children's Rights and observing its own professional and ethical standards when preparing a child-related story/ article/ information.
- Identify and respond to gaps existing in this area of the media.
- Promote coverage of child-related issues in compliance with professional and ethical norms.

1.4. Methodology

At the initial stage of the project, the Charter trained selected monitors on the coverage standards of child-related issues. The guiding principles for the monitors were derived from the following sources:

- The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics
- Guidelines and principles recognized by the International Federation of Journalists, which refer to publications on child-related issues
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Guiding principles on media coverage of the child-related issues
- Code of Conduct for Broadcasters¹

From June 1 to September 1 the Charter's monitors studied the compliance of journalistic works according to the above mentioned guiding principles.

The monitoring did not include any kind of quantitative analysis (only the data of the general volume and thematic distribution). It simply included a qualitative analysis of the child-related materials published in the media.

According to the project's authors there were no preliminarily selected media outlets. The monitors observed all publications that were directly or indirectly related to children during the reporting period.

1.5. Objects of Monitoring

- TV Companies
- Online Media
- Printed Media

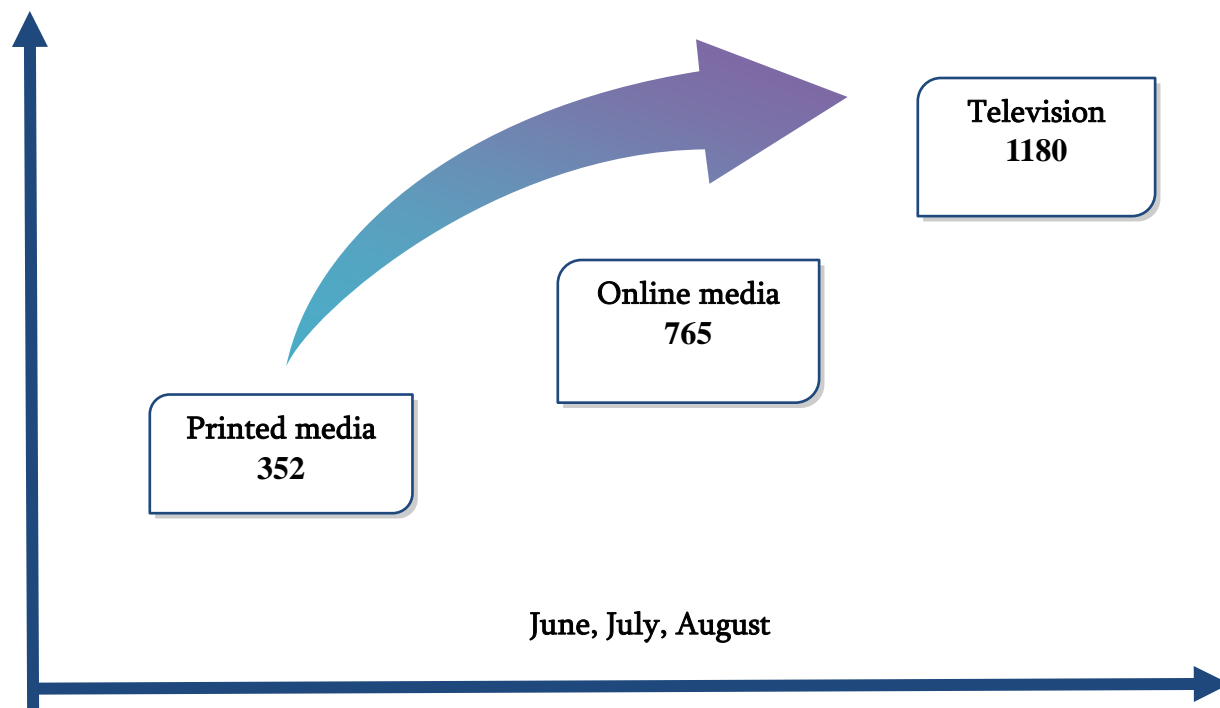
2. General Evaluation of Results

2.1. Quantitative Data

During the monitoring period the Charter's monitors viewed and studied a combined total of 2,297 journalistic works including

¹ "International and National Standards for Reporting the Children-Related Issues"
<http://unicef.ge/uploads/.....pdf>

