

Child Protection Issues in Chinese Media¹

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In China, the issue of the growth of vulnerable children is gaining more and more attention from the State and society. *The National Program of Action for Child Development in China 2001-2010*, issued in 2001, states that we shall

pay close attention to girls and children with special difficulties, and ensure that they have equal opportunities of enjoying healthy growth and participation in development.

Therefore, we should

provide better conditions for the healthy growth of orphans, children with disabilities and abandoned infants through increasing the input to child welfare efforts and improving facilities and services,

strengthen the establishment and management of relief and protection centers for street children, and

strengthen the construction of formal rehabilitation institutions for children with disabilities.²

In recent years, an increase has been observed in mass media coverage of the issue of child protection. The issue has entered public spheres through the 'agenda setting' of the mass media. Given the important role and influence of mass media in China, it is necessary for us to survey mass media coverage of vulnerable children, so as to urge society to pay more attention to this issue and take due actions.

However, there has been very little research on mass media coverage of child protection in the communication field. The sources searched showed that merely 12 articles on this topic were published in the major periodicals of journalism

and communication in China's mainland during the period between January 1990 and June 2003, including *Journalism and Communication* (sponsored by the Institute of Journalism and Communication, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), *Modern Communication* (sponsored by the Beijing Broadcasting Institute), *TV Research* (sponsored by the CCTV – China Central Television), *China Radio and TV Academic Journal* (sponsored by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television), *Journal of International Communication* (sponsored by the School of Journalism, Renmin University of China), *Journalism School* (sponsored by the Fudan University in Shanghai), and *The Journalist Monthly* (sponsored by Wenhui-xinmin, United Press Group).

One of the 12 articles was published in 1997 and entitled 'Media and Protection of the Rights of the Child'.³ Here, the author explores mainland China's laws and regulations on media and the protection of the child and their practice. In Section Four, 'Journalists' Consciousness of Protection of the Rights of the Child', the author found that some reports on violence against children, child labor, sexual abuse of children, abduction and trafficking of children, and abandonment of babies mainly consisted of denouncements and sensational descriptions, neglecting the legal content of the cases and showing a lack of consciousness of protection of the rights of the child.

The other eleven articles are all narrations of the reporters' experiences during the coverage, published in *The Journalist Monthly*. Of these, three are about the journalists' experiences during their interviews with impoverished children, and how they sympathized with and helped the children.⁴ Two are about how one can call on society to save children suffering from serious diseases⁵ – for example, a serial report on children with leukemia gave prominence to the formulation of local regulations on insurance for children's hospitalization in Shanghai. Five are summaries of experiences in the coverage of 'cracking down on abduction and trafficking of children', where the reporters helped the abducted children contact their parents, rescued the children together with the police, and sent the children back home, all through news and serial reports such as 'Action of Returning Children Home'.⁶ Another document is an analysis of a case of a son killing his mother,⁷ where the author criticizes the violations of the Law of Protection of Minors in the coverage, including revealing the minor's name, the school he went to, his mother's name and other private information.

The other two important articles, 'A Research Report on Girls' Image Reported by Chinese Mainstream Newspapers'⁸ and 'Child Labor Issues in the Chinese Media',⁹ were published outside the communication field. Both are results of content analyses. The former, using a sample of reports on girls from six mainstream newspapers, analyzes from a gender perspective the achievements and problems of girls reported on in mainstream newspapers. The latter, surveying all the reports on child labor from <http://www.people.com.cn>, attempts to explain the phenomenon of child labor in reality by analyzing the frequency of media coverage of the issue of child labor, number of child laborers, their jobs and living conditions, and ways to save them, in order to explore ways to solve the problem.

