

Reporting Child Deaths

The Role of the Media
by Glasgow Media Group

NSPCC 
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

This paper by the Glasgow Media Group is published by the NSPCC as a contribution to the debate on responses to child deaths following abuse and neglect.

The views expressed by the authors of the report are not necessarily those of the NSPCC.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

The NSPCC's mission is to end cruelty to children. The NSPCC FULL STOP Campaign will spearhead a host of new initiatives based on partnership with other organisations and mass involvement from the public.

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42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH
Tel: 020 7825 2500 Fax: 020 7825 2525
Email: info@nspec.org.uk
Website: www.nspec.org.uk

Registered charity number 216401

Director and Chief Executive: Mary Marsh

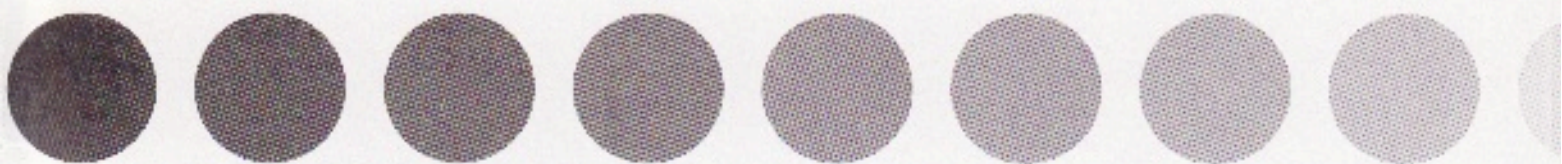
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The Role of the Media
by Glasgow Media Group

NSPCC TM
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Reporting Child Deaths

The Role of the Media
by Alison Smith (Group)

Reporting Child Deaths: the role of the media

Foreword

The NSPCC is pleased to be publishing this paper by the Glasgow Media Group as a contribution to the wider debate on how increased priority can be given to the subject of child deaths following child abuse and neglect, as an issue for social policy and professional practice. We first commissioned the Glasgow Media Group to undertake an analysis of media coverage of child abuse deaths for the first edition of our *Out of Sight* report (1999) and in revising that report we asked the Group to update their research to take account of more recent cases. We are publishing this updated version separately from *Out of Sight* (2001) because we believe that it has broader relevance not only to professionals directly concerned with child deaths, but to all those working in the media and in child protection.

We argue in *Out of Sight* that for a number of reasons the deaths of children following child abuse and neglect are kept out of sight. These include shortcomings in the recording of child deaths in official statistics, difficulties in "identifying" and "diagnosing" deaths following child abuse and neglect, the lack of a standard approach to investigating child deaths, shifting policies, and the absence of a national co-ordinated strategy for responding to these deaths. Another reason is the nature and extent of media reporting of these tragic cases. As a result of their analysis, the Glasgow Media Group argues that there has been a decline in media coverage of child deaths between 1980 and 2000. They argue that to reverse this decline there would need to be changes in the way in which information is supplied to the media by public and voluntary agencies.

If the aim is to have a more adequately informed debate about child killing then the media has to have information from public authorities. We recognise that there has to be a jump of trust to provide research and information to journalists which can be used as the basis for news stories. There also has to be improved education of both the media and the general public about the routine and widespread nature of violence against children. The NSPCC is committed to such an approach.

The media plays a key role in setting the climate of public debate on deaths following child abuse. One of the key challenges is to shift the media's perspective so that it actively promotes informed debate about child maltreatment and prevention, rather than reinforcing stereotypes about the nature of child abuse and child abusers. There is a clear role for the media to shape and to lead public opinion, rather than being led by it. It is an indictment of our society, as the Glasgow Media Group reports, that issues of class and race, and the 'attractiveness' of the victim

often influence whether a story is covered, and to what extent. The national media continue to accord disproportionate attention to "stranger danger." There is still much to be done to make the horrifying deaths of children at the hands of members of their own family visible to others.

We believe that it is possible to achieve a change in our culture so that children are valued and their needs effectively reported in the media. In some countries – Sweden, for example – the Commissioner for Children is not only a watchdog over professional practice but also a children's champion with the media. The NSPCC believes this is a key role for the Children's Commissioners that we wish to see appointed in each of the UK jurisdictions.

Consideration should be given to encouraging bodies responsible for media regulation to develop a media code of practice for reporting child deaths from abuse and neglect. This should be developed from the perspective of safeguarding the rights of children to be protected from abuse and neglect. Media organisations – in particular newspapers, but also the broadcast media – might also consider creating specialist children's correspondents. They would help to give children and young people in our society a public voice, and have a role in assessing the effects of local and national government initiatives on children as well as on adults.

Given the media's key role in shaping and influencing our culture and responses to social issues, the NSPCC is committed to taking these matters forward. We would very much welcome any comments* on the issues raised and recommendations made by the Glasgow Media Group in its paper *Reporting Child Deaths: the role of the media*.

Mary Marsh
Director and Chief Executive
NSPCC

Reference

NSPCC. (2001), 'Out of Sight - report on child deaths from abuse: 1973 to 2000', London: NSPCC.

* Comments on this paper should be sent to: Child Protection Awareness Group, NSPCC, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH. Email: infounit@nspcc.org.uk

Reporting Child Deaths: the role of the media

Glasgow Media Group

This study was originally undertaken by the Glasgow Media Group and published in *Out of Sight* by the NSPCC in 1999. It has now been updated with analysis of additional cases of child deaths reported in the media from the period 1999 – 2000 to co-incide with the publication of the second edition of *Out of Sight* (2001). It also includes a comparison of local and national press coverage of the issue.

Main Issues

1. There has been a sharp decline in the volume of media coverage of child deaths where the person responsible is a family member between the 1980s and 2000. This is replicated in all media in our sample including ITN and BBC TV news.
2. This is caused partly by changes in official procedures such as the reduction in public inquiries, partly by changes in the internal organisation of media institutions, such as the decline in the reporting of court cases, and partly by key changes in news values (what is seen as contemporary and 'interesting' news).
3. In interviews with journalists we identified a series of news values which could affect the volume and intensity of coverage in specific cases. These included the social class of victims and 'attractiveness'. Another major factor seen as compelling audience attention was that of 'stranger danger'. The most recent coverage shows the development of additional news angles, such as the 'cater turned killer' and also a more developed focus on the causes of violence, such as mental instability.
4. To reverse the decline in coverage would require changes in the manner in which information is supplied to the media. This should involve both agencies such as the NSPCC and public authorities.
5. There is normally much more extensive coverage at local than at a national level, except occasionally when a specific news value, such as 'stranger danger' or the horror of a particular event occasions an intense focus in national media.

Introduction, Sample and Method

This study examines the reporting of child deaths in the UK media between 1980 and 2000. Specifically it analyses the amount and type of coverage given to the deaths of children within the family (usually involving a parent and/or step-parent). It also seeks to identify the key factors which affect the volume of coverage in specific cases and to account for changes in

patterns of coverage over time.

Our study had three dimensions. The first was an analysis of the extent and type of coverage of child deaths. The sample was chosen to represent the four main TV news channels, together with both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.

We examined the coverage of fifteen selected cases of child death (five in the 1980s, five up to 1998 and five between 1999 and 2000) on BBC network news and ITN. We looked at the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror*.

The first ten cases chosen were identified on the basis that they were comparable in terms of the abuse the children were subjected to prior to their deaths. In all ten cases the death resulted in convictions for manslaughter or murder against the father/stepfather and sometimes also the mother. For the 1999 – 2000 sample our criteria changed slightly given the shorter time frame from which to select cases. These children had not all been abused prior to their deaths, but each case was concluded by July 2000 by either the conviction of the parent, or in one case their death.

