

Representation of Children in the Nigerian News Media

Raheemat Adeniran
Lagos State University

Suleiman, Hassan
Lagos State University

Ajaga, Mikaila, Ph.D.
Lagos State University

&
Jimi Kayode
Lagos State University

Abstract

Nigerian children face various challenges during their journey through life. The country ranks among the worst nations in many child-related world ranking indices ranging from child health, out-of-school children, to child labour, among others. With these challenges facing the Nigerian child, the study examines the extent of coverage accorded children in the mass media. Content analysis research design was adopted for the study to analyse 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. Based on this, we recommend a more cautious approach in reporting children and children-related issues.

Keywords: Representation, Print Media, Children, Media framing, Agenda setting, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigerian children face various challenges during their journey through life. The country ranks among the worst nations in many children-related world ranking indices ranging from child health, out-of-school children, to child labour, child development index, among others. Several children-related issues abound requiring urgent attention of stakeholders within and outside the country if the country must redeem its image as one that caters for the need and protects the innocence of its children. The media provide a unique avenue through which such children related issues could be brought to the fore of public discourse. In recognition of this fact, the Norwegian Government and the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) launched the Oslo Challenge as a call to action to ensure that “the overwhelming power of the media for good in the lives of children is identified, encouraged, and supported, while the potential harmful effects are recognised and reduced (Oyero, 2010). The media was thus challenged to promote good ethical conduct *to avoid sensationalism, stereotyping, or*

undervaluing of children and their rights [Child Rights International Network (CRIN), 2009].

But is the Nigerian media living up to its responsibility in championing the course of the Nigerian child. This study examines the coverage of children-related issues and representation of children in the Nigerian press. It evaluates the extent and form of press coverage accorded children-related issues in the Nigerian press to determine if the Nigerian press is at the forefront of championing efforts geared towards improving the quality of life of the Nigerian child.

Plight of Children in Nigeria

A recent report by Maplecroft ranks Nigeria among 11 worst countries with extreme cases of child labour “where children are toiling dangerous and dirty conditions, missing out on education and other basic rights” (Nigeria, Somalia, Others Rank as Worst Countries for Child Labour – Report, October 17, 2013). About 11 million children of school age are reportedly out of school despite the enactment of the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004, which makes education free and compulsory for the first nine years of a child's educational career (Adedokun, 2013). The rise in insurgency in the country has undoubtedly reduced child enrolment and attendance in schools as insurgents now target schools in perpetrating their heinous crimes thus prompting parents/guardians in susceptible areas to withdraw their wards from schools in the hope of keeping them alive. The abduction of over 200 girls in April 2014 from a school in Chibok, Borno State whom are yet to be released almost nine months after (as at January, 2015), continue to hunt the country. Oladunjoye and Omemu (2013) found that the increasing attacks on schools have negatively affected school attendance in three states with high rate of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

Nigeria is also reported to have the second highest rate of

first day deaths and stillbirths in the world at 32.7 per 1000 births (Pakistan, Nigeria have highest child mortality rate – report, 2014). The country is ranked ninth country with highest under-five mortality rate in the world (**State of the World's Children, 2014**). Latest figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics in its Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 4) on Nigeria for 2011 also indicate that the Nigerian child is continuously abused and deprived of fundamental rights. The nutritional status of the average Nigerian child under is still low as one in four children (24%) under-five is underweight, and less than one in three is underdeveloped (36%). Only 15 per cent of children zero to five months old are exclusively breastfed as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF.

On health, only 28 percent of children receive all their vaccines by the age of 12 months and one-fifth (20%) never received any. Overall, only a quarter (24 percent) of the children 12-23 months had vaccination cards. Although sleeping under insecticide treated mosquito nets (ITNs) is considered one of the most effective ways of preventing malaria transmission (a major contributor to under-five mortality rate), only 16 percent of children under-five sleep under ITNs.