The study

From the limited material, we can see that child victims of violence, child labor, abducted children, children suffering from serious diseases, impoverished children and discriminated girls have entered the visual field of researchers and journalists, who are trying to promote social protection of these children through research and reports. But research in this area has rarely included children affected by AIDS, disabled children and abandoned babies. A series of questions require more systematic studies, such as the exact number of reports on vulnerable children in the mass media, how the media describe the issue of vulnerable children, and public attitudes toward the issue. As the problems of vulnerable children are usually based in China's impoverished areas and in the marginalized populations of cities, one significant aim of the study summarized in this article was to analyze in more detail the issue of vulnerable children and public attitudes in the media contents.

By way of content analysis, this study, sponsored by UNICEF China, describes and analyzes how child protection issues have been or have not been addressed by Chinese media, and how media have reported on these issues. The study therefore explores Chinese society's awareness of the situation, as well as the nature of, causes of and solutions to the problems of vulnerable children.

Research questions and method

The study defines vulnerable children as child groups whose survival, development and rights are being threatened.

According to this definition, vulnerable children include:

- 1) disabled children
- 2) abandoned and orphaned children
- 3) children of migrants
- 4) street children
- 5) children trafficked within the country and across borders
- 6) child laborers
- 7) sexually exploited children
- 8) violated children, i.e., child abuse including physical, psychological, and sexual violence from family and relatives, school teachers, peers and community
- 9) girls with survival or developmental obstacles due to gender discrimination (including higher school drop-out rate among girls, unequal treatment by parents of a boy and a girl at home, the higher birth rate of boys, gender stereotyping)
- 10) children and youth who abuse drugs

- 11) children with HIV or from AIDS families
- 12) children of poor families
- 13) children of criminals and drug addicts
- 14) children in conflict with the law and juvenile justice.

Information presented on television and in newspapers related to the above-mentioned subjects was collected and analyzed. The study also measured children's background in relation to each of the fourteen categories:

- 1) ethnic background of the children in the media coverage
- 2) age group of the children in the coverage
- 3) gender of the children in the coverage

Questions

The main research questions of the content analysis were the following:

- 1) Issues and context: What issues or problems are Chinese children in the media actually facing? What are the causes and wider socio-economic context that give rise to the problems? And what is the family/public/government perception of these issues?
- 2) Legislation and law enforcement and their effectiveness: Which laws related to the issue are mentioned in the media? Does the report mention whether there are enough legislative measures to address the issue and how effective they are? Is there any report on law enforcement?
- 3) Action taken: What kind of action to address the issue is reported on? Who is responsible for the action, where and how? Is there any mention of support from the public, community institutions, alternative care (i.e., foster care) and NGOs?

The measures of media coverage include:

- 1) frequency of coverage in the media
- 2) date of distributed issue
- 3) page of coverage and its title
- 4) kind of content (news, drama, documentary, talk show, etc.)
- 5) ratio of domestic incidents/contents from abroad
- 6) ratio of urban/rural coverage
- 7) geographic presentation
- 8) treatment of children as a victim, as a participant, or the like
- 9) length of the coverage (and follow-ups)
- 10) attitudes toward/perception of the child issue
- 11) protection of the child's identity.

Sample

According to *Statistical Communiqué of The People's Republic of China on the 2002 National Economic and Social Development*¹⁰ released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2003, there were (in 2002) 306 broadcasting stations, 770 medium- and short-wave radio transmitting and relaying stations (with radio coverage of 93.2% of the population), 360 television stations (with TV coverage of 94.5% of the population), and 96.38 million cable television users reached throughout the mainland of China. In 2001, 2,111 newspapers and 8,889 magazines¹¹ were issued.

It was impossible to cover all media in our study, which is why we could only select some representative media. When making the selection, we mainly considered the following elements: (1) the media coverage – both national and local media should be considered; (2) the media type – comprehensive, professional and segmented media should be considered; (3) the media category – television and newspapers should be included; and (4) the circulation – high circulation and low circulation media should be included. We selected the following media for the study, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Media Sample