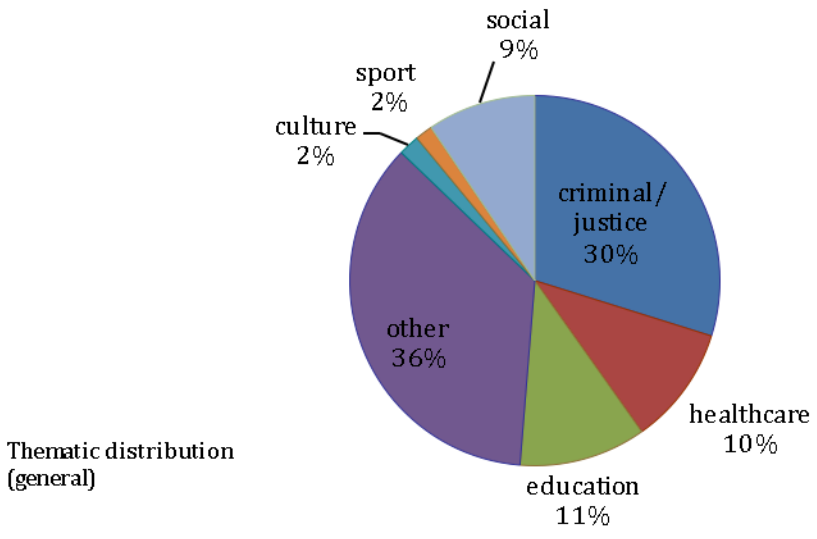
stories, articles and or any other brief information directly or indirectly related to children.



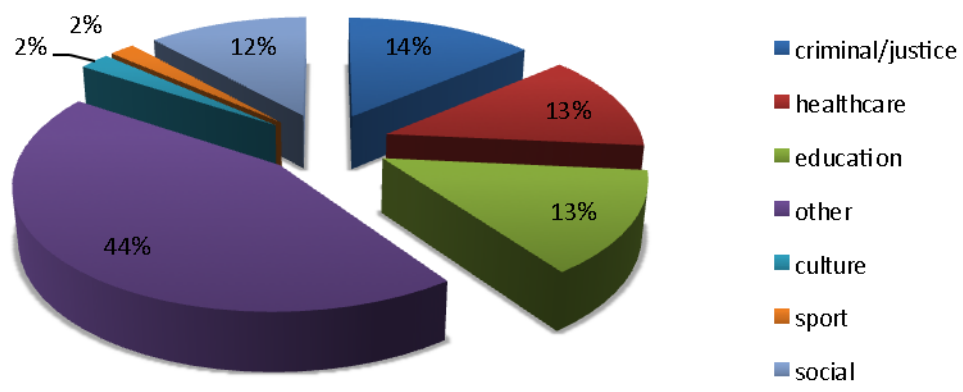
During the monitoring period the most frequently covered topics were those relating to criminal cases and law. The media paid less attention to other significant issues of public life such as education and social protection/healthcare. At the same time, quantitatively the majority of the works were included in the category of "other". This includes brief information notes published in all types of media that do not belong to any particular thematic group. ^{2 3}