On Early Child Development Index (ECDI), the percentage of children age 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of four domains – physical (motor skills, freedom of recurrent illness), literacy-numeracy, social-emotional and learning (ability to follow simple instructions, ability to occupy herself/himself independently); the country's the ECDI score is 61 per cent. Literacy-numeracy records the least score with 32 per cent among the key domains while physical has the highest with 93 per cent.

Many children remain invisible to the Nigerian state as only 42 per cent of children under-five were registered at birth thus denying them the opportunities to claim services and protections due to them on an equal basis with registered children. About half (47%) of the country's children ages 5-14 years are involved in

child labour in Nigeria, with such work interfering with their education, continuously drain their childhood of joy and crush their right to normal physical and mental development (**State of the World's Children, 2014**). Violent discipline of children is also common in the country as parents and caregivers continue to use physical punishment or psychological aggression to correct perceived misbehaviour despite the fact that it violates the children's basic human rights (**State of the World's Children, 2014**). Nine in ten (91%) receive violent discipline rate among children age 2-14 years. Thirty-four per cent of such children receive severe violent discipline while only seven per cent were disciplined by non-violent means.

These reports and others like them point to the fact that Nigeria still has a lot to do concerning the rights of children and that the media as monitors of governance and as advocates of the seemingly marginalized sectors of the population such as the aged and children ought to partner with civil rights groups to make society better for the more vulnerable.

Child Representation in the Media

Over the years, studies have been done depicting the representation of children in the media across the world. A number of them recorded findings indicating that children's story remained on the back burner in the media and that most stories are outsourced stories, reflecting a tendency by media to react to issues rather than adopting a proactive role (Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2013). One of such is a study by Child Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) on children's portrayal in the British media, which acknowledged negative portrayals of children in the media - as troublemakers and deviant, or as victims (cited in Child Rights International Network (CRIN), 2009).

The study established that children are presented in the news in one of two ways:

1. As victims - vulnerable, passive, dependent, angelic,

ideally with blond hair and blue eyes. This fits in with idealistic Western conceptions of children that define childhood as a time of innocence.

2. As law breakers - threatening, out of control, menacing, hoodie-wearing, knife-carrying.

Nada Korac noted a 2001 study of children and the media in Serbia, which more or less corroborated the findings of the CRAE study. The Serbia study classified 72 per cent of representations of children in the media as “passive”. According to Korac, an alien leafing through newspapers, browsing the internet, watching television, would likely conclude that: “The child is a member of a rare, helpless, and rather endangered species. The members of that species are mostly of indefinite age, sex, and social status. All they are capable and fond of doing is to play and have fun. Apart from that there is little they can do, understand or say”. The study demonstrated a “superficial and sensationalist approach” to children, who were largely presented in a negative way. Children were used as a means for drawing attention or attaching importance to other themes. Moreover, there was a judgemental attitude to children based on adult standards (cited in CRIN, 2009).

The Media Monitoring Project (2004) in partnership with Save the Children, Sweden, and UNICEF organised an *Empowering Children and Media* project to analyse the representation of children and children's rights in the South African news media. Participants of the project analysed over 22 000 news items or image having a reference to a child or children from 36 different media, including print, radio and television From March 2003 to May 2003. Findings of the study reveal that children were grossly under-reported during the study period as only six per cent of all monitored news items contained children. Majority of the stories reported on children were negative and dominantly on crime. They also found that children were rarely sourced for their opinions and that they only received prime

coverage in the country's media when they feature in negative reports such as crime, disasters or accidents, child abuse, and war, conflict or violence. They were equally represented mostly as victims in the items monitored.

Oyero (2010) conducted a content analysis of child rights stories in two Nigerian Newspapers over a five-year period from 1999, the year that Oslo challenge was launched, to 2003, the year that Nigeria's National Assembly passed the Child Rights Act. The study found that children rights issues are generally under-reported and that such reports are usually buried in the inside pages of the newspapers in majority of cases. Oyero noted the poor coverage and placement of child rights stories as an indication of perceived weak newsworthiness of such issues among media practitioners. The study also found children among the least quoted groups in the child rights stories analysed. In essence, the media and other stakeholders when setting agenda for their rights often ignore voices of children. Thus, children are often ignored in the decision making process on their rights, and the media seem uncommitted to changing the status quo.

