Coverage of Child Right Abuse in Nigerian Newspapers

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Authors’ contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors COI and NDP conceptualized and designed the study and wrote the preliminary pages. Author NUA managed the literature review and statistical data of the study while author OIC managed the statistical analysis and interpretation. All authors were involved in the result discussion, preparation and approval of the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Studying and analyzing the newspaper coverage on issues of children is sine-qua-non to the overall development of Nigeria because it would serve as an insight into the conditions in which our children find themselves today and a guide for preparing them to be socially and spiritually responsible in the society. This study, therefore, analyzed the manifest media contents of two major newspapers in Nigeria namely Daily Sun and Punch (January-April 2017) with a view of ascertaining the frequency, depth, direction and prominence of coverage of reports on child rights in Nigeria. Based on the findings from the content analyzed newspapers, it was discovered that the select newspapers did not give adequate coverage on child rights abuse issues in Nigeria. Both newspapers did not give prominence to the stories reported as almost all were buried in the inside pages. The study recommends that Newspapers publishers in Nigeria should train reporters that will report daily on child right abuse so as to increase the visibility of child rights reports in the media. Also, Newspapers in Nigeria should give more prominence to child right abuse cases by placing them on the front pages of their editions and publishing periodic editorials on child rights related issues.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the face of increased violence, war, abject poverty, child trafficking and many vices that dehumanize our race, the need to protect the child as the most vulnerable segment of our society becomes imperative. Across the nations and continents of the world, particularly the war-torn areas, the fate of children and children’s rights are becoming more uncertain with each passing day.

It is for these reasons that the concern of well-meaning organizations like the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) [1] and the International Labour Organization (ILO) among others to protect the rights of the child can be appreciated. But concern without action is futile if not fatal. Concern backed by action is bound to produce desirable results. Results that are not sustainable cannot manifest in action. The action is achieved through well thought-out work-plans and strategies with long-term effects in view. The aim must be to bring about a change in attitude and perception if not a total eradication of those attendant factors that militate against the wellbeing of the child.

The global community no doubt is faced with a very uncomfortable but undeniable truth: Preventable harms which wreck the future of millions of children. UNICEF’s [2] document "70 Years for Every Child" remarked that "millions of children’s lives are blighted, for no other reason than the country, the community, the gender or the circumstances into which they are born". This is actually wortissome considering that the child is the progenitor of the human race. The situation is more frightening if one stumbles upon the statistical data of the number of children affected globally and what lies in stock for the future if nothing is done.

Evidently, without accelerating the pace of coordinated efforts of stakeholders in doing more for the child especially in terms of protecting him/her from the harms of the society and creating enabling environment for his/her development; the future of our societies which will be in the hands of millions of this disadvantaged and vulnerable children will be impaired.

Almost all vulnerable children are grossly affected by circumstances not of their own making but by inequities of fate which reduces their life chances and opportunities. These may be in form of poor parental background, natural disaster, socio-cultural adherence to traditions, religious extremism, political instability, obnoxious practices, man-made horrors and lack of opportunity for education. From UNICEF’s General Comments [3] “before they draw their first breath, life chances of poor and excluded children are often being shaped by inequities” - a fact which seems to be true, calls for a deeper reflection on "how much have we done; and how much can we do actually for the child". Our response, in essence, determines whether they live or die, whether they have a chance to learn and later earn a decent living because conflicts, crises and climate-related disasters deepen their deprivation and diminish their potential.

Without knowledge on the vulnerability of the child and the areas which call for the attention of the stakeholders (parents, teachers/formators, religious leaders, government and their agencies, the State and the global agencies for the child), the task of protecting the child becomes a herculean one. For this, the media comes into play.

The media as a platform for mass communication and mobilization have the potential to influence audience behaviour (especially through its knowledge provision, sensitization focus, general dissemination of information and reactions/feedback) as well as policy and decision-making process of the public sphere. The media can achieve all these by way of deepening information availability and accessibility, stimulating action, direction, provoking attention, persuasion and by defining situations and framing the "reality" [4]. In consideration of these inert qualities, the media as a platform for mass communication truly has symbolic power which can be effectively deployed to salvage millions of children suffering globally through abuse and exploitation.