Medium	Coverage	Media Type	Media Category	Circulation Number of Average Issue ¹²
CCTV Xinwen Lianbo	National	Comprehensive	Television	Estimated 0.1 billion audiences
<i>People's Daily</i>	National	Comprehensive	Newspaper	High circulation: 1.77 million
<i>Beijing Youth Daily</i>	Beijing	Segmented	Newspaper	Mid circulation: 449 thousand
<i>Wenhui Daily</i>	Shanghai	Comprehensive	Newspaper	Mid circulation: 293.8 thousand
<i>Yangcheng Evening Paper</i>	Guangzhou	Evening paper	Newspaper	High circulation: 1.5 million
<i>China Women's News</i>	National	Segmentation	Newspaper	Low circulation: 106 thousand
<i>Legal Daily</i>	National	Professional	Newspaper	Mid circulation: estimated 400-600 thousand ¹³

We should point out that this is not a standard representative sample. As national media, *People's Daily* and CCTV Xinwen Lianbo have an incomparable influence on the public. Inevitably, they are the media we should pay close attention to. However, how many reports in such media are actually related to child protection issues? *China Women's News* is also a national medium, but its circulation is much lower and, furthermore, it is a segmented newspaper sponsored by the National Women's Federation. As 'women' and 'children' are often associated with weak groups in China, *China Women's News* reports a great deal on child pro-

tection issues. Particularly, it has a special page – ‘For the Children’ – on each Wednesday. *Legal Daily* is the only large national comprehensive daily newspaper circulating in domestic and overseas markets, which focuses on promoting democracy and legislative construction. It may concentrate some of its reports on child protection issues. Therefore, *China Women’s News* and *Legal Daily* were our study targets, as well.

It was difficult for us to select a sample of local newspapers representing the more than 2,000 newspapers in the country due to our limited budget and other concerns. As a result, the selection of local newspapers was mainly focused on Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, the top three flourishing areas in China. The selected newspapers in these three areas include one daily, one segmented and one evening paper. *Wenhui Daily* in Shanghai mainly targets intellectuals with its emphasis on such areas as education, technology, literature and arts, hygiene, theory, science, sports and travel. *Beijing Youth Daily*, sponsored by the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Youth League, reports specially on news that concerns Beijing youth. *Yangcheng Evening Paper* is one of the evening papers with the highest circulation in the country. Like other evening papers, it is closer to the lifestyle of common people. Owing to the characteristics of these three local newspapers, *Beijing Youth Daily* might have more reports related to child protection than do the other two papers.

The study included all reports, news, articles, comments and pictures on issues of child protection in the seven media, published from January 1, 2001, to December 31, 2002. The unit of analysis (the smallest element of the content analysis) was the entire article or story with an independent caption. There were 1,509 units of analysis.

The method of selecting these units was as follows: (1) select all reports according to keywords related to the 14 kinds of vulnerable children mentioned previously, as well as keywords related to the rights of the child, the interests of children, child protection, and protection of minors; (2) read these reports and select those that included a child protection issue in more than half of the space allotted to the report; (3) download these reports and organize them.

Main findings

The purpose of the research project was, thus, to analyze the social awareness of and attitude toward the existence of, conditions of, quality of life of, origins of vulnerable children and the solutions to their problems. We can claim that recognition in the media is fairly consistent with social reality on the ground that the media and society are under control of the same ideology. We made careful deductions concerning the findings of the content analysis. The main findings are summarized in the following.

Reports on vulnerable children

The problems related to vulnerable children were covered on a rather small scale by some of the major media, and they were treated in the CCTV news as if they were global problems or problems only existing in foreign countries. This shows that vulnerable children are still not one of the focal issues of society. In 2002, however, there was an increase in activities aimed at improving the living conditions of these children, which could mean that society has become more sensitive to vulnerable children.