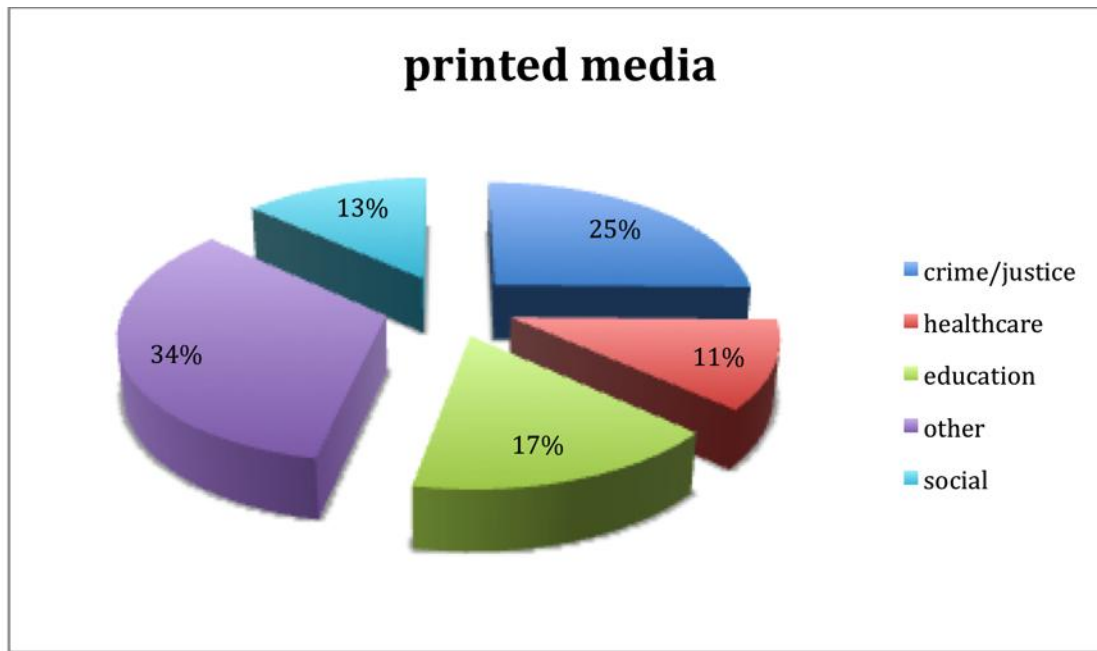
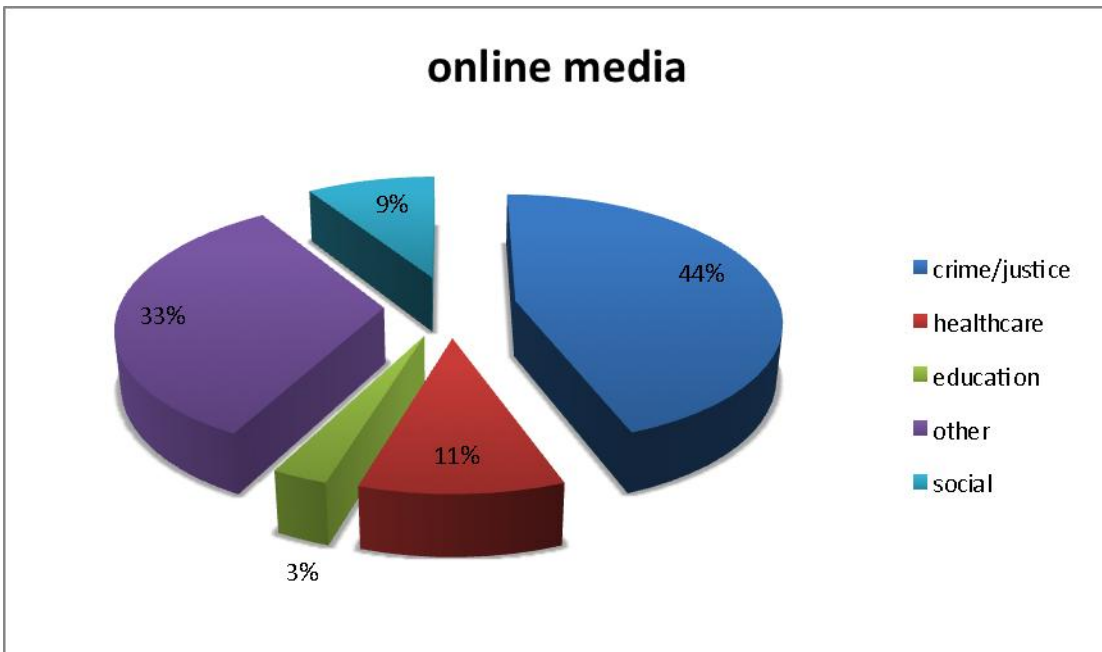
² Pie-chart shows percentage of the thematic distribution.

³ Each thematic index has the same color on the chart.



TV Companies





2.2. Qualitative Analysis/ General Trends

The monitors of the Charter started their media analysis on June 1 and detailed observation ended on September 1. The problems revealed during the monitoring process can be divided into two

groups: the general trends common to all types of the media and different trends for different types of the media.

The main trends are:

- ❖ Similarity and uniformity of the news.
- ❖ Indirect identification of the children being in conflict with the law, children involved in family dramas and victims of violence (rarely found during the monitoring process).
- ❖ Surface coverage of the child-related issues apart from rare exceptions.
- ❖ Using children as objects of charity and advertising materials.
- ❖ Involvement of children in politics especially for the purpose of criticizing political subjects.
- ❖ Sensational and dramatized coverage of the child-related issues (especially regarding criminal cases and social issues).
- ❖ Use of musical and special effects in video reports to achieve more emotionality.
- ❖ Use of wrong terminology (with regard to the children with disabilities).
- ❖ Interest in private and family traumas.
- ❖ Exact repetition of official press releases.