There was no suggestion in the media coverage that strangers had been involved in any of these deaths. However given the extensive coverage which is given to the deaths of children at the hands of strangers, we will in fact discuss some such cases below. We will consider in particular the case of Sarah Payne in July 2000, because of the wide range of issues that it raised in relation to public awareness of danger from paedophiles.

[Appendix 1 provides details of the sample and method]

The cases were as follows:

- 1) **September 1984, Tyra Henry**, killed by father Andrew Neil, received life sentence at Central Criminal Court in London July 1985.
- 2) **December 1986, Karl McGoldrick**, killed by mother's partner Mark Knowles, who received life sentence in October 1987.
- 3) **December 1987, Liam Johnson**, killed by father Robert Johnson, received 15 years for manslaughter.
- 4) **December 1988, Sukina**, beaten to death by father, who received life sentence after trial in November 1989 at Bristol Crown Court.
- 5) **August/September 1989, Daniel Vergauwen**, killed by mother and stepfather Gerald Dowden. Dowden received life sentence after trial at Central Criminal Court in London in April/May 1990.
- 6) **November 1992, Leanne White**, killed by stepfather, Colin Sleate, and abused by mother, Tina White. Sleate received life sentence and mother 10 years at three week trial at Nottingham Crown Court November/December 1993.
- 7) **December 1995, Darren Lee Gleaves**, killed by father (also) Darren Gleaves, jailed for life for murder, November 1996. Mother admitted child cruelty by not phoning an ambulance sooner.

- 8) **January 1996, Baljinder Kullar**, killed by father, Harinder Kullar, who received life sentence at the Old Bailey in June 1997.
- 9) **November 1996, Sarah Adams**, (18 months old) from Sutton in Surrey, killed by mother Lavinia Adams, and/or stepfather, John Sherrington, jailed for five and seven years respectively for cruelty in December 1997.
- 10) **December 1997, Phillip Martin**, killed by stepfather William Ward (life for murder) and mother Rhana Martin (10 years for manslaughter) at end of July 1998.
- 11) **Chelsea Carlin, died 15.5.99**. Father, Phillip Carlin convicted of five counts of willfully ill-treating a child under 14, July 2000, resulting in a 10 year sentence. Mother Paula Pickering convicted of three counts of willful ill-treatment in June 2000.
- 12) **Christopher and Harry Clark, died 1996 and 1998**. Mother Sally Clark convicted of both murders November 1999. Appeal failed October 2000.
- 13) **Bradley George, died 12.11.99**. Father, Christopher Rees pled guilty to his murder in June 2000. Received life sentence.
- 14) **Oren and Lewis Jackson, died 1.7.00**. The bodies of both children were found at home, along with that of their mother Claire Jackson, who had hung herself.
- 15) **Katie McKenzie, died 4.3.00**. Mother Rosemary McKenzie who has learning difficulties, was found to have committed culpable homicide at a special hearing on 28.6.00.

The second element to our study was a series of interviews with journalists who have covered child deaths. At least half of the journalists we spoke to had long term experience of reporting cases of child death as far back as the 1970s and certainly as far back as the key cases of the early to mid 1980s. Our interviewees included general and specialist reporters, TV news producers and editors and freelance reporters, as follows:

Robin Ackroyd, reporter, former crime reporter, *Daily Express*

Harry Arnold, reporter, *Daily Mirror*.

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent, *The Guardian*.

Bea Campbell, freelance.

Eileen Fairweather, freelance.

David Fletcher, ex Social Services Correspondent, *Daily Telegraph*.

Sue English, former Deputy Editor *Channel Four News*

Joy Johnson, former Home Affairs producer, ITN

Richard Lindley, reporter, ITN

Heather Mills, former Home Affairs reporter the *Independent*, former Old Bailey Correspondent, *Daily Telegraph*, currently, *The Observer*

Jack O'Sullivan, formerly feature writer, currently Associate Editor, the *Independent*.

We were interested in the journalists' views on the amount and longevity of coverage, the type of coverage and the factors which led to child death stories being featured in the papers or on television. We asked them if they could identify any reasons why reporting in this area might have declined.

What were the journalists' news values? Were they more interested in killings by strangers or by persons known to the victim? Was reader interest the major criterion for coverage, or was there also a broader public interest? How did these factors interact? Which types of child deaths were most likely to gain coverage or, conversely, to remain unreported? Are there internal editorial priorities in this area?

We were also interested in how news resources were allocated inside news organisations. Are there a number of journalists in British newsrooms with a specialist interest in this area or are reporters assigned to cover it on an ad-hoc basis? To what extent have a shortage of resources and the growth of short-term contracts in newsrooms influenced coverage?

A further major strand of interest was in the sources which journalists used and – more crucially – the news events which were most likely to result in a story about child death being featured. How had changing institutional responses to child deaths affected coverage? What was the impact of the phasing out of public inquiries into child deaths and the changing legal constraints on reporting, such as the provisions in the Children Act, 1989 or the more general limitations of libel and contempt law? Finally, we asked about perceptions of public opinion in relation to child deaths and child abuse more generally.

The third element to our study involves a more detailed comparison of local and national press coverage of all 32 child deaths identified from our analysis of five weeks newspaper coverage from 1 June 2000 to 5 July 2000. We searched the names of the children and their parents in a sample of nearly 200 newspapers and journals. As well as comparing local and national coverage, we also compared cases which were broadly similar, but which received markedly different levels of coverage, indicating specific news values in operation.

Part One: Media Coverage of Child Deaths

Our analysis indicates that there has been a decline in coverage of child deaths from the 1980s to 2000. This is a pattern replicated in all media in our sample of cases and on BBC and ITN in the entire period of our analysis. This decline is in coverage of deaths where the person responsible was known to the child. As we will see this contrasts sharply with the intense focus on danger from strangers (particularly paedophiles) which occurs at the end of our sample period following the death of Sarah Payne.

Figure 1: Press and TV coverage of selected cases of child killing

	<i>Daily Mirror/ Sunday Mirror</i>	<i>Times/ Sunday Times</i>	<i>BBC TV News</i>	<i>ITN</i>
Tyra Henry	22	39	8	11
Karl McGoldrick	6	1	0	0
Liam Johnson	1	2	0	1
Sukina	1	7	2	2
Daniel Vergauwen	3	4	1	0
Leanne White	5	8	3	2
Darren Lee Gleaves	0	0	0	0
Baljinder Kullar	0	0	0	0

Sarah Adams	3	3	0	0
Phillip Martin	3	0	1	1
Chelsea Carlin	2	0	0	0
Christopher & Harry Clark	9	12	3	5
Lewis & Oren Jackson	1	1	1	1
Katie McKenzie	1	0	0	0
Bradley George	9	0	0	0
Total of 1980s coverage	33	53	12	14
Total of 1990s coverage to 1998	11	11	4	3
Total of 1999-2000 coverage	22	13	4	6

Of the fifteen cases we examined, the case which was covered the most was the earliest one, that of Tyra Henry (See Figure 1). Of the other cases only three were covered in all four media outlets, Sakina, Leanne White and Christopher and Harry Clark. There were also two cases, both in the 1990s, which were not covered at all on any of the media outlets we examined. This was not because information about these cases was unavailable since both were reported elsewhere. The case of Darren Lee Gleaves was reported extensively in the *Northern Echo* and on the BBC's regional news programme *Look North*, while the case of Baljinder Kullar, who was killed by her father, was reported in the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Yorkshire Post*. Nevertheless, her death received the least coverage of any of the fifteen cases: it was not reported on BBC regional news and the only mention in the British national press was a short piece in the 'News in brief' section of the *Guardian*.