To yield good fruits, the power of the media must be moderated and controlled as the responsibility of relevant authorities (public and professional) so that the effects of its influence (formal and informal) over the nature and structure of our society will be more proactive than destructive. Several studies in the sociology of mass communication have revealed that children constitute a special audience that requires
specialized attention in media coverage and portrayal of issues that relate to them. No issue can be more beneficial to the child in media than the propagation of the Child Rights [5].

As the major vehicle employed by institutions (public and private) as well as individuals, the media is the tool for the promotion of ideas, and the promotion and communications of value systems in the society. It is the intentions of the authors that in pursuit of the rights of the child, stakeholders and mass communication professionals should take advantage of the media capacity to; direct, re-direct and influence the behaviour on the general public to be the advantage of the child’s best interest. This is important because the future capacity and development of a nation depend on the overall quality of life of the child today. There is a call for government, philanthropists, and institutions (NGOs), professionals (journalists and human rights activists) to synergize programmes, information, education, training and communication campaigns designed to address the issues of Child Rights and development.

In Nigeria in particular, the media have continued to play a vital role in the existence and growth of the country. Not only do the media provide information, they are also involved in fostering national coexistence through reportage of issues that border on children, women, the aged, minors and the physically challenged. In view of the above assertion, to what extent has newspapers in Nigeria covered and reported issues bordering on child rights with reference to frequency, depth, prominence and direction?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A right is an entitlement which derives from our humanity. We are entitled to some Rights because we are human beings. These entitlements are referred to by some philosophers and thinkers as natural rights. They are the right to life, the right to develop, to self-expression, the right to worship, to own property etc. These are natural rights that we are born with [5].

Rights are based in respect for the dignity and worth of each person, both in his or her own right and as a member of a community, group or society as a whole. All people have inherent value as human beings. This means that human rights are universal. The principles of human rights are not applied differently for people of different cultures or traditions. They apply equally to all people wherever in the world they may be found, and whatever their circumstances. Human rights are “inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal rights” [6].

Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent; hence all rights must be recognized at all times. No right is more important, or more basic, than others. All human rights are equally important and equally essential to the respect for the dignity and worth of every person. If even one right is not being fulfilled, it can reasonably be said that the rights of that person, as a whole, are not properly respected.

There are two broad categories of rights which are commonly applied in discussing human rights.

Civil and political rights cover areas such as voting and elections, the criminal justice system, non-discrimination, basic civic freedoms and other similar kinds of rights. These are the rights which work to protect the individual (or identified groups within society) from abuses and arbitrary actions by those who hold political power.

Economic, social and cultural rights include the rights to work and to enjoy an adequate standard of living, the right to education or to health, and other rights of that sort. These rights generally protect the individual (or identified groups within society) from exploitation or exclusion to opportunity.

2.1 Child Rights

The human experience is rich in history and has not forgotten the horrendous nightmares occasioned by several recorded humanitarian disasters which have clipped its wings of development. Throughout history, the child and women are perhaps the most vulnerable to these horrendous disasters. At the back of United Nations Charter, the then League of Nations has thought after the WW I that enacting treaties to promote women and children will in effect reduce the humanitarian casualties recorded during national and global emergencies [7]). However, as much as they (League of Nations) were right in this line of thought, after the collapse of the League, the succeeding global alliance – the United Nations thought it wise to provide protection to the child and mother not just during national and global emergencies but to initiate a framework for domesticating it in each of the
member nations [8]. Above the thoughts of the defunct League, the ideals of the United Nations are much more enduring especially in thinking that framework for protecting the child ought to be rights of the child which without bias ought not to be violated by any other member of the society. These rights as they reasoned are valuable in two critical ways:

i. Protecting the vulnerability of the child who depends on the thoughts, decisions and actions of others to survive.

ii. Providing conducive environment and platform for the proper development of the child whose later absorption into the human society as an adult will be integral in the global fight against the dark sides of humanity; the part of history the human society against all odds must prevent from reoccurring.

In order to understand the nature of these rights and the objectives which they set out to achieve, it is pertinent to understand both culturally and universally who is a child.