From the trends listed above, the involvement of children in politics for the purpose of criticizing political subjects is especially common in the printed media. This practice is however rarely used by online media and TV companies.

The trend of using musical and special effects in video reports to achieve more emotionality is prevalent in the multimedia products of online media. This trend is used less by TV companies.

Use of the following wrong terminology is often encountered: “handicapped and healthy children”; “disabled children”. Printed media mostly uses the term “handicapped” but when they speak of both handicapped and non-handicapped youths, the printed media

sometimes uses the word “healthy” to distinguish. To use the word “healthy” as a counterweight to the term “handicapped” is clear discrimination against people with disabilities.

Information agencies and portals often use different types of press releases without the necessary discretion. Most of the letters sent to the media outlets by the Charter concerned such instances. A name and a surname “slipped through” one of the state institution’s press releases. This was then released unchanged by the agencies who had not paid any attention to the fact that in the press release of the Ministry the victim and the accused were referred to by their initials and only the identity of the other victim was revealed.

During the three month period of monitoring one more general trend was identified – the media is interested in child-related issues only in a specific context, such as:

1. During specific dates. For example, June 1, the International Children’s Protection Day
2. As part of current events. For example, murder of a juvenile in Batumi

These two factors determined qualitatively the high rates of the child-related news in June and July. In other periods, the media devotes less time to children and to topics that are not current events in spite of the fact that they are significant and relevant - for example, education and healthcare.

The date mentioned above, June 1, is one of the most visible examples of this trend. On this day, the International Children’s Protection Day, the children do not become the main characters of the news but rather become the objects of charity and advertising instead. That day, and for the entire first week of June, all types of media devoted most of their time to child-related issues. Typical coverage focused on who had visited children and where, or who had bought presents for children. After this the children mentioned on TV and in the articles during the visits of some state institutions or

private companies, as a rule, are not the subjects of interest for the media any more.

We must also mention the positive trend revealed during the monitoring period. At the very beginning of the monitoring period there were cases, especially in the online media, of the indirect identification of children and youths being in conflict with the law or related to the family drama or as victims of violence. By the end of the monitoring period there were no such problems observed.

It should be noted that today the Georgian media covers the child-related issues more carefully than ever before.

3. Significant Violations and Responsiveness

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics addressed directly the media outlets with a request to respond to the violations revealed during the monitoring period. Here are several examples of ethical misconduct:

TV Companies:

- One of the stories of the **Morning Programme** on “Channel 9” on June 1 referred to children living in a conflict zone. One of the respondents was a child recalling in detail the story of the bombing of his house. He says that his grandfather was severely injured as a result of this bombing. Another under age respondent recalls how she escaped death during the bombing.

The media outlet and the author did not consider the risk of retraumatizing the child when a journalist asks a child in front of the camera to recall a tragedy that he/she has witnessed.

- Again in June in one of the news bulletins on “Channel 9” there was a story about a charity. According to the information, the representatives of the organization "Women of Georgia for Peace and Life" presented books, sweets, T-shirts and stationery

to the children who were patients of a TB Centre. There were no interviews with the children, nor their names were mentioned but the under-age patients were clearly visible in the background during footage of grown up respondents.

The monitoring group has concluded that since people having tuberculosis are commonly stigmatized, the media should exercise more caution in covering such materials, especially when dealing with children.

- One of the news bulletins of the Georgian Public Broadcaster “Channel One” covered a story concerning the violence against a juvenile in Kakheti region. The faces of the children in the background were blurred in the shots, but the interview of the mother who was speaking about the details of the above mentioned violence was presented undisguised. The interview was accompanied by subtitles identifying the mother. By showing the mother the Georgian Public Broadcaster created a very real threat of identification of the juvenile victim which is not allowed according to the Broadcasters’ Code of Conduct as well as by the Georgian Public Broadcaster’s own Code of Conduct and as per all ethical standards.

As soon as the information was broadcasted the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics addressed the Georgian Public Broadcaster, and since then such mistakes have never been repeated in the main bulletin “Moambe”. The story prepared in violation of the Code of Conduct was removed from the internet archive by the broadcaster.