Ikpe (2007) studied the newspaper coverage of sexuality of children in Nigeria and found that the papers mostly covered stories of rape or other such negative story angles on sexuality thus underpinning the tendency for the media to focus on negative or crime stories in their reportage of children-related issues. **Williams-Thomas** (2010) surmised that, "in the modern context, crime has continued to represent a considered proportion of news reporting, with dedicated crime reporters giving detailed, up to the minute accounts of recent cases on Television news shows. Newspapers give ever increasing column inches to the latest crime headline and internet websites provide sources of information and dedicated blogs for members of the public to indulge" concerning children.

With the unending challenges facing the Nigerian child as enumerated above, the challenges is on the media to drive change

towards improving the status of the Nigerian child by drawing public attention to positive issues that can enhance their quality of life. The media can achieve this through extensive coverage, sensitisation, and proper positioning of children-related issues. The nature of such issues is also important if the desired change must be achieved. The study thus examines coverage of children-related issues in the Nigerian print news media by examining children portrayal, kind of such issue reported, prominence given and dominant slant of children-related issues published by sampled publications over a period.

Research Questions

1. How are children portrayed or represented in Nigerian print news media?
2. What child-related issue is most reported in Nigerian print news media?
3. What level of prominence is given to child-related issues in Nigerian print news media?
4. What is the dominant slant of child-related issues published in Nigerian print news media?

Theoretical Framework

This study contextualizes its framework theoretically upon the agenda setting and framing theories of media. Agenda Setting is the process whereby the mass media determine what we think about and how we should think about it in terms of how the media makes visible selected items in the public sphere and thereby dominates the creation of pictures in our head. In this process, editors play an important part as they go through their day-to-day tasks in deciding and publicizing news. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.

The common assumption of agenda-setting is that the ability of the media to influence the visibility of events in the

public mind has been a part of our modern culture. Therefore, the concept of agenda setting in our society is for the press to selectively choose what we read, see, or hear in the media. The concept of framing is related to, but expands the agenda-setting theory by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is the prerogative of journalists. Thus, a frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided. Frames influence the perception of the news by the reader, listener or viewer. Representation of children in the media being studied here is contextualized as a function of the agenda setting and framing aspects of the journalists' coverage of children in the Nigerian media. (Littlejohn, 2002; McCombs and Shaw, 1977; Wilson and Wilson, 2001; Fairhurst and Star, 1996; Sanchez, 2002)

Method of Study

The study adopted the content analysis research method. The population for the study comprise major daily national newspapers and news magazines published in the country, representing the Nigerian print news media. Two national newspapers, *The PUNCH* and *The Guardian*; and two leading news magazines *Tell* and *The News*, were sampled for the study. The two newspapers and magazines were *purposively* chosen because they are among the leading newspapers and magazines in the country. The study analysed all news story, features, and editorials on children, published by the four publications in the second quarter of 2013. Dedicated children pages such as *Junior Guardian* published in *The Guardian* on Sundays, and *Young Punchers* published in *The Punch* also on Sundays, were excluded

from the study as the focus is on the core news contents published on children.

The period, April 2013 to June 2013, was studied to examine print news media portrayal of children over a period in 2013 when the study was undertaken. The whole editions of the four publications published within the three months period were studied. The units of analyses for the study included all news, features, and editorials published on children generally. A coding schedule was developed as the research instrument to measure different variables. The variables are presented in categories, with each category having varying options to choose from. The options in each category are not ranked in any order. One of the authors did the coding process and it involved allocating values for the categories developed in each of the units of analyses studied. The data generated was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software.