While the figures for 1999 – 2000 indicate a slight reduction in the rate of decline in coverage by ITN and *The Times/Sunday Times*, their coverage focused on the case of the Clark brothers, as to a lesser extent did the BBC and *The Mirror/Sunday Mirror*. It should also be noted that three of the most recent cases were only covered by the *Mirror*. Without this coverage by the *Mirror*, the decline in coverage by media outlets as a whole would have been more marked. While coverage of the deaths of Christopher and Harry Clark was considerably less than in the case of Tyra Henry in the 1980s, it still received notably more attention than any of the other cases in the most recent sample.

The second part of our study of coverage involved examining the profile of child deaths on BBC and ITN television news. We did this in order to establish whether the coverage of the cases we had chosen for analysis in greater depth was representative of broader trends.

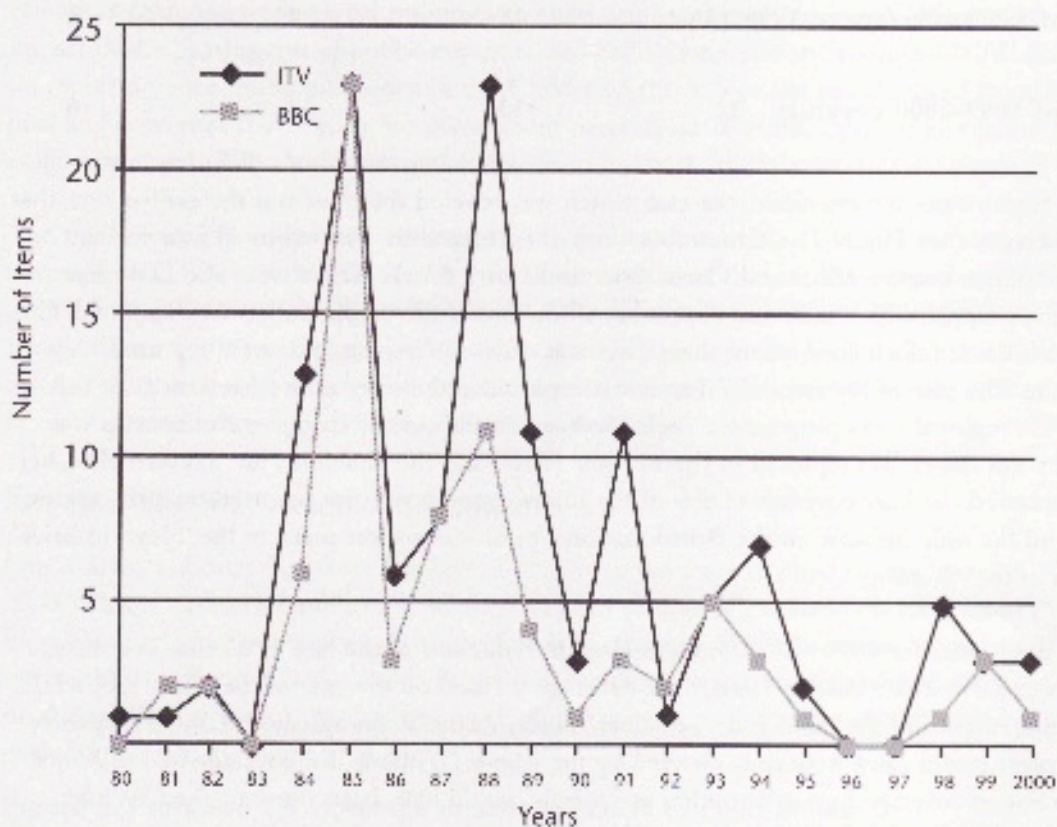
As can be seen from Figure 2, television network news coverage of child deaths rose dramatically in the mid 1980s. The key cases which caused this increase were the deaths of Tyra Henry (1984) and Jasmine Beckford (1985). Reporting dropped off in 1986 before rising dramatically

¹ Not including Channel 5 since it does not span the period of the sample. We did not attempt to include Sky News for the same reason.

again in 1987-98. The cases in this period which gained the largest amount of coverage were the deaths of Kimberly Carlile (1986) and Doreen Aston (1988).

From 1989-1990 television news never again devoted so much sustained attention to the deaths of children at the hands of their families. Furthermore, the biggest peaks of coverage tended to be associated largely with single cases and a large number of child deaths received either no coverage or appeared on the news for no more than a single day. This continuing decline in coverage is apparent throughout the twenty year period we studied. The reduced rate of decline in coverage by ITN in the last year is due to reporting on the case of Sally Clark. However, the overall pattern matches the decline seen above in our analysis of specific cases.

Figure 2: ITN and BBC network television news coverage of child deaths, 1980-2000



When we spoke to journalists about the drop in coverage some seemed unaware that it had happened. However, many of the journalists we spoke to were able to identify some of the reasons why the coverage of child deaths declined and why it varied so much from case to case.

Part Two: Explaining the Variety of Coverage

The reasons for the wide variations in amount and duration of coverage are complex. In this section we examine firstly the news events such as court cases, inquiries, police press conferences and statements which played a role in boosting or undermining news interest in specific cases. In the second part of this section we examine how the internal priorities of news organisations, such as news values and editorial priorities affect the coverage of specific cases. Both sections are based on our research and interviews with journalists and our analysis of press and television coverage over the twenty year period.

1. The importance of 'news events' in boosting coverage

(i) The inquiry

The main source for reporting of these deaths is the inquiry, whether public or internal. Where the trial was held in public, this was a key reason for coverage being extended. The most significant example of this in our sample of specific cases, was that of Tyra Henry, which received considerably more coverage than the others. In the more general sample of television news, the cases with the most sustained coverage tended to be the subject of public inquiries (e.g. Jasmine Beckford and Kimberley Carlile).

The journalists we spoke to agreed that inquiries were crucial news pegs on which to hang coverage of child deaths. Public inquiries in particular provided colour in the form of people to quote and witnesses to describe. Together with court cases, they also removed some of the legal constraints such as libel and contempt of court.

In seven of the first cases, some form of inquiry was held into the involvement of the agencies involved. In most cases, inquiries did raise concerns about professional practice, and made prescriptions for future management of child protection cases. In the case of Karl McGoldrick, the death of the child and the prosecution of the parents were not covered at all even though information was available in the form of Press Association and other reports of the case. However, in response to the independent inquiry into social services' handling of the McGoldrick case, the *Mirror* ran two full pages, including a full front page story headed 'How could THIS happen' and the *Times* headline stated 'Care staff did too little'. *The Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Independent* reported the case in similar terms. ITN and BBC network news did not cover the case at all.

(ii) The Court Case

A second key source of information leading the coverage of child killings was the court case. The case of Claire Jackson, who killed her two sons before hanging herself, clearly did not involve a court case. In all but two of the remaining fourteen cases, the trials were covered to at least a limited extent.

In 11 of the 14 cases, there was no coverage of the death in the national media.² The main exception to this is Tyra Henry whose death was covered in the media because she was left badly beaten and abused at Guys Hospital, London. She had been left there by her aunt with a letter giving her a false name. As a result, the police became involved and issued a statement requesting that the mother get in contact with them. Bradley George's death, which was particularly violent, was reported within two days in the *Sunday Mirror*, *Sunday Telegraph* and *Sunday People*. Finally, Katie McKenzie's death was reported by the *Daily Mail*.

The procedures adopted by the police is a key reason why the deaths of children at the hands of strangers get markedly more coverage than killings of children by their parents. As David Brindle of the *Guardian* put it:

² In the regional media the death of Phillip Martin did receive some coverage because he died as he was being taken to hospital and the police consequently became involved. (*Look North*, 8 December 1997)

"The police sometimes don't even disclose when it's a domestic, whereas sometimes when it's a 'stranger' offence, of course you're straight into press conferences and the tepee coming at you."