- A story of a minor who had died in Ozurgeti was broadcasted in the news bulletins of the Georgian Public Broadcaster and TV Company “Imedi”. In spite of the fact that there was a high public interest in the event, it was unnecessary to show an interview of the mother crying over the coffin because the similar information to what she had given had already been provided by the relatives and friends of the family.

Showing a person at a moment of sorrow and tragedy is not recommended by the Broadcaster's Code of Conduct as well as by the Georgian Public Broadcaster's own Code of Conduct.

- In August all broadcasters covered an incident that happened at the Sport's Palace in Tbilisi. A sixteen year old teenager participated in this incident. Most of the broadcasters covered the story without identifying the juvenile but there was a mistake made by the TV Company "Imedi" in their story where the name and surname of the juvenile were not disclosed but his face was not blurred in one of the shots. Even though this was shot was from a considerable distance there is still a risk of identifying the person.

When covering the criminal cases, a juvenile's personal life and details should be protected to the maximum. Any form of their identification leads to the stigmatization of juveniles and threatens their future lives. ⁴

Online Media

- There were eleven reports prepared by the internet media about a story in the village Dighomi where according to the investigation a father had killed his wife and an infant. Reports were released mostly in June. From the perspective of the media monitoring group of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, four reports among them were made in violation of the journalistic ethics. The victim's (mother) name and surname were revealed. Besides the deceased infant, the couple also has two more small children.

The Charter has sent letters to all four media outlets ("Info 9", Agency "Pirveli", Agency "Geonews", Agency "news.ge") explaining why the media outlets should not have identified the victim and the

⁴ Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics addressed media outlets on every above mentioned case. The absolute majority of them shared the comments and took relevant actions.

accused.

All four agencies corrected the information and posted altered versions on their websites.

- The report of www.presa.ge was prepared in violation of the standards of journalistic ethics. It covered the rape of a twelve year old girl in Samegrelo. The name of the victim's family was mentioned in the article which risks the identification of the victim.

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics addressed the editorial staff of "presa.ge". The article has since been modified accordingly.

- Two video stories posted on "PalitraTV" website drew the attention of the monitoring group.

"Six orphaned brothers and sisters live in extreme poverty". The plot shows how the orphaned children live (including juveniles). The children are fully identified. The author uses close-ups, (in the case of the juveniles their photos are used). The shots are accompanied by sad music and special effects that add an artificial severity to the coverage.

As well as the issues with the visual side, the story does not offer any solution to the problem – this gives the impression that the report is oriented on sensation and on viewer's feelings and emotions rather than on the real, deep, comprehensive coverage of the problem.

- Again, under the title "Paralyzed Girl and her Family of Five Living in the Bath" a video was posted on the website of "Palitra TV". The story is about a socially vulnerable family. According to the story, the mother lives in a bath together with her four under-age children. The report shows a 15-year-old blind girl with cerebral paralysis. The author uses close-ups, shots where the difficulties caused by her health problems are

shown (how difficult it is for her to eat, dress, etc.). At the end of the story it is revealed that to support the family, the mother makes her child beg.

Sad music is added to the already grave picture which becomes a background of the story and further aggravates the viewer's impressions.

Identification of the child, her close-ups, video effects and sad sentimental music used in the story creates a sense that the material is oriented toward the feelings and emotions of the audience. There is absolutely no attempt of the author to find out what the government is doing for the main character of the story, or where the structures responsible to take care of the children with the similar problems are.

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics addressed the editorial staff of "Palitra TV" which explained the reason why such an approach was chosen to prepare the story. It turned out that people helped the family after the publication of the story.

Printed Media

When violations were revealed in the printed media the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics asked the publishing editors to consider its comments as recommendations. During the monitoring period the Charter addressed the following media outlets: "Kvela Siakhle", "Tbiliselebi", "Rezonansi", "Gza", "Asaval-Dasavali", "Sakartvelos Respublika", "Alia", "Lelo", "Kviris Palitra". Here are several examples of violations observed:

- "Why don't Khaduri's Children Like Natelashvili and "Christian-Democrats?" An interview with the children of the Minister of Finance that was published in the newspaper "Kvela Siakhle" in July. The journalist speaks with 8 two children,

aged 6 and 8 years respectively, about politics and politicians as well as about certain political parties.

- There is a similar interview with “Georgian Dream” coalition member Zakharia Kutsnashvili’s 15 and 10 year-old children published under the title “Why do Zakharia Kutsnashvili’s Children Call “National Movement” Destructive and What do they Advise Saakashvili?” in the newspaper “Asaval-Dasavali” in June.