Among the six newspapers, *Legal Daily*, *China Women's News* and *Beijing Youth Daily* were most likely to have reports about vulnerable children. Next came the evening newspapers, while the comprehensive daily newspapers seldom had such reports. At the same time, we made the following observation: *China Women's News* often placed news about vulnerable children on the front page or in the news edition, *Legal Daily* had a special column for such news called 'Young people and Law', while the comprehensive daily newspapers usually put such news on the page for education, science and culture. This shows that vulnerable children's problems are treated as educational problems in comprehensive daily newspapers, as legal problems in *Legal Daily*, and are comparatively important in *China Women's News*. But the latter paper has a low circulation and is run by the Women's Federation, which is why it has limited influence in comparison with those papers that can represent the government's attitudes, such as *People's Daily*. This also indicates that women are seen as the ones who should solve the problems of vulnerable children. 'Protect the legal rights of women and children' is not a slogan set up by the nation, but usually by the Women's Federation. Moreover, women's rights and children's rights are often mentioned simultaneously – women and children are not treated as two independent social groups. This also contributes to the observation that children's problems are regarded not as the nation's problems, but as the Women's Federation's problems.

Vulnerable children living in rural areas were scarcely covered, only in about 7 percent of the cases. In fact, we believe that most of the children facing problems live in the rural areas, as poverty is one of the main causes of their difficult conditions. Thus, reports in the mainstream media stray away from social reality. This can primarily be understood from the following three perspectives: First, most of the media exist in urban areas or are urbanized media. Second, the audience of most of the media are urban dwellers, so the media try to cater to these people. Third, those people who can offer help to vulnerable children are most probably urban dwellers, which is why they become the main characters in the urbanized reports. A large number of reports on children's problems are reports on the 'good deeds' of these urban people. Therefore, the real problems of the vulnerable children are most often overlooked. This finding on the misleading reports of the media is also a reflection of the values of mainstream society.

Another finding related to the above-mentioned one was that reports on children in poverty were the most frequent of the fourteen categories of children in

difficult positions. And the number of reports on abandoned and orphaned children was ranked among the leading four categories. This is connected to the 'charitable donation' of the city dwellers. Children were not the main characters in the reports on vulnerable children or on abandoned and orphaned children, but the main characters were enterprisers, philanthropists, noted public figures, and laborers from other social strata. People care more about 'who' offers help to these children and how much he or she spent on this help than about the difficult conditions the children are living in.

Child abuse, especially sexual abuse, and adolescent criminals were the problems mostly reported on as worthy news. These reports were full of moral condemnation, indignation, exaggerated feelings, etc., but they were lacking in consideration for child rights, gender equity, and law.

Reports on other children in difficult positions, such as children of drug addicts, child laborers, drug-abusing youngsters, sexually exploited children, street children, and children of migrants, were given comparatively less attention in the media. This can also be explained by the involvement of city people and the values usually held by the media, something that reflects the different social attitudes toward children in various kinds of difficult positions.

Social capital of vulnerable children

The identity of vulnerable children entails living with and developing in the face of the problems confronting them. Street children have poor health, safety, and educational resources; sexually abused girls are not only physical and mental victims, but are further pressed by the traditional culture. There is limited social capital available to them for changing their destiny.

Social capital is defined as the social resources upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihood objectives. These social resources are developed through networks and connectedness, membership in more formalized groups and relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchanges (DFID Sustainable Livelihoods guidance sheets, 1999). In the World Development Report 2000, the World Bank discerns different ties:¹⁴

- Bonding social capital – the strong horizontal ties which connect family members, neighbors, close friends and business associates (people who share similar demographic characteristics)
- Bridging social capital – the weak horizontal ties which connect people with different ethnic and occupational backgrounds (people who share broadly comparable economic status and political power)
- Linking social capital – vertical ties which connect poor people with people in positions of influence in formal organizations (banks, agricultural extension offices, the police).

According to our research findings, every kind of social capital is limited for vulnerable children. Most of the social capital vulnerable children can use is *bonding social capital*. For example, the girl violated by her stepfather asked her aunt for help, because the aunt had a friend who knew something about the law; the girl raped by her teacher asked her mother for help, and so on. However, such social capital is also vulnerable for the following reasons: (1) vulnerable children are from poor families, and their family and friends themselves have limited social capital; (2) for children abused by family members, sexually abused female children, street children or child laborers, etc., the family and neighbors cannot be their social capital – on the contrary, these persons may drive the children into further trouble, at the same time as these children lack other social capital.