2 News Values

(i) Blame the social workers

Press coverage tended to peak when an inquiry report was published. Inquiry reports focused in part on the level of competence of any agencies involved with the family prior to the child's death. We found that where the report was critical of social workers, it was more likely to be covered. With Karl McGoldrick, the headlines focused largely on the failings of social work staff. The *Daily Mail* had the headline 'Social workers ignore all the warnings' and on the same day, a headline in the *Mirror* stated '17 Blunders that Killed Little Karl - Social workers "duped" by co's evil murderer'. However, the report of the inquiry specifically referred to failures by doctors, courts, police and health workers as well as social workers. These other professions were not so prominently pilloried.

There are two cases where the inquiry reports were less critical of the professionals involved – yet these reports were not covered in some of the newspapers. The *Daily Mirror*, for instance, completely ignored the case of Liam Johnson, while both the *Mirror* and the *Times* did not cover the case of Sukina, in which the report stated: 'It was not the social workers, health visitors, doctors or nurses who were responsible for Sukina's death. She was killed by her father.'

(ii) Stranger danger

The most covered cases of child killings within the family in the past two decades are those where it was initially assumed that the child had been killed by a stranger. While none of these cases are included in the current sample, it is worth considering some of them here. Because of the 'stranger' element, press conferences were organised by the police almost immediately, which meant that they were very quickly picked up in the news. It subsequently emerged in most, but not all cases that each child had in fact been killed by a parent, step-parent or foster parent. This unexpected development in each case appears to have resulted in continuing coverage.

It is not simply the existence of news events such as police press conferences and footage of the hunt for the missing child which secured more coverage for killings such as this. The news events are important, but inside the newsroom, deaths at the hand of a stranger are regarded as much more newsworthy. Most of the journalists we spoke to said that murder by a stranger was of more interest to their readers.

"People are not comfortable with the reality of the fact that... overwhelmingly most abuse, most homicides are committed by family." (David Brindle)

And all of the journalists we spoke to agreed that murder by a stranger was more likely to get in the media in the first place.

"Murder by a stranger gets press interest because it highlights people's fears. I suppose it's the bogeyman... the idea of a paedophile lurking around the playground." (Robin Ackroyd)

Media case studies: Rikki Neave and Billie-Jo Jenkins

The murders of Rikki Neave and Billie-Jo Jenkins, received sustained coverage, in the first instance because they were assumed to have been killed by a stranger. This is because of the news events created by institutional responses to the deaths (the launch of murder inquiries and the police press conference in which distraught parents appeal for information) and the news room judgement that murder by a stranger has a higher news value. But there were also other unusual elements to these stories which further sustained news coverage.

Rikki Neave was a six year old boy, whose body was found in a woodland area near the family home in Peterborough in November 1994. Following the initial press conference, it was almost two months before the mother was arrested. The trial cleared Ruth Neave of murder, but she was jailed for cruelty. The subsequent Social Services Inspectorate report criticised the social work department, where managers accepted they had focused too hard on maintaining the family.

Other than the initial suspicion of killing by a stranger, the subsequent discovery of family involvement, and the later criticism of the social services department, there were additional 'unusual' factors. These were that the mother was solely responsible for killing the child, and secondly the references which were made to – subsequently unproven – satanic rituals.

The case of Billie-Jo Jenkins, had the most intense and long running coverage of any in the past two decades. This was a girl of 13, whose body was found at the back of the family house on 15 February 1997. The foster father Sion Jenkins was arrested on 24 February, then re-arrested and charged in March. It emerged during his trial, that he had forged qualifications to obtain his post as headmaster. He was convicted of murder in July 1998. He subsequently appealed his conviction, in January 1999. His case was featured in the *Trial and Error* series which attempted to highlight evidence questioning his guilt. His appeal was thrown out in December 1999. The following comment from Richard Lindley summarises some key issues in this case:

"Several things made that case news. First, here is a pillar of society - he turned out to be a fraud, but he was a deputy headmaster of a secondary school, and he has taken a child that is not his, into his care, his protection. Indeed, he was in the process of adopting her. I think it was particularly shocking to the public mind that someone who's seen to be such a straight arrow, who's seen to be doing everything with the best of intentions - might have killed her, and indeed the jury decided he had."

Race, class, 'attractiveness' and 'horror' in news values

Other factors raised in interviews with journalists in relation to the reporting of child deaths included the use of photos, and the issues of race, class and 'attractiveness'.

"They [the news desk] love photos, even if it's scabby little working class kids." (anonymous reporter)

But photographs are more likely to be used if the subject is deemed to be attractive:

"When you've got a victim of a crime, whether a child or an adult, they're going to be on the front page if they're pretty." (anonymous reporter)

The Tyra Henry story broke initially after she was left injured in hospital. A key reason for her death being covered was the availability of photos which were taken at the invitation of the police and medical staff.

Photos were used more in the cases of Tyra Henry and Sukina, both particularly photogenic children, than in many of the other cases. The case which has received most coverage of all involved Billie-Jo Jenkins, a very photogenic teenage girl.

Race

The journalists we spoke to conceded that the race/ethnicity of the victim and/or perpetrator could influence coverage. One of our interviewees told us unattributably about previous experience:

"It was an unwritten policy, but if you had say two Asian children dying in a house fire - it might have got on the front page. It would if they were white children, pretty much depending on what was on the newslist that day. It's not newspapers being racist, it's them reflecting what the public thinks. It's a very difficult and kind of tabloid area that one." (anonymous reporter)

In this case, the fact of being Asian might lead to less coverage. However, if a black person is to be identified as a criminal, then this might lead to more prominent coverage. The use of photographs of black criminals was also identified by this reporter as an issue:

"It's very difficult to overly state in words the race or the colour. What you're doing is telling your readers that it is a black person by using a photograph, because it's part of the picture." (anonymous reporter)

This last comment is relevant to our sample, with reference to the case of Tyra Henry, who was killed by her black father, Andrew Neil, who was allegedly nicknamed the 'Cannibal Kid' as a result of a violent reputation in his neighbourhood. On 26 July 1985, the *Express* published a particularly large photograph of Neil, with the headline "Cannibal Kid" gets life for murder of little Tyra. Photos of the father of Sukina were also extensively used in the press. He was also the subject of reporting which compared him to an animal: 'evil beast' (*Daily Mirror*). No white parent was described in such terms.

Class

Class was mentioned by some of the journalists as being a factor in whether stories get into the news. Here the importance of attracting the attention of the 'middle classes' was raised:

"The angle I was trying to sell it on was two kids had killed themselves, and they were both middle class... That nearly got the story in because it meant middle class articulate parents, somebody like us would be the thinking. [In another case] a drugs story - 15 year old boy, good middle class family, high achiever at school, all the predictions for success, and that's when the [news desk] culture goes oh my god the drugs thing is getting to our kids too." (Eileen Fairweather)

Class assumptions can also have a bearing on attitudes to child abuse, which may impact on reporting judgements:

"I know there's a great effort always to tell me that child cruelty goes on in the very best middle class homes, but I don't actually believe it." (Richard Lindley)

Squeamishness

In discussing the reporting of child deaths, several journalists mentioned a reluctance to cover cases which are particularly upsetting, either to themselves or because of the potential to cause the readers distress.

"The media shy away from these things - we can't upset people over their breakfast egg... I don't think we should either." (Robin Ackroyd)

"I do recall Maria Colwell [killed in 1974] - I became involved... and I found it so distressing, because soon after I became a father. I found it so distressing that it's the one story I asked not to do if I can help it. I don't turn down murders - I've been in Belfast." (Harry Arnold)

Horror

By contrast it was clear that some of the cases were featured exactly because of the appalling nature of the acts involved. Examples of this, including the case of Bradley George, will be discussed in more detail in our comparison of local and national coverage.