It is clear that in both cases children are used to belittle political figures. This is exploitation of children in such a form that degrades their honor and dignity, stigmatizes them and puts them at risk of verbal and physical insults from different parts of the society. At the same time, these articles expose the children of those politicians that were insulted by the little respondents to the same risks. This has no justification whatsoever, even if the consent for this type of interview was obtained from the parents themselves.

- An article was published in June in the newspaper “Kviris Palitra” under the title of “And Then Father Shot him...”

There are several stories told in this article. The first story is of a father killing his son. The journalist identifies the accused as well as the victim. The journalist uses comments of the victim’s sister who asks him not to publish her comments: “‘This does not concern either politics or Saakashvili or Ivanishvili. Why do you want to parade it?! This is the tragedy of our family and I don’t want everybody to know about it. Don’t I have the right to ask? My mother won’t stand to see the picture of her son in the newspaper,’ –the grieved sister told me”.

The article carries this comment regardless and it becomes known that the murdered person has a ten-year old son. Based on the facts that father and grandfather are both identified in the article, as well as their address, it becomes easier to identify the child.

The child's interests suffer even more because the journalist tries to draw a drastic picture of the murder using the following language: "harrowing voice of the grieved mother", "I faced a horrible scene – a young man was lying on the floor surrounded by blood pools", also a subtitle in bold: "If I tell you about my family I have to tell such terrible things I don't know how it can be published in the newspaper".

It should be noted that at the time this article was written the verdict on the accused father had not yet been delivered. However because of this material the ten-year old child might have to face questions for his entire life.

- One more tragedy that was covered by the Georgian printed media in violation of the Children's Rights happened in Didi Dighomi. "Why did the Former Special Forces Officer Kill his Wife and a Five-Year-Old Child?" – was the headline in the newspaper "Kvela Siakhle". The article identifies the name and surname of the Special Forces officer, the name of his wife, and the name of the murdered child. The history of the family is told in details, the place of residence is indicated along with the parents' jobs, it claims several times that the man had mental problems and that had tried to commit suicide twice. The material is accompanied by two photographs of the house with the inscription – "The House where the Murder Took Place..."

The family has two more children who at the moment, as the journalist states, are living in the house of a priest. Clearly, it is very easy to identify them based on the vast material.

The same mistake is made by the magazine "Gza" ("The tragedy of the Former Officer of Special Forces"). Here they also identify the following: names and surnames of the parents, age and name of a deceased child, their address, jobs, details of the tragedy and the material is accompanied by a photo of the father.

The tragedy of this family has been at the center of attention of many newspapers and magazines and in most cases the above mentioned misconduct has taken place.

Conclusions

The results of monitoring conducted by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund indicates that as regards covering child-related issues the situation has improved from the viewpoint of protecting Children's Rights and observing ethical norms. Presently, journalists and editors treat child-related issues more carefully than ever before, though the monitoring results also revealed that there are still cases of violations of Children's Rights and ethical standards. The problem persists not only with regard to the coverage of current affairs but also in terms of the lack of extensive and in-depth coverage of such topics that are particularly important for the welfare of children and that affect their future lives.

Recommendations

As part of the project, the Charter and UNICEF invited experts to analyze and further elaborate on the recommendations. The experts actively participated in public discussions of the results. By the end of the report the project's authors and invited experts have presented the following recommendations to the media:



Media should pay special attention so that there is no disclosure of information in any form that is damaging or humiliating to the dignity of the child, even if the intended dissemination of such information is motivated by the kind intentions and desire to help the child.



Do not display and spread news about a child having any kind of problems, if this news cannot or will not give necessary or valuable

information to the viewer / reader and does not change the essence of the story.



Journalists and editors should differentiate between their own responsibilities from those of a parent or a guardian. Obtaining the permission of a parent or guardian should not be a key factor for identifying child/youth or showing him/her in any form.



Media should provide the public with extensive and more in-depth information not just on current affairs but on the topics and issues that are especially important to children's welfare and affect their future lives. Media should try to promote and raise such topics every day.



Media should study with special care official information and press releases which relate to children or where children are mentioned before dissemination of such information.



Journalists and editors should be cautious about covering such news that instead of highlighting children's problems are promoting certain government structures or serving to advertise private persons or companies.



Do not involve children in such articles and stories/topics that neither relate nor apply to them. For example: politics.