2.1.1 The concept of children and philosophical approach

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger Mthan 18. Characteristically, the authors consider a child as a person below the age of 18 who is dependent on his or her parents or guardians for shelter, succor, care, guidance, education and any other nurture necessary for the growth and development of the child into a fully functioning member of the society. A child's needs as an infant, adolescent or young adult considerably vary so also the challenges and dangers which lay upon his/her part.

2.2 Childs’ Right in Nigeria: Child’s Rights Act 2003

Fortin [9] was enacted by the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 31st July 2003. It is an act to provide and protect the rights of the Nigerian child and other related matters. The Act has 278 sections and 11 schedules.

The rights of the Nigerian Child, as protected by the Act are divided into three major parts:

i. His/her rights at the domestic/family setting;

ii. His/her rights in his relationship with the larger civil society;

iii. His/her rights under the Juvenile Justice system.

The provisions of the CRA can be summarized under Four Pillars of Rights as in Nigerian Child’s Rights Act, [9] (CRA):

- Right to Survival
- Right to Development
- Right to Protection
- Right to Participation

The fundamental four pillars of Rights as in the Nigerian Child's Rights Act [9] is not in isolation to other international provisions such as the MDGs. Based on its integration the following may be harnessed as principles and objectives agreed upon by the act:

- Put the child first;
- Eradicate poverty;
- Invest in education;
- Leave no child behind;
- Care for every child;
- Educate every child;
- Protect children from harmful exploitation;
- Protect children from war;
- Combat HIV/AIDS;
- Listen to children and ensure their participation; and
- Protect the earth for children

Create an environment in which they are loved, respected and cherished, their rights are promoted and protected without discrimination of any kind, where their safety and well-being are paramount and where they can develop in health, peace and dignity.

In 2003, Nigeria enacted into its laws the rights of the child taking into cognizance the provisions of CRC. The Act also makes provision for the responsibilities of the child. The responsibilities of children under the Child’s Rights Act, [9] are:

i. The child shall respect parents and elders

ii. The child shall work for the cohesion of the family

iii. The child shall respect and ensure the ideals of freedom, equality, humanness and justice for all persons

The responsibilities of parents include:
The role of media in child right protection and control

The media which is the channel of communication plays a vital role in reporting on child right abuse and neglect and the operation of the child protection system. Nworgu, [10] states that media are channels or vehicles that carry information from the source(s) to the receiver(s). Media coverage helps to raise awareness of this, to the public interest among victims and parents; it has an important role in prevention and in highlighting new and emerging issues and the media can also hold agencies and policymakers to account when necessary. However, any media scrutiny of a situation involving the death or injury of a child should also respect the rights and dignity of children and the families involved.

a) Godoy [11] in his research on child right abuse and media reported that of the 110 children sampled in El Salvador working in domestic service most of them were underage between 12 and 17 years of age. The media reported cases of battered children and others saved from the clutches of child right abuse. Hodges [12] in his findings opined that street hawkers' children who worked throughout the day or late in the evening or who traded on major highways were found to be more likely than others to experiences abuse of their right. To curtail the incidence (child right abuse) Sanders and Godoy [11] suggest that there is a need to increases societal awareness of issues that may affect children. They further opined that prevention of child right abuse involves changing those individual and community attitude, belief and circumstances which allows abuse to occur. A well-focused print media (Newspapers) has the potential to contribute successfully to community education and prevention of child right abuse and neglect. This is in the realization of the fact that media play a significant role in informing people's attitude and behaviour. Lindsay [13] argued that the media has a central role in mediating information and forming a public opinion (Agenda setting theory). Understanding the media influences and how to use mass media channels constructively may be an essential tool for fighting social problems like child right abuse. Wellings and Macdowel [14] affirmed the strength of mass media lies in helping to put issues on the public, in reinforcing local efforts in raising consciousness about issues and in conveying simple information. This is Sequel to [15] position that agenda setting implies that the media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. The point here is that the media help to priorities societal issues. Newspapers like other media of mass communication such as radio are a veritable means to inform, educate, entertain project culture and perhaps it permanent in investigating the extent Newspaper has helped in creating awareness on the evils of child rights abuse in the society (Nigeria).