Development of new views

The most recent coverage of child deaths (from our sample of news in 2000) shows an intense focus on some traditional news values, but also the emergence and growth of some relatively new ones. Predominant new themes include the re-definition of cot deaths (where a second cot death in a family has resulted in the babies' deaths being redefined as murder. Secondly, we found a more developed focus on the causes of violence, particularly mental instability. Thirdly, the 'carer' who may be a killer theme was covered extensively in June 2000 in press and television, with the case of a professional who was alleged to have killed numerous children in her care. Finally although 'stranger danger' featured in the 1990 - 1998 sample, it reached an unprecedented level of coverage with the case of Sarah Payne and its aftermath in the focus on the issue of paedophilia in the community.

Editorial Policy

The ability to get pieces in the press and onto TV depends to some extent on the personal interests and editorial priorities of the media. The editorial preoccupations of some tabloids were said to militate against covering child abuse or death within the family.

"Tabloids, particularly those that present themselves as strong supporters of the family, do not want to flag up that what goes on inside families is not always very nice. It much more suits their view of the world to write about risks from paedophiles than about the reality that children are much more likely to be abused by their own family." (David Brindle)

But the broadsheets can also be resistant. Beatrix Campbell told us:

"My commissioning editor said we don't want Bea Campbell banging on about child abuse. As soon as you develop expertise on the politics of childhood, then that expertise works against you. You are regarded as a zealot then... I'm freelance, but I've never been invited by the paper I primarily work for in a pro active way - never - to write about child death or a child abuse case." (Beatrix Campbell).

We have argued that there are a variety of factors both internal and external which influence the various ways in which child deaths are covered. But we also need to explain the historical dimension to this.

Part Three: Why has Media Coverage declined?

As before, the decline in coverage can be explained in terms of internal and external factors. In particular changes in the legal context and institutional and agency response to child deaths have interacted with changes in the economic and regulatory context of news production. These factors have together produced a change in the structure of news attention which has undermined interest in the reporting of child deaths.

(i) External factors: fewer sources, more restrictions

One of the key changes which has led to a decline in the reporting of child deaths has been the decline of public inquiries in this area to be replaced by internal agency reviews. This seems to have occurred following the revision of the Department of Health's *Working Together* document in 1991. Most of the journalists we spoke to did not seem to be aware that public inquiries had been phased out, even those who were particularly well informed about policy matters. However, some did see this as a factor in the declining coverage:

"There was this huge explosion of interest around the time of Tyra Henry, Kimberley Carlisle and all of that. Then I think society felt that's enough of those kinds of navel gazing inquiries and the world moves on a bit. So the focus moves off." (anonymous reporter)

In addition one journalist specifically referred to the Children Act as creating considerable difficulties in reporting in this area.

"I personally think the whole Children Act thing is a disaster, in that it's made it impossible to report cases involving children. Except under the most extraordinary circumstances, you can't name children... The whole thing is an absolute minefield." (Richard Lindley)

The provisions governing the naming of children have clearly been drawn up with the objective of protecting the interests of the child. Comments from journalists though indicate that child deaths are much less likely to be reported extensively. A further, indirect, legal factor cited by some journalists was the increased risk of litigation:

"We're increasingly wary of litigation if we start casting aspersions on individuals. Certainly the readiness with which... the police federation will sue - if we imply so much as... the slightest error of judgement on their part, on the part of named officers, we get a writ automatically. That kind of culture is flowing over into other agencies too." (David Brindle)

The decline of public inquiries is one key factor in the decline of coverage. But any news event still has to make it through the editorial process to be news. The next section examines how news values and editorial priorities have changed in recent years.

(ii) Internal factors: fewer resources, more competition

The recent history of the UK press and television is one of intensified competition for audience

share and of declining news gathering resources. This has marked consequences for the reporting of all sorts of important social issues, unless they are consistently advocated by well resourced interest groups, particularly corporations and governments. The decline in news resources and the increasing reliance on features, lifestyle coverage and controversy have affected the amount of coverage of child deaths and the way in which they are covered. Joy Johnson was one of the first home affairs producers appointed in UK TV news in the 1980s at ITN. She compares her experience then with the contemporary picture:

"It's difficult... - multi skilling, deskilling - the whole journalistic practice that's going on at the moment, where there doesn't seem to be the time to stay with a story. The technology has moved on, the news cycle has got much faster... Personnel keep changing because of short term contracts. I used stand on doorsteps for hours on end. That would not happen now unless it was a very big story."

Such pressures impact on the building of specialisms and a network of contacts in the news room and also on the ability of journalists to spend a significant amount of time investigating a story:

"It's resources... traditional foraging for news has been cut and cut and cut... We don't, to be honest, get out of our offices very much." (David Brindle)

One key consequence of the decline in news resources is the decline in court reporting: there are now no Old Bailey correspondents on the national press. As David Brindle comments:

"We may never, never find out about a child death, where it's within the family. Because the first we may ordinarily stumble across it is in the courts. If they're not being covered, then we're not going to get that either."

The decline in court reporting in the national media has increased the dependence of journalists on the regional media and on general or regional reporters rather than specialists:

"National newspapers are totally dependent on local journalists sending in those sorts of stories." (David Fletcher)

"If it's Scotland, then the London media will be less interested. If it's Newcastle, they'll send a regional reporter, they won't send a specialist reporter." (Beatrix Campbell)

The decline of child deaths caused by family members as an issue for the media has been the result of changes in the structure of the news agenda. The interaction of external and internal factors outlined above have been important here and have combined to cause the rise and fall of child deaths as a public issue. We give an outline account of that process in the next section.

Part Four: Child Deaths as a Social Issue

There has been a complex interaction between child care policy, public inquiries and the reporting of child deaths and abuse in the past two decades. The key problem with media reporting of these issues is that it is extremely dependent on news events and these are seen through the filter of news values which are often inimical to sustained or thorough debate. Beatrix Campbell argued that one of the key issues which is not systematically addressed is the broader policy question about how as a society we should deal with the abuse of children:

"In the last 10 years there's been terrific turmoil about what happens to children - you can identify definite distinct phases. From the mid-80s when the statutory services were given a very clear instruction - thou shalt not not intervene.... they had to take action and they had to consult the children... By the 90s the DoH (Department of Health) adapted a position [which] advocated a less investigative report... and a switch of resources away from investigations of abuse towards family support... If you adopted an approach (in the case of child abuse) which prioritised preserving that family, rather than protecting the children, then there could be dire outcomes for the children. I don't think that the media engages with the deeper professional and political issues around what exactly is the difference between these two different approaches."

The Role of Inquiries

The first relevant inquiry was published in 1974, and concerned the death of Maria Colwell, who was killed brutally by her stepfather, despite various agencies being involved prior to her death. As QC Allan Levy has commented: 'Co-ordination of agencies and the failures in respect of it were to become and remain a familiar theme of inquiry reports.' More than 25 further inquiries were held in the period up to the mid-80s. Then, three inquiries into the deaths of Jasmine Beckford, Tyrone Henry and Kimberley Carlisle had a lasting impact on the professions. As Levy points out: 'The common thread running through each case was that each child had died at the hands of their parents or caretakers from severe physical abuse and neglect and the professionals had failed to intervene.' The cases above led to the rise of child abuse as a social issue. They were the cases which journalists spontaneously recalled in interview. Veteran reporter, David Fletcher recalls:

"I've been covering child abuse over 20 years - I remember the NSPCC giving press conferences and talking about child abuse, and everybody was amazed and aghast, and didn't really believe it happened. It was something that very much came out of the closet. Initially there was certainly a huge increase...in the reporting of those cases."

Following the big cases of the 1980s there were no more public inquiries into individual child deaths to provide news pegs on which to hang the story. This was crucial to the decline of interest in news rooms. Journalists regarded the story as 'old news':

"I think it's not on any more is because it's not as new and dramatic. Once the story becomes news, it has momentum and then all of a sudden it drops off." (Joy Johnson)

In addition, many journalists felt the lessons from public inquiries into child deaths had already been learned. As David Brindle put it:

"There's a consensus that those inquiries were badly needed, because we hadn't got it right in terms of child protection, and we needed to go through that learning experience. Although the media will still go hunting for individuals to blame for not doing their job properly. We don't feel that as a society there are any more lessons to learn in the way the job ought to be gone about."