We also found in the study that vulnerable children can obtain *bridging social capital* through receiving various types of aid, legal aid, relief, training, etc. In a report in the *China Women's News*, 4th January 2001 issue, all circles in Fuyang City provided aid to the Funan female children classes. In the 22nd August 2001 issue, there was a report on street children in Wuxi joining the training course of 'protecting the rights of street children'. In the *Legal Daily's* 22nd October 2001 issue, the Nanchang Women's Federation opened a hotline to provide impoverished children with legal support. In the *Legal Daily's* 23rd February 2001 issue, an old man in Yimong adopted five babies discarded by their parents. In the *Beijing Youth Daily's* 9th April 2001 issue, college students provided a free of charge second classroom for street children. In such conditions, when impoverished children receive aid, abandoned and orphaned children and disabled children may have access to bridging social capital. But if the aid is one time only, it may not give these children a chance to contact the aid-provider, and in this sense such social capital is unreliable. As seen from the reports, when some of the social capital is one-to-one and when aid-providers keep regular contact with vulnerable children, the aid-providers can be social capital for the children. The aid-providers bring not only money, but also strong support for the children's mental and physical health.

Some reports showed that vulnerable children have access to *linking social capital*. For example, the *Legal Daily's* 1st July 2001 issue reported that the director of the police office in Yongnian in the Hebei Province helped the children of convicts to continue their study in school. The *China Women's News's* 28th May 2002 issue reported that the governor of the Liaoning Province visited orphans and handicapped children. But this kind of relationship is unstable and vulnerable children are still in a negative and passive position.

We saw in the reports that some vulnerable children made positive use of the indirect social capital in order to change their condition, such as through reading and studying law and legal magazines. However, this only happens under certain conditions, for example, when the children grow older, leave the origin of their troubles or obtain certain knowledge. Therefore, generally speaking, vulnerable children need social capital to protect themselves as a consequence of their vulnerable state.

Solutions in the framework of social protection

Social protection comprises all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized, with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups.¹⁵ For different vulnerable people, social protection has different ways of intervening. The above-mentioned findings of the content analysis of reports regarding child protection in the media were put into the framework of social protection.

We saw that in the media reports the most frequently recommended solution – offering charitable donations and aid – belongs to the category of ‘social assistance’. The second most frequently recommended intervention was social insurance. Few reports suggested interventions belonging to the category of social equity. According to the framework of social protection analysis, the following important actions were overlooked:

- Propagating for changing social attitudes and promoting social equity in order to build up an optimal environment for the healthy growth of children. Propaganda and education on social equity are especially needed in communities and families in which vulnerable children live.
- Providing mental and physical medical aid to abused children in order to help them return to society in a state of good health. For example, after being violated, many girls drop out of school or run away from home under the pressure from society and family, causing their social vulnerability and loneliness to increase.
- Encouraging children’s participation in society and enhancing their ability through training and special actions.

Action takers and social exclusion

According to the mass media, most of the action takers who are trying to improve the environment in which vulnerable children grow up are the public and individuals, departments in local governments, NGOs, the judicature, the nation, enterprises, schools, media, and the military. Generally speaking, governmental departments play a key role in legislation and policymaking, while the public and individuals, NGOs, and other bodies usually adopt an intervention policy that involves transferring social support, such as a ‘donation’. However, these two kinds of movements are unilateral adult movements – there is no room for children to take part or be heard.

This is a kind of ‘natural’ social exclusion of vulnerable children. However, we made the following observations in many media reports: First, the real re-

quirements of vulnerable children have not been presented and met – for example, people overlooked the requirements of children who endure long-term suffering from domestic violence and sexual abuse, which is why these children remain in helpless conditions. Second, without any help, the children might take possible action to protect themselves from the persecution, and some more courageous ones might even search actively for social resources to improve their living conditions, but their activities are often ignored. Third, if given proper instruction and education, vulnerable children can become very different; for instance, it was reported that homeless girls who received training on child rights became more willing to air their views.¹⁶

In short, we should let these children join in on the process of taking intervening actions and making policies concerning the improvement of their lives.

