An Analysis of Ethical Violations in Newspaper Reporting: An Investigative Study of the Sri Lanka Press Council Code of Ethics

Wijerathna D[1], Sathurusinghe R.I.T[2], Vidushika W.A.K.C[3] and Dhulabarani M[4]

[1] *Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

[2] *Department of Mass media, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

[3] *Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

[4] *Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Mysore, India*

sthula28@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research study initially examines the role of the code of ethics used in the Sri Lanka Press Council (SLPC) established in 1981 in promoting ethical standards of print media. It focuses on the effectiveness of the ethical guidelines on the conduct of journalists. Newspapers published over the period from 17 October 2025 to 30th April 2026 in all three languages (Sinhala, English, and Tamil) were reviewed on a daily and weekend basis. This study explores the role of the Code of Ethics in enhancing positive standards in print media and identifies the key ethical violations found in newspapers. It further examines the improvement in ethical reporting in print media. This research is based on the mixed-method approach. According to the findings, the code of ethics provides a clear framework for ethical and responsible reporting. However, in Sinhala newspapers, there are a higher number of ethical violations under the investigation reports of the SLPC. The mostly observed ethical violation is related to Clause 2(e), which deals with privacy and dignity. Many ethical violations involve the publishing of sensitive images and revealing the identity of minors. English and Tamil newspapers show less violations, and most of the publications are in accordance with the ethical standards. The research study further reveals that ethical violations have gradually reduced over time in investigations. This reflects the positive impact of SLPC initiatives, including awareness programs and letters. Even though these actions are not strict, they help improve ethical reporting through timely monitoring and guidance. This analysis shows that through guidance the media ethics can be improved. The study further highlights that the existing Code of Ethics is outdated and fails to adequately address current media challenges, which cannot be directly addressed due to potential limitations. Other than that, the Code of Ethics remains useful and relevant for journalism in Sri Lanka, but it must be updated in adherence with developing media practices and expectations.

Keywords*: Sri Lanka Press Council, Media Ethics, Newspapers, Ethical Violations*