We can see here the problem that news is defined as dealing with institutional responses to issues which are problems in society. If the institutional response is adequate then

there is in effect no issue, even if children continue to be killed.

Shift of focus to sexual abuse

As coverage of child deaths declined in the late 1980s, media attention shifted to the sexual abuse of children. This too was the result of the interaction of news values and institutional responses. The comprehensive report of the Cleveland Inquiry was published in 1988. Extensive coverage highlighted the subject of sexual abuse of children by their families. Scarcely had the dust settled when there were calls for another inquiry into allegations of abuse in Orkney which was published in 1993. The initial focus here was on sexual abuse of children, with allegations of ritual abuse. Later the focus moved onto allegations of over-zealous intervention by agencies such as social work and the police. Reporting of the earlier inquiries focused very much on condemning social workers and other professionals for doing too little too late, but the reporting of Cleveland and Orkney condemned social workers and other agencies for doing too much too early. This led to a new type of reporting about social work practice. Far from doing too little, they were now accused of doing too much:

"The other bogeyman apart from the stranger killer, is the social worker who comes along and takes your children away without any evidence, or little evidence." (Robin Ackroyd)

The rise of child sexual abuse as a public issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s was also followed by a decline in media attention as new issues preoccupied policy makers in agencies and government as well as in the news rooms. Child abuse in children's homes led to public inquiries in the 1990s such as the 1990 'pindown' inquiry, into sexual abuse in Leicestershire children's homes and the inquiry into child abuse in North Wales children's homes. More recently there has been a heightened attention to the issue of paedophilia. Eileen Fairweather described to us the shifts she has encountered with regard to editorial policies on reporting paedophilia:

"When I started writing on paedophilia in 1991 it was very hard to get stories about it in the paper. Now it's a hot subject. It's about distancing - we don't want it to be people like us. But at least it's on the agenda."

This comment was made before the tragic case of Sarah Payne which, as will be discussed, brought together very sharply the issues of paedophilia and child death – but with a strong focus on the news angle of 'stranger danger'.

Part Five: Comparison of local and national press coverage

This analysis involves a comparison of local and national press coverage of all child deaths at the hands of family members, which appeared in the five week period from the first of June to 5 July 2000. We included all cases in a batch of press reports covering these dates, as supplied to us by a cuttings agency. We also searched the Lexis Nexis website for all coverage of these cases dating back to 1997. There are 32 children here, involving 26 families and including six pairs of siblings. The following table allows comparison of local and national newspaper coverage for each case.

Child name	Local	National	Child name	Local	National
Anthony brothers	21	3	Aidan Green	15	3
Rebecca Brayford	2	0	Baby Hargreaves	0	0
Chelsea Brown	4	0	Alanis Holland	15	0
Denek Campbell	17	10	Jackson boys	3	9
Jack Carding	16	2	Nihaal Kapde	2	0
Chelsea Carlin	6	2	George Kelly	10	0
Katie Cave	12	2	Katie McKenzie	18	4
Clark brothers	78	63	Corey Raine	5	0
Olivia Cordice	0	0	Chloe Snee	4	0
Emma Jade Dyson	3	2	Woods babies	0	0
Ferris children	16	4	Lauren Wright	4	0
Cory Francies	0	0	Zaidi children	13	6
Bradley George	6	11			
Daniel Gosling	1	4	TOTALS	271	125

Figure 3: Local versus national coverage of 32 child deaths

It is clear that child killings by family members generate more local than national newspaper coverage overall. Indeed, twelve cases were covered only by local newspapers. These include the cases of Olivia Cordice, Cory Francies, Baby Hargreaves and the Woods babies, which we established from other sources (see Appendix 1).

Some local newspaper coverage involved local papers covering stories in their own area. One example of this is the case of Alanis Holland, which was only covered by Leicester and Derby papers. However, there were many instances where local papers reported on child deaths from other parts of the country. This was true of the case of the Zaidi children. Saba and Zeeshan Zaidi were killed along with their mother Shazia in their home on 19 March 2000. The children's father was subsequently charged with their murder. While the family lived in Berkshire, the story was reported in local papers in Newcastle, Coventry, Bristol, Birmingham, Belfast and Glasgow, a total of 13 times as compared with only six in the national papers.

Of all the 32 children, Chelsea Carlin most closely resembles the cases which received more media attention in the 1980s. She had been neglected and abused by both parents over many weeks prior to her death, and had suffered a violent death at the hands of her father. Yet her fate generated very little interest in the press and none at all on television. In contrast to this, Bradley George's case was the second most covered by national newspapers, which reported the story more than local papers. Bradley George was killed at the age of eight weeks by his father Christopher Rees. Bradley's mother Samantha George had left Rees, who was violent towards her, and moved to a refuge before the baby's birth in September 1999. Shortly after Bradley was born, the mother moved into a new house. Rees broke into her home on November 13th, 1999. After viciously assaulting Samantha, he turned to Bradley whom he threw against a wall. It is the horrific nature of the attack on the baby which appears to account for the increased reporting in this case, as indicated by the following headline:

"Monster: The Father of this Eight Week old Baby used him as a club to beat his mother."
(Daily Mirror, 17.6.00)

We also found that the presentation of stories could be affected by the influence of a combination of news values. We compared three stories where two sudden infant deaths had occurred in one family. The stories relate to the re-definition of cot deaths. This news angle led to the initial coverage, but we also found that the level of coverage was affected by other factors such as the class of the family involved.

Redefined Cot Death Stories

In each of the three cases in this category, it was the second cot death within a family which resulted in investigations of the deaths of both babies. While the three cases were at different legal stages in June 2000, the level of media interest shown varied considerably.

The case covered least was that of the Woods/Hansen family, which was still at the inquest stage of police investigation. Since the death of Toby Woods in September 1999, police had been investigating his death and that of baby Ashley who had earlier been born to parents Robert Woods and Donna Hansen. Mr. Woods had told a previous hearing that he thought the police were deliberately delaying matters to await the result of another related case - Sally Clark's appeal. This story was only reported in one short article (*Leicestershire Evening Telegraph*, 28.6.00) which stated that an inquest into the death of Toby Woods had been 'adjourned again' until July 2000.

The second case was Donna Anthony who was convicted of murdering her two babies in November 1998, and sentenced to two life sentences. Her daughter Jordan died on 1.2.96 at the age of eleven months. It was the subsequent death of her son Michael (4 months) on 20.3.97, which resulted in a police investigation. Anthony was found to have killed both babies by smothering them. Her appeal against her convictions was dismissed by the Court of Appeal in London on 29.6.00. Fresh medical evidence - suggesting that she suffered from Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy - was accepted as credible by appeal judges. However, it was considered to be inconclusive as to whether her abnormality of mind diminished her responsibility for her actions to the extent that her convictions should be reduced to manslaughter. This story was covered by local papers on a total of 21 occasions. Seven reports appeared in the early stages of charges being brought and a decision made to go to trial. A further ten articles were published during the trial, and four local papers reported the appeal being rejected. Three national papers reported the story only once, at the time of the trial - *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*.

