

# Inferring production values from content

A comparative analysis of media content on sex crime and national crime statistics between 1993 and 2003

# Background: The SAVI report

- One in five women (20.4 %) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood. In over a quarter of cases (i.e. 5.6 % of all girls), the abuse involved penetrative sex — either vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- One in six men (16.2 %) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood. In one of every six cases (i.e. 2.7 % of all boys), the abuse involved penetrative sex — either anal or oral sex.
- One in five women (20.4 %) reported experiencing contact sexual assault as adults. Over a quarter of cases of contact abuse in adulthood (i.e. 6.1 % of all women) involved penetrative sex.
- One in ten men (9.7 %) reported experiencing contact sexual assault as adults. One in ten cases of contact abuse in adulthood (i.e. 0.9 % of all men) involved penetrative **SEX.** (McGee et al., 2002, Executive Summary)

# Literature on Public Opinion

- Media select messages
- Media set agendas
- Media frame events
- Media contextualise events
- Media draw on templates

# The power of the Press

- “That is to say, then, that the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” (Cohen, 1963)



# Media & sexual crime

- Incongruity between offender and offence was emphasised
- Child neglect is ignored
- Disproportionate focus on abuse outside the home
- Events are sensationalized and trivialized
- Vital issues are misrepresented
- Scapegoats are sought

# Cheit, 2003

- “Several recent studies suggest that coverage of child sexual abuse is unlikely to be widespread in the sense of covering a wide range of cases. Rather, the cases that receive significant coverage are likely to follow a common pattern in crime reporting: one that exalts the unusual, thereby turning the most uncommon events into the ones that seem common. ... The content of the top ten stories bears out several traditional concepts of newsworthiness. These stories tended to involve “the bizarre and the unusual,” the dramatic, and/or the famous.”

# Method

- Lexis-Nexis & RTE Media Web
- 5 weeks from each year, 1993-2002
- Coded by independent coders
- 1127 initial IT stories became 571
- 48 RTE news stories became 38
- An Garda Síochána supplied statistics

**Table 2 Number and percentage of stories by victim type by source**

		Source Title		Total
		The Irish Times	RTE News	
Category of crime	Child	381	25	406
		66.7%	65.8%	66.7%
	Adult	176	7	183
		30.8%	18.4%	30.0%
	Unspecified	14	6	20
		2.5%	15.8%	3.3%
Total		571	38	609
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%



**Table 4 Number and percentage of stories by victim gender by source**

		Source Title		Total
		The Irish Times	RTE News	
Victim gender	Male	124 21.7%	8 50.0%	132 22.5%
	Female	257 45.0%	8 50.0%	265 45.1%
	Unspecified / Not Applicable	190 33.3%	0 .0%	190 32.4%
Total		571 100.0%	16 100.0%	587 100.0%

**Table 5 Number and percentage of stories by perpetrator gender by source**

		Source Title		Total
		The Irish Times	RTE News	
Perpetrator's gender	Male	417	26	443
		73.0%	100.0%	74.2%
	Female	7	0	7
		1.2%	.0%	1.2%
	Unspecified / Not Applicable	147	0	147
		25.7%	.0%	24.6%
Total		571	26	597
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 6 Number and percentage of stories by victim perpetrator relationship by source for child victims**

Category of crime			Source Title		Total
			The Irish Times	RTE News	
Child	Relationship to Perpetrator	Stranger	10 2.9%	1 5.0%	11 3.0%
		Parent	38 10.9%	1 5.0%	39 10.5%
		Sibling	3 .9%	0 .0%	3 .8%
		Uncle/Aunt	10 2.9%	0 .0%	10 2.7%
		Other relative	6 1.7%	0 .0%	6 1.6%
		Authority figure	149 42.6%	18 90.0%	167 45.1%
		Boyfriend/girlfriend	1 .3%	0 .0%	1 .3%
		Other	131 37.4%	0 .0%	131 35.4%
		New acquaintance	2 .6%	0 .0%	2 .5%
		Total			350 100.0%

**Table 7 Number and percentage of stories by victim perpetrator relationship by source for adult victims**

Category of crime	Victim's relationship to Perpetrator	Stranger	Source Title		Total
			The Irish Times	RTE News	
Adult	Victim's relationship to Perpetrator	Stranger	12	1	13
			7.4%	50.0%	7.9%
		Parent	1	0	1
			.6%	.0%	.6%
		Uncle/Aunt	1	0	1
			.6%	.0%	.6%
		Other relative	3	0	3
			1.9%	.0%	1.8%
		Authority figure	16	1	17
			9.9%	50.0%	10.4%
		Boyfriend/girlfriend	2	0	2
			1.2%	.0%	1.2%
		Partner/Spouse	5	0	5
	3.1%	.0%	3.0%		
	Other	106	0	106	
		65.4%	.0%	64.6%	
	New acquaintance	15	0	15	
		9.3%	.0%	9.1%	
	Colleague	1	0	1	
		.6%	.0%	.6%	
	Total	162	2	164	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