Data Analysis

The study examined all child-related stories published by four major news publications during the three-month period under study. Three hundred and ninety-two (392) stories were analysed in all. The frequency distribution of the stories analysed among the sampled publications are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Sampled Publications

| Publications | Frequency | % |
|---------------------|------------------|------------|
| <i>The Punch</i> | 198 | 50.5 |
| <i>The Guardian</i> | 174 | 44.4 |
| <i>The News</i> | 13 | 3.3 |
| <i>Tell</i> | 7 | 1.8 |
| Total | 392 | 100 |

Table 1 above shows the frequency distribution of the stories analysed in the sampled publications. Majority of the stories analysed in the study were published by the two sampled newspapers with both accounting for almost 95 per cent (94.9%) of the total stories analysed. This may be expected considering the fact that 91 editions each of *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers covering the three-month study period were analysed as against 13 editions each of *The News* and *Tell* magazines studied.

The study also examined the direction of the children stories reported by the sampled publications during the study period. This measured whether the stories were slanted positively, negatively or were simply neutral. This was done to determine whether Nigerian print news media focus more attention on positive, negative, or neutral issues in their coverage of children during the period. The results are displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Tone of Children Stories

| Tone | Publication | | | | Total |
|----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | The Punch | The Guardian | Tell | The News | |
| Positive | 78 | 103 | 5 | 10 | 196 |
| | 39.4% | 59.2% | 71.4% | 76.9% | 50.0% |
| Negative | 103 | 60 | 2 | 3 | 168 |
| | 52.0% | 34.5% | 28.6% | 23.1% | 42.9% |
| Neutral | 17 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 28 |
| | 8.6% | 6.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 7.1% |
| Total | 198 | 174 | 7 | 13 | 392 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Table 2 above shows all the sampled publications gave more coverage to the positive issues on children except for *The Punch* newspaper, which had reports that are more negative during the study period. A further examination of the published stories showed that *The Punch* newspaper reported more on cases of

abuses towards children and all such stories were coded as negative in the study.

The study examined the frequency distributions of the three forms of stories, which represented our units of analysis for in the study. The results among the sampled news publications are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution of Forms of Children Stories Analysed

| Form | Name of Publication | | | | Total |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | The Punch | The Guardian | Tell | The News | |
| Straight news | 136 | 122 | 1 | 3 | 262 |
| | 68.7% | 70.1% | 14.3% | 23.1% | 66.8% |
| Features | 60 | 48 | 6 | 10 | 124 |
| | 30.3% | 27.6% | 85.7% | 76.9% | 31.6% |
| Editorial | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| | 1.0% | 2.3% | .0% | .0% | 1.5% |
| Total | 198 | 174 | 7 | 13 | 392 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Table 3 above shows that most of the stories studied in the two sampled newspapers were reported as straight news, with over 30 per cent reported as features. *The Punch* and *The Guardian* published two and four editorials respectively on children during the period under study. The two sampled magazines however had most of their stories analysed in the study being features with few of the stories reported as straight news. This may be expected considering the differences in the nature of newspapers and magazine stories.

Another variable examined in the study is the level of prominence accorded children stories in Nigerian print news media. This was done by considering the positioning of the children stories published within the pages of the sampled publications during the study period. The results are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4: Positioning of children stories

| Position | Publication | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | The Punch | The Guardian | Tell | The News | |
| Front page/ Cover story | 8 4.0% | 3 1.7% | 1 14.3% | 2 15.4% | 14 3.6% |
| Back page | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 0% |
| Editorial page | 1 0.5% | 4 2.3% | - | - | 5 1.3% |
| Other inside pages | 189 95.5% | 167 96.0% | 6 85.7% | 11 84.6% | 373 95.1% |
| Total | 198 100.0% | 174 100.0% | 7 100.0% | 13 100.0% | 392 100.0% |

Table 4 above shows that children stories are relegated to the background in Nigerian Print news media as majority of the stories published on children during the study period were buried in the inside pages of the sampled publications. Over 95 per cent of the total stories analysed in the story were buried in the inside pages. Less than four per cent (3.6%) made font page headline, and five editorials representing just over one per cent (1.3%) of the stories studied were published by the sampled publications during the study period.