2.4 Empirical Review

In 2015, Adeniran, Hassan, Mikaila and Kayode [16] x-rayed the challenges faced by Nigerian children during their journey through life. The study examines the extent of the coverage accorded children in the mass media. Content analysis research design was adopted for the study to analyze selected national newspapers and magazines to examine the major child-related issue(s) mostly reported in the media, as well as direction, function, and prominence level, accorded stories published on children. The agenda-setting and framing theories provide the theoretical framework for the study. The study found that children-related issues are generally under-reported in the Nigerian press but when the children are involved in crime-related issues, the media give them "adequate" coverage.
Kayode and Adeniran [17] also conducted a study on Nigerian Press Coverage of Children as Victims and Perpetrators of Crimes. Adopting the social responsibility theory as its framework, and content analysis as a method, the paper examines how Nigerian newspapers adhere to these basic guidelines on reportage of children involved in crime and other social vices. It examined the level of identifying information (either explicitly or covertly) provided on children in media reports. The study found that cases of sexual offences were dominant during the study period and that the identities of the children involved were not adequately protected. Most of the stories were reported as isolated straight news with few instances of follow-ups on later developments on individual cases reported. Hence, Nigerian newspapers were urged to ensure in-depth coverage of children involved in crime stories, while protecting them from secondary victimisation by ensuring that they remain anonymous in their reports.

### 2.5 A Case Study

Nkememena [18] discovered that child trafficking, continues to be a subject of considerable media coverage in Nigeria. Most victims were abducted or left home with the traffickers who promised educational opportunities or other incentives. They were taken to places in foreign and local countries. The press has an imperatives role to play in reporting child trafficking as the fourth estate of the realm, the watchdog of the society and agenda-setting machinery. The main objective of the study was to critically examine the performance of the newspapers toward adequate coverage of child trafficking. The study made use of social responsibility theory and agenda setting theory to find out how the media create awareness on the ills of child trafficking. The study set out primarily at content analysing issues of Daily Sun and Vanguard newspapers on child trafficking in Nigeria for a period of twelve months. Code sheet was used. Based on a systematic sampling technique, a sample size of 118 newspapers was selected for over a period of one year which runs two respective years of reportage (September 2007 – August 2008). Based on the findings from the content analysed newspapers, it was discovered that the selected newspapers did not fare well in their coverage of child trafficking. Both newspapers did not give prominence to the stories reported as almost all were buried in the inside pages. Recommendations were made based on the findings.

For Uzochukwu, Morah and Okafor [19], given the backdrop that print media coverage of child-related issues has been inadequate, this study attempts to investigate the extent the Nigerian broadcast media give prominence to child-related issues, with particular emphasis on child rights and protections. Six broadcast stations (three radio and three television stations) were monitored for a period of three months. The overall results showed that in all the stations, only six issues were reported on children by ABS radio, Purity Fm, Silverbird TV, and NTA, with just three related to child's right and protections. The implication is that child rights and protections, as well as child related issues, are not salient in Nigerian broadcast media despite the important part that children occupy in any nation. The study recommends that the media should intensify efforts to raise awareness and mobilize public opinion on issues pertaining to the child’s right and protections in the country.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored within the context of two vital theories namely: Social Responsibility Theory and the Agenda Setting Theory. These theories will be used to explain or interpret some phenomenon because its basic tenets are fundamental to the understanding of the subject under study.

#### 3.1 Social Responsibility Theory

Okunna [20, p. 277] states that the Social Responsibility Theory of the media is largely an extension of the libertarian theory. They emphasised on the moral and social responsibility of person and institutions which operate the mass media that is to say that the media supposed to be socially responsible to the society in all aspect. Folarin [21, p.31] Social responsibility theory owes its origin to Hutchins Commission on freedom of the press, set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in libertarian of free theory. Based on the postulation, social responsibility theory of the press asserts that the media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to the society such as:

- a. Provide the public with information and discussion on important social issues and the avoidance of the activities harmful to the public welfare and security of the state.
- b. That through the professional standard of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance, these obligations can be met.
That the media should regulate itself within the framework of law and established institutions to be able to carry out its responsibilities.

Based on the principle the society has the right to expect a high standard of performance from the media.

That the media should reflect its society's plurality giving access to various points of view and grant all the right to reply.

