

## Op 6

### A Descriptive Study on ethical adherence on Reporting of Unnatural Deaths of Women and Girl Children in Three National Newspapers in Sri Lanka

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#### Background

Code of Ethics for Journalists in Sri Lanka gazetted in 1981, requires the journalists to respect the reputation and privacy of individuals. Unnatural deaths of women and girl children are often a subject of speculation especially when due to external causes such as injury/trauma or where the manner/circumstance of death is homicidal/suicidal/accidental or undetermined. **Objectives** To describe the newspaper coverage of unnatural deaths among Sri Lankan women and girl children, and objectively comprehend its adherence to the code of ethics for journalists.

#### Methodology

Headings and contents of newspaper articles reporting deaths of females over a period of six months (September 2016 to February 2017) in three national newspapers published in Sinhala, Tamil and English, were analyzed based on themes and subthemes.

#### Results

During the study period, out of 152 newspaper articles perused, 88 were Sinhala while 33 and 31 were in English and Tamil respectively. The analysis of circumstance/manner of death revealed 51% accidents, 30% homicides, 12% suicides and circumstance was undetermined in 7%. Articles in the English newspaper were factual and short while Sinhala and Tamil newspapers included more background information with opinions of concerned parties. Sensationalized headings or eye-catching phrases appeared in many articles. Moreover, information leading to identification of victims/alleged perpetrators was present in the published articles of all three papers. In many news reports on suicidal and homicidal circumstances, contributory factors were highlighted though investigations were not concluded. It was also noted that updates on some homicides have appeared as squeals to the initial news report as they progressed at the courts. There were hardly any messages for preventive measures.

#### Conclusion

The violation of Code of Ethics for journalist was apparent in many instances especially in Sinhala and Tamil newspapers. Reporting of female deaths in newspapers were more for creating sensation rather than prevention or reporting the incident.

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