**Table 8 Mean of newspaper word count by victim type and gender**

				Source
				The Irish Times
Victim	Child	Victim gender	Male	414
			Female	305
	Adult	Victim gender	Male	301
			Female	287



**Table 11 Number and percentage of stories by perpetrator category by front page by newspaper**

Professional Category	The Irish Times			
	Page 1		Other Pages	
	N	%	N	%
Cleric/Religious	9	69.2%	104	58.8%
Medical	0	.0%	5	2.8%
Teacher/Coach	0	.0%	22	12.4%
Police/Military	3	23.1%	18	10.2%
Farmer	0	.0%	5	2.8%
Other (Named)	0	.0%	7	4.0%
Entertainer	0	.0%	2	1.1%
Business	0	.0%	7	4.0%
Professional	0	.0%	1	.6%
Student	0	.0%	1	.6%
Legal	0	.0%	0	.0%
Sports	0	.0%	0	.0%
Blue Collar	1	7.7%	5	2.8%
Politics	0	.0%	0	.0%

**Table 12 Number and percentage of stories by perpetrator category by front page by newspaper for child victims**

Professional Category	The Irish Times			
	Page 1		Other Pages	
	N	%	N	%
Cleric/Religious	9	90.0%	100	66.7%
Medical	0	.0%	1	.7%
Teacher/Coach	0	.0%	21	14.0%
Police/Military	0	.0%	11	7.3%
Farmer	0	.0%	3	2.0%
Other (Named)	0	.0%	7	4.7%
Entertainer	0	.0%	1	.7%
Business	0	.0%	2	1.3%
Professional	0	.0%	1	.7%
Student	0	.0%	0	.0%
Legal	0	.0%	0	.0%
Sports	0	.0%	0	.0%
Blue Collar	1	10.0%	3	2.0%
Politics	0	.0%	0	.0%

# Crime statistic comparison 1

- In the official statistics, the most common crime against children is sexual assault (67.29%). The same is true of the content analysis data (76.4%).
- The figures for rape in relation to children are also broadly similar, 18.8% in the official statistics and 16.9% in the media reports.
- Incest accounts for 2.2% of the official statistics but 5.1% of the media reports.
- In relation to adults, the official figures indicate that sexual assault is the most common offence (64.3%) whereas the media reports have rape as the most frequent (67.3%).

# Crime statistic comparison 2

- In the comparisons between adults and children, a different picture emerges. In the official figures rape is committed almost three times as often against adults as against children (73.1% v. 26.9%) whereas in the media reports it appears twice as often (62.6% v. 37.4%).
- According to Gardaí the majority of victims of sexual assault are adults (63.9%) whereas media reports imply that children are overwhelmingly more commonly such victims (85.8%).
- In the official statistics, buggery is a more common crime against adults (70.5%) whereas in the media reports the reverse is true (66.6% for children) but the N here is very small.

# Discussion

- In both news sources, stories about child abuse are twice as frequent as stories about sexual crimes against adults, although the Garda statistics report that the opposite is true.
- Sexual crime against children is over-reported and sexual crime against adults is under-reported.
- Stories with female victims predominate, in keeping with prevalence data from the SAVI report that women are more likely to be victims of sexual crime than men.
- Perpetrators in the media reports are overwhelmingly male, with little reporting of sexual crime by female perpetrators, although the SAVI report indicates a higher incidence of female perpetration than is evident in the media reports.



## Discussion 2

- Within the media reports of sexual crimes against children, 15.6% of such crime is attributed to parents or family members, 3% to strangers and 45% to authority figures. This contrasts very strongly with the SAVI figures which suggest that strangers are responsible for about 20% of child abuse, 16.8% by family members (fathers, uncles, cousins, siblings) and 4.6% by authority figures (clergy, teachers).

# Conclusion

- It is critical for Irish society that, in the matter of sexual abuse and violence, its citizens are as well informed as can be about the reality of the problem.
- The current patterns of reporting are somewhat deficient in this respect. This is especially true in relation to the level of reporting on sexual crime against adults.
- As the SAVI report indicates, 42% of women reported some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime, as did 28% of men.
- This clearly an ongoing social problem and tackling it into the future will require comprehensive and accurate media reporting.