ABSTRACT

Media plays a very important role in generating awareness among the general public and it creates pressure on the pertinent issues for the development of nation. Media can also be very effective for the overall development of children through advocacy of children's right. In our context, the Agenda Setting theory of the media served as the theoretical framework on which the research is based. Many studies have indicated the validity of this theory and they have shown that the mass people pay more importance to the issues which have more coverage by the media. Their (mass people) viewpoints are dependent on the level of coverage given to them by the media. In this situation, there has been an urgent need to monitor the information and issues on children covered by the media. One of the major functions of media is education. It can very well educate the mass of people on child rights. Depending on the credibility of media, print media especially the newspaper can play the vital role of educating the mass people on child rights and thereby ensure protection of rights to these children. After reviewing the past studies, it was revealed that children news/views did not enjoy necessary attention by the print media and was not considered important. Keeping in mind the present phenomenon, the present study has been taken up with the following objectives

i) to know the children's issues those are more frequently published in the print media;

ii) to find out the prioritized issue related to child rights on each newspaper;

iii) to identify the overlooked children issues that should be advocated. And

iv) to ascertain the role of print media in educating the mass people on child rights.

To achieve these objectives, four daily local newspapers, The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, Amar Asom and Asamiya Pratidin were selected and content analysis method was applied on children issues covered by the newspapers, during the period 1st January to 31st December, 2012. Further to achieve its fourth objective i.e. to ascertain the role of print media in educating the mass people on child rights, a questionnaire cum
interview schedule was developed and administered to 300 male and 260 female respondents from Kamrup Metropolitan District. A multistage purposive cum random sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. In the first stage, Kamrup Metropolitan was selected purposively. In the second stage, one town and one village were selected randomly from each of the six circles under Kamrup metro district. In the third stage, nearly 1 percent of the population of the respective towns and villages were selected randomly. Pre-testing of the instrument was conducted on 30 male and female respondents from non-sampling area to test the validity of the tool. The data obtained were subjected to statistical analysis using frequency and percentage. Experts from the selected news houses were purposively selected and interviewed to know the role of the newspapers regarding the coverage of children’s issues.

Findings showed that the knowledge of child rights among the mass people was far from satisfaction. The study found that majority of the respondents (97.85) were only partially aware of the child rights to have parental care, leisure and recreation, followed by right to survival (96.07 %) and right to education (92.66 %). While, very least number of the respondent were fully aware of the rights to have nutrition followed by right to expression, to have information, to think and to practice religion right to have good health, right to name and nationality and right to have protection against any type of abuse exploitation or neglect etc. Television/radio/internet were the main source for majority of the respondents through which the acquired child right education followed by newspapers/magazines and Government agencies. Very few of them acquired child right education through NGOs.

While, querying about the view points of the respondents about the role of newspapers, was found to be satisfactory. Majority of the respondents felt newspapers encourage children towards science and technology and agreed that newspapers educate the people about the dangers of child work. While 76.07 percent and 83.03 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that newspapers provides a clean environment for children and urge for non-discrimination against class. Regarding, urge to provide facilities to children, the responses were neutral. On the contrary, according to the respondents the space provided to children news/views was very scanty and less frequent. Although, the
language used was always very respectful and sensitivity was maintained. But most of the news on children lacked in-depth analysis. The titles/catch lines and the photos on children were somewhat satisfactory. Regarding the role played by the newspapers in educating the readers about the educational rights of children, 78.9 percents of the respondents responded positively. Similarly, in terms of health, children in conflict zone, juvenile justice, organisational activities, child rights protection and violation of child rights, they supported the role of newspapers with a huge majority.

According to the experts of each news group, the placement of the children news was based on its relevance and importance. They are mostly placed in the inside pages and rarely placed on front page. They found to follow up children news, if it is necessary. They also showed respect towards children, by using respectful language and maintaining the privacy of the victim.

In the content analysis of the newspapers, the study found that the frequency of Child Rights news/views were far from encouraging. The total number of news/views in the four dailies was 31,916, out of which only 1006 (3.15 %) news/views covered were pertaining to children. Among the four dailies, The Assam Tribune gave 3.74 percent of coverage whereas; Asamiya Pratidin contributed least coverage on child rights with only 2.76 percent. Among all the parameters on child rights issues, The Sentinel and The Assam Tribune gave more importance to child rights protection and least importance was given to children in conflict zone. Juvenile justice received highest coverage on Asamiya Pratidin whereas Amar Asom paid least importance to news/views on juvenile justice. The most prioritized issue was found to be on violation of Right to Education. It was revealed that issues like drug abuse; birth registration, children creativity and issue of disability were overlooked issues of all the four newspapers. The issue of International news on children was also overlooked. Contradictorily, issues on Health, child malnutrition, IMR and children in conflict zone were also found as overlooked issues on The Sentinel and The Assam Tribune. Again, issues like child right protection and sexual offence on children was overlooked by Asamiya Pratidin. The study found that coverage of issues like corporal punishment, malnutrition, IMR, female foeticide, infanticide and abandoned children were very scanty in Amar Asom.
On the basis of the findings, it was concluded that the newspapers have a fair coverage on children's issues. However, there is a contradiction in the study. The discussion on the findings showed that the data are mostly quoted against the activities reported from those of organizations that work with/for children. The overlooked issues may be the reciprocal result of this lack of investigative journalism in the publication. The other reason may be the lack of enough organizational activities for the children and exposure. Besides some overlooked issues of children the study showed the positive and fundamental importance of children and development in the print media. Overall the newspapers are doing good work in publishing and disseminating news/articles related to children issues but can be better if they take child rights as their agenda to increase the civic knowledge of the mass people of Assam and ensure secured future of our children.

Recommendations made were that, priority should be given to the overlooked children’s issues. Similarly there might be many other children issues and problems which are needed to be identified and acknowledged. There should be regular flow of news/analysis on children related issues rather than focussing on occasional news. It was also observed that the news/articles are mostly informative in nature for adult and less attention has been given to analytical aspect of concerned issue. Therefore Children related news/articles should be more analytical and solution oriented. Further the international news coverage should be more oriented to international developmental and creative activities that will serve as good examples to inspire the readers. There should be follow up regarding any activities of the organisations working for children to know its impact on the people. Disabled children and underprivileged children are also a part of our society. Therefore it is very important for the newspapers to pay special attention on such issues. To have a major impact on the mass people and to bring about desirable changes in the condition of the children, newspapers must give priority to child rights coverage. Last but not least, newspapers should cover much more news/news/articles on child rights issues. They need to cover child rights issues like, child rights to participation and decision-making, children as citizen of civic society, child rights to expression, child rights to recreation etc.