This study is anchored on this theory to ascertain how far Punch and Daily Sun newspapers have been able to fulfill these responsibilities of being accountable to society. Children who are a special gift from God, as well as the fathers and mothers of tomorrow, are supposed to be given serious attention to their issues, irrespective of their nature so that the government and the public will be informed and necessary action is taken when their rights are infringed upon by the society.

3.2 Agenda Setting Theory

Another theory that was adopted in the analysis in this study is the Agenda Setting Theory. Baran and Davis [22] maintains that the theory proposes that the public agenda or what kind of thing people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the news media choose to publicize. While Wimmer and Dominick [23] argue that Agenda setting theory examines the relationship between media priorities and audience priorities in the relative importance of news topics. This means that if the news media decide to give the most time and space to covering issues concerning children, child right abuse in the society will be reduced and it will become the most important item on the audience agenda. If the newspapers under study devote their time in reporting the issues concerning children as often as possible they will not only emphasize the importance but also will give the public what to think about the children as regards their wellbeing as the future hopes of the nation.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In reference to the frequency of newspapers coverage of child right abuse in Nigeria, this study found out that newspaper coverage of child right abuse in Nigeria by the select national dailies is low compared to other issues. Data revealed that child right abuse recorded 78(34.8%) frequency, IPOB 80(35.7%) frequency and Recession 66(29.5%). The implication of this is that IPOB was given much coverage, as against the frequency of child right abuse in Nigeria.

For depth of coverage, findings revealed that 45.9% of the stories understudy fell within the depth of 5 inches, 32.6% fell within the depth of 6-10 inches, 17.8% fell within the depth of 11-15 inches while 3.7% fell within the depth of 16 and above. This report could also be as a result of Nigerian newspapers paying more attention to other areas rather than the progenitor of the human race "the child". This connotes that the two newspaper publishers in Nigeria do not have much regard for the right of the child and its protection, participation, survival and development.
Table 1. The days studied

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</table>

On the question of prominence in terms of placement of stories on child rights, there is no prominence accorded to child right abuse in Nigeria newspaper. Data from the code sheet revealed that placement of child right abuse report in the front page was 18 (15.8%), centre page 31(27.2%), back page 3 (2.6%), unlike the inside page which had 37 (54.4%). This indicates that the two newspapers did not give prominence to the stories reported as almost all were buried in the inside pages.

Lastly, the direction of newspaper coverage of child right abuse in Nigeria is not favourable. The finding of the fourth objective indicated that 53 (60.2)% of stories obtained from straight news, feature stories and editorial report on child right abuse by the two national dailies were unfavourable.

The results of this study were all in consonance with the findings of scholars like Adeniran et al. [16], Kayoed et al. [17], Uzochukwu et al. [19]. The authors agree that there is gross under-representation of children in the media both print and electronic while the majority of the few representations are in the negative especially as victims and as perpetrators of crime.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the media coverage of child right abuse in Nigerian by Punch and Daily Sun Newspapers. Four research objectives were selected, and four research questions were employed in the study, with content analysis as the research method. The findings show that only 34.8% of the reports centred on child right abuse. This is actually worrisome considering the fact that the child is the progenitor of the human race and the future of every nation. Governments of nations of the world, including Nigeria, have pledged their commitment to the fight against child right abuse. With the low coverage recorded by the Nigerian newspaper on child right abuse, one can conclude that Nigerian government does not value their future leaders and the fight against child right abuse has not received any reasonable attention in the country.

From UNICEF’s general comments [3] "before they draw their first breath, life chances of poor and excluded children are often being shaped by inequities" - a fact which seems to be true, calls for a deeper reflection on how much have we done; and how much can we do actually for child".

Our response in this essence will determine whether they live or die, whether they have a chance to be protected from abuses, participate, survive and develop this potential in life and earn a decent living. According to the study, it is alarming that more often than not, these potentials given to these children are cut short by abuse, conflicts and crises.

Because of the vulnerability of this child the attention of the media, government, parents, teachers and religious leader are needed to eradicate this dreaded evil called abuse for the continuity of human existence.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher hereby makes the following recommendations:

1. Newspapers publishers in Nigeria should train reporters that will report daily on child right abuse. This is because the more child right abuse issues are being reported; the more secure the children will be.
2. Newspapers in Nigeria should give more prominence to child right abuse cases by placing them on the front page of their editions and doing editorials on them.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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