

Journalism fails to reliably report abuse-relevant homeschooling

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When abuse and neglect cases occur in homeschool settings, news coverage often omits mention of the victims' school status, even when it plays a key role in the nature and extent of the abuse/neglect.

To investigate how often school status is omitted from news coverage despite being highly relevant, we took 40 homeschool abuse and neglect cases that occurred in the last 5 years and involved food deprivation, imprisonment, or both—form of abuse in which isolating children from mandated reporters and other concerned adults plays a key role. We then did a Google News search for each case and analyzed the top 5 news articles for each one (n=200 articles).

Preliminary findings:

- In over half of articles (61%; n=122), school status was not mentioned at all. In 6 of the 40 cases, it was not mentioned in any of the top 5 articles for that case; in no case was it mentioned in all top 5 articles.
- In only a quarter of articles was homeschooling explicitly mentioned (n=50). In an additional 14% of articles, school status was mentioned using other terms (pulled out, withdrawn, never enrolled) but without explicitly mentioning homeschooling.
- Only 5% of articles (n=10) mentioned state homeschooling laws.
- Fewer than 10% of articles (9%; n=17) drew a connection between homeschooling and abuse. When they did draw a connection, almost half (n=8) drew it only on the level of that particular case, without mentioning homeschool generally.

- Although in many cases it is highly unlikely that much (if any) education was occurring, educational neglect was mentioned less than 10% of the time (9%; n=16 articles).

Although homeschooling was highly relevant to the forms of abuse in our case sample, over half of the news articles we looked at failed to mention school status at all, and only a quarter mentioned homeschooling by name. This suggests the existence of cases that are not included in our database, and never will be, because no journalist happened to mention the children's school status and therefore there is no way for us to know that the child was homeschooled.

Less than ten percent of articles mentioned educational neglect, which was likely widespread in these cases. Only 5% of articles mentioned state homeschooling laws, meaning that almost all articles failed to include context key to understanding why abuse cases like these occur and how they can be prevented.

Journalists can do better. Children spend significant time in educational settings chosen by their parents; understanding how crimes against children occur means knowing what environments they are in and what safety features those environments do (or, in the case of homeschooling, do not) offer. The general public deserves to be given the context needed both to understand why and how neglect and abuse cases occur and how to stop them. In the case of homeschooling neglect and abuse cases, relevant context includes school status; state homeschool laws; and the relationship of both to neglect and abuse—including educational neglect—via the presence, or absence, of mandated reporters.

[Please click here for the full findings of our report.](#)