Each of the sampled newspapers published over 95 per cent (*The Punch* – 95.5%, *The Guardian* – 96%) of their children stories in the inside pages. *The Punch* published more stories on its front page having four per cent of its children stories on its front page in contrast with *The Guardian*, which has less than two per cent (1.7%). *The Guardian* however published more editorials having four editorials, as against *The Punch* with only one editorial published on child-related issue during the study period.

For the sampled magazines, any story having its headline displayed on the cover page was coded as front-page story. This included the cover story for the edition and any supporting story featured on the cover. *Tell* only published one supporting story on children on one of its edition during the study period. *The News* however published one cover story and another supporting story on children each in two of its editions during the study period. Both magazines have about 85 per cent (*Tell* – 85.7%, *The News* – 84.6%) of the children stories each published during the period in the inside pages.

Another variable measured in the study is the theme or subject matter of the children stories published by Nigerian print news media. This was done to examine the kind of issues Nigerian media focus on when reporting about children. The findings are presented in table 5 below.

Table 5: Themes of Children Stories

| Theme | Name of Publication | | | | Total |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | The Punch | The Guardian | Tell | The News | |
| Education | 31 15.7% | 37 21.3% | 3 42.9% | 3 23.1% | 74 18.9% |
| Arts | 0 .0% | 7 4.0% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 7 1.8% |
| Security | 3 1.5% | 1 .6% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 4 1.0% |
| Family | 6 3.0% | 3 1.7% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 9 2.3% |
| Entertainment | 1 0.5% | 1 0.6% | 0 .0% | 1 7.7% | 3 .8% |
| Health | 38 19.2% | 44 25.3% | 3 42.9% | 2 15.4% | 87 22.2% |

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Crime | 65 32.8% | 24 13.8% | 0 .0% | 3 23.1% | 92 23.5% |
| Child labour | 6 3.0% | 3 1.7% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 9 2.3% |
| Child rights | 3 1.5% | 8 4.6% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 11 2.8% |
| Specific days | 6 3.0% | 8 4.6% | 1 14.3% | 0 .0% | 15 3.8% |
| Accident | 12 6.1% | 3 1.7% | 0 .0% | 2 15.4% | 17 4.3% |
| Sports | 9 4.5% | 26 14.9% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 35 8.9% |
| Economy | 2 1.0% | 1 .6% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 3 .8% |
| Others | 16 8.1% | 8 4.6% | 0 .0% | 2 15.4% | 26 6.6% |
| Total | 198 100% | 174 100% | 7 100% | 13 100% | 392 100% |

Table 5 above shows that majority of the stories analysed focused on crime stories involving children. The children were reported mostly as victims of the crimes being reported though they occasionally feature as the crime perpetrators. Issues relating to child health and child education also featured prominently during the period under study.

Independently, *The Punch* newspaper focused more on crimes, followed by education and sports in its coverage of children. *The Guardian* newspaper however focused more on health, followed by education and sports in its children news coverage. *The Guardian* has a dedicated news page solely for school sports hence its increased coverage of children sports. Just like *The guardian*, *Tell* also concentrated on health and education in its coverage of children news. *The News* however focused

mostly on crime and education, followed by health and accidents in its reportage of children news.

Other themes featured by the sampled publications include religion, information and communication technology (ICT), environment, social vices, charity, electricity/power, infrastructure, conflict, corruption, fashion, natural disaster, poverty, personal safety, and suicide. These themes occurred just once or twice in the total stories analysed in study.