The third case was Sally Clark, who was convicted of murdering her two children, one year after Donna Anthony, in November 1999. Eleven week old Christopher died on 13.12.96 and eight week old Harry died on 26.1.98. Clark launched an appeal against her conviction in July 2000. The level of media interest and support for her appeal stands in marked contrast to Donna Anthony's case. We counted a total of 78 local stories and 63 national stories, with the majority of both being published at the time of the trial and conviction, in October and November 1999. In July 2000, there were 7 local and 11 national reports concerning Clark's appeal on the basis of doubts over medical evidence. The case also featured in Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme (27.4.00), which questioned the statistical significance of two cot deaths occurring in the same family. The fact that Sally Clark was a corporate solicitor featured in most of the press reports, including mentions of solicitor or lawyer in 49 headlines:

"Solicitor bailed" (*The Times* 27.8.99, p.16)

"Solicitor mum accused of murdering her children; 'smothered and shaken'
(*The Mirror* 13.10.99, p.17)

"Solicitor Accused of Killing Baby Sons: Both Showed Signs of Abuse Court Told"
(*Birmingham Evening Mail* 13.10.99, p.5)

Many references were also made to the fact that her husband was a solicitor and her father a senior police officer, and both family members were frequently quoted and interviewed around the time of the initial appeal hearing. Our analysis has shown that this case was covered most of the five cases selected for 1999 – 2000, particularly by *The Times*, with twelve articles. Indeed, the case attracted more national newspaper coverage than the other 50 child deaths in our 1999 – 2000 sample. One journalist writing for the *Independent* (14.11.99, p.20) highlighted the level of coverage the case attracted:

"The Clark case has attracted particular attention, partly because of the double death, but also because of the ostentatiously affluent background of the family. Mrs Clark, 35, and her husband Stephen are both solicitors they live in a prosperous and expensive suburb, they employed a nanny."

Whether the Clark case goes on to a successful appeal or not, coverage of the case already stands in contrast to the attention paid to the Anthony and Woods/Hansen families, and it would seem from the headlines alone that class is a key factor. Given that the Anthony and Clark stories are among the three most reported cases in the 1999-2000 sample, it seems clear that redefined cot deaths are a new and currently well reported news angle. However, the second point here is that coverage is affected by other news values, such as class, in the case of Sally Clark. It is worth noting that the two cases from the overall sample of 15 which generated television documentaries questioning standards of evidence were the two wealthiest middle class perpetrators – Sally Clark the corporate solicitor and as discussed in the earlier sample, Sion Jenkins, the assistant headmaster.

Mitigating Circumstances as a News Value

There were five cases, each involving the mother of the child or children, where the parent suffered, or in one case was deemed to have suffered, from a mental illness, and/or learning difficulties. Three of these were among the five most covered cases in our 1999 – 2000 sample.

First, Derek Campbell was the second most covered case in our sample. Six-year-old Derek was thrown by his mother Alison Campbell from the high rise flat where they lived, in October 1999. The case was covered sympathetically by most newspapers, with references to Campbell's difficult life, her history of alcohol and drug abuse and her tendency to depression. Campbell's plea to a reduced charge of culpable homicide was accepted on the basis that her responsibility for her actions was diminished at the time. Perhaps an additional reason for the high level of coverage of this case was the horrific nature of Derek's death. Several reports mentioned the fact that Derek was heard to shout 'Mum don't do that' before she dropped him to his death. Six of the ten national newspaper reports on this case were published by the *Daily Mail*.

There were similarities between the next two most covered cases. In the first, Julie Ferris killed her two babies by smothering them – first Hayley in 1993 and then Brandon in 1998. While this case shares features with the redefined cot death cases above, most of the reporting focused on the limitations of the mother, and the failure of the health service to recognise the risk to the

babies. Julie Ferris was described as having a mental age of six, as well as a history of mental illness. She was deemed mentally unfit to take part in a trial and found to be responsible for her babies' deaths in June 2000. *The Mail*, the *Express* and the *Telegraph* covered the story. Secondly, Rosemary McKenzie smothered her daughter (subsequently named Katie) at birth. Again deemed unable to stand trial, with a mental age of nine, McKenzie was found to have committed culpable homicide in June 2000. Eight reports questioned the lack of social work involvement in the case. Of the four national newspaper reports on the McKenzie story, three were published by the *Daily Mail* and the fourth by the *Mirror*.

The fourth case in this section is that of two year old George Kelly who was killed in March 1999 by his mother Lucy Kelly. Diagnosed as having a borderline personality disorder and depression, she admitted manslaughter due to diminished responsibility. She received a three year probation order. She was said to have drowned her son because she been terrified that George's father would harm or kill him. While the case failed to generate any national newspaper coverage, six of the ten local newspaper reports highlighted the mother's fears:

"Tormented Mother Drowned Son in Bath." (*Birmingham Post* 9.5.00)

"Troubled Mother Free After Killing her son" (*Western Daily Press* 9.5.00)

The final case in this section is that of the Jackson brothers – Oren (6) and Lewis (2). The brothers were killed by their mother Claire on the 1st of July this year. She then hung herself the same day. Newspaper reports emphasised that Ms Jackson had celebrated her 28th birthday with her sons the week before and that the local community was shocked by this unexpected event. Many of the reports included smiling photographs of the mother and two boys. There were an unusually high number of national newspaper reports on this case the following day, which was a Sunday.

Each of these five cases involved a mother who was viewed as being in distress. Reporting on the first four cases involved clear references to mental illness. In the two cases where learning difficulties also featured (Julie Ferris and Rosemary McKenzie) questions were asked about the failure of agencies to monitor the children born to mothers described as having mental ages of six and nine respectively. In the case of Claire Jackson, where there was no known history of mental illness, reporting of the few facts known in this tragic case implied serious levels of parental distress underlying the deaths in this family.

The Carer Turned Killer?

During the five week period on which this sample is based, a 47-year-old nurse was at the centre of claims that 18 terminally ill children between the ages of eight weeks and 17 years had received lethal doses of medication. The story was reported initially in *The Sun* newspaper, which published under the headline "Nurse is probed over 18 child deaths". The story was picked up by local papers and television news on 22 June 2000 and by national press the following day.

Newspaper and television reports quickly linked this investigation with the horrific case of Beverly Allitt, a 21-year-old nurse who worked in Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital in the early 90s. It was discovered that several children who had died in the hospital had been injected with insulin or other drugs. Allitt was ultimately convicted on four counts of murder

and nine counts of attempted murder on 28 May 1993, having been diagnosed as an extreme case of Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy (involving seeking attention by harming others).

For the case in June 2000, following from the initial reports, it emerged that the nurse had been suspended from her job at an Essex clinic in September last year. She was told at the time that a parent had complained about a breach of confidentiality. The investigation had initially centred on concerns about the deaths of two of her patients, and the other 16 cases had been included in the investigation because they had happened near the time of the original two. Between 22 June and July 11, 58 newspaper reports were published on the story, with 29 each in national and local press. One week after the story first broke, detectives involved in the investigation of the deaths commented that they now believed the nurse had done nothing to hasten the deaths of the two children that sparked the probe into 18 possible 'mercy killings'. According to a report in the *Mirror* (29.6.00) police established that the use of painkillers in the two cases was well within normal limits. While police still had to call in independent experts to interpret papers in the case, they were reported to believe it was 'a matter of time before all the deaths are found to be natural.' Within a fortnight, on 10 July the Royal College of Nursing decided not to suspend the nurse after a hearing in London. The last cluster of reports on the case announced the RCN's decision the day after it was made.

While most reporting consistently and increasingly highlighted the dubious nature of the allegations, the story broke in a dramatic and disturbing way, with initial suggestions that the bodies of the children may have to be exhumed, and with comparisons to Beverly Allitt. The outcome of this flurry of reporting appeared effectively to be a non-story.

Stranger Danger – Laura Kane and Sarah Payne

The child death story which had received most media attention up until 1998 was that of Billie-Jo Jenkins, the teenage girl beaten to death by her foster parent. One reason for the high level of interest in the case was that it was initially assumed that a stranger had attacked Billie-Jo.