Significance of intervention from public rights and law

The content analysis showed that when the perpetrators of sexual abuse are fathers, stepfathers and teachers, the reports often used such language as ‘beast’, ‘animal’ and ‘more cruel than the tiger which loves its whelp’. For example, the raping of a 13-year-old girl by the man who was adopting her was described as ‘Suhebater raped Wendulari beastly’.¹⁷ Another report with the title ‘Demon father was caught raping his little girl’ described how a 14-year-old girl had been repeatedly raped by her father for nearly seven years and that she was found several months pregnant.¹⁸ What is more, expressions such as ‘beast teacher’ and ‘the sinful hand of the old teacher’ were also common in the reports. It should be stressed that such expressions reveal the moral requirement of the society, but have nothing to do with the child’s rights and the state law. One of the reports in the *China Women’s News*’ issue on 17th July 2003 is called ‘Wicked mother forces her daughter to be prostitute’. The 12-year-old girl had been raped many times since she was 5 years old. Although this report does not belong to our sampled reports, it is typical in that all villagers were aware of the crime and condemned the family, but none of them thought they should take any actions or report it to the authority. That is to say, the public lacks the sensitivity to use citizenship to intervene and simply avoids such ‘vice’ through their moral indignation. Therefore, the girl’s living conditions become even worse. The angry expressions such as ‘beast’ actually mean that sexual violence is regarded as a kind of personal affair, instead of as a human rights abuse of children in a wider sense. Moreover, in reports in which stepfathers and teachers were also husbands and fathers in other contexts, some people questioned those sinners and asked what they would do if the victims were their own daughters: ‘His own daughter is of the same age as Anan. What would his reaction be if his daughter were persecuted like Anan?’¹⁹ This is a typical example of traditional logic – ‘you shouldn’t force the other to do things you yourself don’t like to do’. This way of thinking regards child rights abuse on the basis of social morality.

No matter whose daughter she is (including the criminal's), she should never be the target of sexual abuse and her rights should be protected.

We ought to understand that violence and abuse directed at children are usually regarded as 'inhumane' household affairs, which is why many children in difficult positions are forced to keep silent under the intangible pressure given by feudal virginity and the idea of 'keeping the scandal within the household'. The media affirm 'natural' and 'normal' behaviors (e.g., raping one's own daughter is beastly) so as to maintain the existing social order. But this maintenance is harmful for children and keeps them from getting on their feet and struggling for their rights. For example, the mother who forced her daughter to be a prostitute was treated as a 'scoundrel', and the villagers stopped all relations with her family. When the media reported this as a normal phenomenon, they overlooked two important factors that might have brought change to the child's living conditions: First, the villagers estranged the mother as a 'scoundrel', resulting in the child having even less access to social help and becoming more and more isolated. Second, the fact that the villagers estranged the mother as a 'scoundrel' shows that they viewed this crime only as an immoral scandal instead of an abuse of child rights, making the girl even more vulnerable. Therefore, what the media and the whole of society must do is relate vulnerable children to citizenship and use the law to maintain children's rights.

The nature of children in difficult positions and the cause of these positions

According to the media reports, most of the difficult positions vulnerable children are in are caused by long-term poverty. In 54 percent of the 633 reports in which causes of children's vulnerability were mentioned, it was stated that 'economic poverty' is the reason. But economic poverty alone cannot cause economical problems; also involved are a shortage of social resources used for sustaining development and shortage of social capital used for maintaining bilateral relations. Economic poverty, thus, may contribute to exclusion from the personal environment of vulnerable children and to their difficulty in getting out of their vulnerable positions. The economically poverty-stricken group has the highest risk and is the frailest group in society. Many of the vulnerable children are forced into difficult living conditions for some incidental reasons, such as being kidnapped and sold, being raped, suffering from domestic violence, being handicapped, being infected by AIDS, etc. The environments in which these children find themselves are poverty-stricken in terms of economy, backward in culture, poor in domestic protection, exclusive with regard to the personal environment, lacking in usable resources, and almost without awareness of child rights. In these respects, changing these children's environments requires support at all levels: national, social, and legal.