The story which received most press coverage during our five week sample was that of nine year old Laura Kane. While the child was killed by someone known to her and her immediate family, this was not known at the time of her disappearance. Nine year old Laura Kane went missing on 25 August 1999. Her body was found ten days later in the home of a family friend, Colin Bainbridge. The court case which convicted Bainbridge of her murder took place at the end of June 2000. We counted a total of 208 local articles and 84 national newspaper articles covering the Laura Kane story. These figures clearly eclipse the coverage of any of the 32 children in our 1999 – 2000 sample. It emerged during the trial that Laura had been on the local council's 'at risk register', which contributed to the sustained coverage. However, it was clearly the 'stranger danger' element which attracted most media interest in this case.

This was also the case in the coverage of Sarah Payne. She disappeared from outside her grandparents' home where she had been playing with her sister and brothers on 1 July 2000. Her body was found 17 days later in a field, just 14 miles from where she was abducted. The extensive television and newspaper coverage of the Sarah Payne story is unprecedented in terms of child deaths. During the period Sarah was missing, her parents appeared regularly on television, pleading for any information which might lead to their daughter's safe return. Following the week in which the child's body was found *The Guardian Editor* (21.7.00) indicated

that the Sarah Payne story was already the third most covered story of the week in the main UK papers with 501 column inches.

On July 23 the *News of the World* began its "name and shame" campaign to reveal the identity of child sex offenders in the United Kingdom. Although the police had not made any explicit reference to a sexual element in the assault on Sarah, the tabloid campaign was linked to the death of Sarah Payne. Following its front page headline "There are 110,000 child sex offenders in Britain: one for every square mile", it listed 49 names, giving the believed whereabouts of these sex offenders. The same day, a man in Manchester was attacked by a mob, in a case of mistaken identity. A suspect for Sarah's murder was also detained and released within 24 hours. Coverage of the story reached a peak during this week. *The Guardian Editor* (28.7.00) indicated that this was the most reported story of the week, with a total of 1,061 column inches devoted to Sarah Payne and to the *News of the World* campaign. On July 30 further names and photographs of sex offenders were published. There were reports from probation officers that many offenders were going 'underground'. Police and probationer representatives tried to persuade the *News of the World* to end its campaign. On 4 August, the tabloid suspended its name and shame campaign. Demonstrations against paedophiles continued in Portsmouth. By the end of this week, *The Guardian Editor* informed that the story had become seventh most covered, with 136 inches. While coverage of the story had begun to diminish, it continued to attract far more coverage than any story of a child killed by a family member.

Following from the *News of the World* campaign, some sections of the media sought to divert attention away from the more sensational reporting on the danger presented to children by paedophiles. While almost all opinion in the media supported the view that legislation surrounding sentencing of paedophiles urgently requires review, some tried to draw attention towards the far more prevalent, yet underreported cases of children killed and abused by their families. While acknowledging the tragedy surrounding the death of Sarah Payne at the hands of a stranger, Susan Hockhart writing in *The Sunday Herald* (23.7.00), commented on the statistics involved behind child deaths.

"Each year, between five and seven children are killed by someone they don't know – a figure which hasn't changed in 30 years, despite a growing population. If we really want to help children at risk, perhaps we should focus on the 60-80 who die at the hands of their parents - most of whom don't even merit a paragraph in the News in Brief section."

These figures also appeared in articles in the *Guardian* (20.3.00 p.18) and the *Observer Review* (23.7.00 p18-4). All three articles also referred to the millions of children living in poverty in Britain.

Journalist Liz McKean also reported on the disproportionate attention paid to killings by unknown paedophiles on BBC2's *Newsnight* on 11 August 2000. Her feature included an interview with the psychiatrist, Oliver James, who made the following observation:

"It's the newspaper coverage that has created this fantastic interest in these killings of small children by strangers. There are many, many other murders of children going on all the time throughout the year but we never hear about them. It's just at the beginning of the school holidays - because the newspapers have grasped the fact that they can sell a lot of papers - there's a lot of interest in this at this time of year amongst parents."

Much of the studio discussion on *Newsnight* following the report, centred on the fact that children are far more likely to experience sexual abuse at the hands of someone they know. The point was made therefore that children need to be educated in what is appropriate behaviour in adults, and need the confidence to be able to say no and to tell a trusted adult if they are unsure. It was also made clear that one effect of the vigilante campaigns which resulted from the *News of the World's* 'name and shame campaign' is that children who may be experiencing abuse could become silenced by fear of their family and/or themselves being targeted by their own community.

Concluding Comments

In the 1990s there have been no routine cases of child killing which received sustained coverage. One of the difficulties in changing the way in which child deaths are treated in public debate is that coverage in our sample period was not given according to the number of deaths of children. It is determined largely by two factors; first the unusual or horrific nature of the crime and secondly the exposure of social services mistakes or culpability. The problem is, as was argued fifteen years ago, that:

"Sensationalistic newspaper coverage of a case like Tina [Henry's] has an unfortunate tendency to make us throw up our hands in self-righteous horror... Such extreme cases divert our attention from the really widespread problem." (Koppel, 1985)

The case of Sarah Payne has now raised the issue of paedophilia, but the media spotlight is very much on 'stranger danger.' The manner in which the media campaign has developed has focused attention away from the area in which children may be most at risk – i.e. from members of their own family. For such children to be helped, requires that their condition be known and if possible, that they seek help themselves. It is ironic that *The Times* reported in August 2000 that *ChildLine*, which counsels children who report distress or abuse 'can only help one in five children'. The other 80 per cent receive an answerphone message telling them that there is nobody available to talk. This brings into sharp relief the priorities of media which can focus so intensely on a tiny minority of cases where children are at risk from strangers. But there are no headlines on the large numbers of children being told there is no-one available to help them, nor media campaigns about the area where they are most likely to be in distress.

If the aim is to have a more adequately informed debate about child killings, then there is a need to reorient media coverage and the manner in which it is informed by public authorities. This will involve the provision of research and information to journalists which can be used as the basis for news stories and also the education of media personnel about the routine and widespread nature of violence against children.

This report does suggest the need for changes in the manner in which information is supplied to the media. This would involve both public authorities and agencies such as the NSPCC. It may then be possible to move to a more informed public debate on social policies to act upon and reduce the killing of children.

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Appendix 1 (Sample and Method)

We compiled our earlier sample from our own archives of the Daily Mirror supplemented for the period prior to 1989 with data gathered at the British Newspaper Library in Colindale, and from the Times index. In addition we commissioned a search for cuttings on the ten cases from the Press Association library, to give us a better picture of how the cases were covered. For TV news we searched the ITN archive website (www.itnarchive.co.uk) and for the BBC, the television archive based in Brentford.

For the 1999 – 2000 sample we looked at five weeks press coverage between the first of June and the fifth of July, 2000. Relevant news items were supplied by a press cuttings agency. From these cuttings, we identified a total of 32 child deaths which had received press attention during those five weeks, and five key cases for comparison against the previous ten cases. We then used the Lexis Nexis website to check all coverage in 194 publications. The cases of Olivia Cordice, Cory Francies, Baby Hargreaves and the Woods babies had been included in articles sent to us by the press cuttings agency. However, we found that the local papers in which their cases were reported were not included in the Lexis Nexis website. So while these four cases appear in Figure 3 as having no coverage, they did appear in brief in smaller local papers.

The basis for selecting the last five cases varied a little from the earlier ten examples, given the shorter time frame involved. As the alleged perpetrators in most of the cases had not yet been brought to trial, we limited our analysis to cases which had been concluded, usually with the perpetrator's conviction. As this sample of five included two pairs of siblings, a total of seven children were involved.

DON'T KEEP IT TO YOURSELF

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is a free 24 hour service which provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse.

If you:

- are a child or young person and you need help,
- know or believe that a child or young person needs to be kept safe,
- are an adult, parent, carer or relative and need advice or help,

please call us on 0800 800 5000 or textphone 0800 036 0566 (for people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment) or email us: help@nspcc.org.uk

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