The cause of the problems – that there are children in difficult positions – lies in the fact that no efficient system for the protection of child rights has yet been

established. In most cases, the right to survive, the right to development, and the right to being protected, which should be enjoyed by all children, are treated as an individual problem, a domestic problem, a problem related to personal morality (such as the traditional idea of respecting the old and loving the young, and the idea of helping the poor and supporting the weak) or social morality (such as that it is forbidden to commit incest). This is why public and legal intervention are absent. We have already seen that it is difficult to make any change in living conditions and develop the environment of children by strengthening this kind of traditional support model.

Recommendations

Based on the above analysis and conclusions, this research study makes the following recommendations:

1. Set up beneficial living circumstances for children in difficult positions by

- using national movements and media propaganda to further education on child rights in the whole society, realizing that the problem is not only one of the Women's Federation but also a problem of the nation and the entire society;
- urging relevant authority departments and policy makers to shoulder the responsibility of protecting and improving children's rights, and on top of that increasing purposeful and planned changes;
- increasing opportunities for vulnerable children to be reported on by mainstream news through training media professionals, and encouraging the media to report on children in difficult positions from the angles of child rights, gender equity, and law;
- strengthening the education of people in the community, schools and families in which children in difficult positions live, so as to help people treat these children venerably and build up a friendly and suitable environment for them to grow up in.

2. Cultivate vulnerable children's ability and strengthen their rights by

- increasing activities that can help these children acquire social capital – for instance, setting up personal relations that go beyond cities and towns or areas, building up all kinds of social nets that can help protect the children, helping them to join proper organizations and helping their families to develop social capital;
- ensuring that children in difficult positions have the right to information, regarding public resources as their social capital in an indirect way, and providing children with knowledge related to legislation and child rights;

- through study and surveys, trying to find and meet these children's real requirements, listening to their voices, and forming an efficient system through which they can be heard by relevant departments and media;
- making strategies to ensure that these children will become social participants, and increasing their ability to make decisions to change their fate;
- training and activities, increasing the children's capability to take part in and change their situation and the societal process – in this way they are empowered.

3. Make social intervention happen by

- increasing the intervention activities of social insurance;
- increasing intervention activities concerning social equity, spreading propaganda about social equity and gender equity in these children's families, schools, and communities;
- setting up agencies, such as centers supporting children in difficult positions, in order to provide psychological and somatic medical services and to help return them to the society with a healthy body and heart;
- engaging in actions that relate vulnerable children to citizenship, using the law to protect their rights, and intensifying society's sensibility with regard to child rights protection.

4. Report on children in difficult positions by

- showing vulnerable children's right to be anonymous, to maintain their privacy and dignity;
- realizing that these children, especially those unfortunately injured and killed ones, all have the right to their dignity – therefore, no naked photos of these victims should be used in the reports and no photos in which these children are improperly-dressed or are belittled;
- not only reporting on the case itself, but investigating underlying causes so as to reveal the main source of child discrimination, thereby making society reflect on the issue;
- standing on the side of and protecting these children and reporting in a serious and accurate way so as to decrease all titillating details and to avoid denouncement of the victims;
- interviewing the vulnerable children and letting their voices be heard in the report;
- trying to find and report on how children themselves can take part in and take action to change their life, and avoiding a lifeless description of vulnerable children.

Notes

1. This article is based on a longer report by the author. Ms Liu Xiaohong, Associate Professor at the Institute of Journalism Communication of CASS, contributed her efforts to data statistics in the study. Ms Zhang Qi and Pang Minghui, graduate students in the CASS, contributed collection and registering of the data.
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