The last variable measured in the study is the portrayal or representation of children in Nigerian print news media. This was done to examine how children are portrayed in the news media. The findings are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Children Portrayal in Stories Studied

| Child Portrayal | Name of Publication | | | | Total |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| | The Punch | The Guardian | Tell | The News | |
| Victim | 112 56.6% | 62 35.6% | 0 0.0% | 5 38.5% | 179 45.7% |
| Entertainer | 0 0.0% | 4 2.3% | 0 0.0% | 1 7.7% | 5 1.3% |
| Achiever | 11 5.6% | 19 10.9% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 30 7.7% |
| Crime perpetrator | 3 1.5% | 1 0.6% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 4 1.0% |
| Contestant | 4 2.0% | 6 3.4% | 0 .0% | 0 .0% | 10 2.6% |
| Beneficiary | 13 6.6% | 37 21.3% | 2 28.6% | 5 38.5% | 57 14.5% |
| Change agent | 8 4.0% | 7 4.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 15 3.8% |
| Learners | 6 3.0% | 4 2.3% | 2 28.6% | 0 0.0% | 12 3.1% |
| Health Patient | 15 7.6% | 13 7.5% | 2 28.6% | 1 7.7% | 31 7.9% |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Celebrant | 1 0.5% | 2 1.1% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 3 .8% |
| Celebrity | 2 1.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 2 .5% |
| Others | 3 1.5% | 4 2.3% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 7 1.8% |
| No specification | 20 10.1% | 15 8.6% | 1 14.3% | 1 7.7% | 37 9.4% |
| Total | 198 100% | 174 100% | 7 100% | 13 100% | 392 100% |

Table 6 above shows that children were mostly portrayed as victims as over 45 per cent of the stories analysed in the study reported children as such. The victimisation occurred in various instances as the children were portrayed as victims of crime, family dispute, societal neglect, poor infrastructural amenities, natural disaster, and civil unrest. This was followed by representation of children as beneficiaries and health patients with each accounting for 14.5 per cent and 7.9 per cent respectively. The children were portrayed as beneficiaries of government largesse, corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities of corporate organisations, latest technological advancements, among others. Portrayal as health patients occurred in reportage of children suffering from various ailments. Almost eight percent of the stories (7.7%) also reported on achievements of children in various fields of human endeavours such as education, sports, arts, etc.

Independently, all the publications studied focused more on victimisation of children in their reports except for *Tell* magazine which published none of such stories. Children portrayal in about 10 per cent (9.4%) of the stories studied could not be distinguished as they focus solely on reporting them purely as children within the society.

Discussion

We now revisit our research questions.

1. How are children portrayed or represented in Nigerian print news media?

Findings of the study showed that children are mostly portrayed as victims in Nigerian print news media. The portrayal of children as victims occurred in various forms such as victims of crime, accidents, natural disaster, health hazards, family disputes, and poor infrastructures, among others. Children were also portrayed as beneficiaries of various handouts from individuals, institutions, and corporate organisations. Cases of children suffering from different ailments and health challenges (coded as health patient in the study) were equally prominent during the period under review. Most of the cases of sick children were reported to solicit funds urgently needed for their treatment from the public. Few of the reports portrayed children as achievers and change agents.

Based on these findings, one can conclude that Nigerian children are portrayed mostly as individuals in need of compassion, handouts, and other forms of assistance from the public or adult population, in the media. There were few reports on achievements and potentials of children within the Nigerian society. This may not be in the best interest of the children as noted by Media Monitoring Project (2004) in a report on its Empowering Children & Media project, that “the consistent representation of children as victims in the news media is disempowering and perpetuates a discourse of victim-hood”. The report noted that the media tend to limit their reports to the facts of victimization and abuse of children while ignoring discussion on their rights as it relates to such victimization. It added that reports about child abuse would only be more meaningful in achieving the desired result when discussed in view of the rights of children within the society.

The tendency for the media to ignore children who are making meaningful contributions to their communities may

discourage other children with similar potentials from exhibiting their potentials. It also contravenes one of the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which allows children the right to express themselves freely on matters that affect them, and to have their views taken seriously (UNICEF, 2014). UNICEF noted that children could drive developmental change on issues affecting their fellows in their communities if given the opportunities and adequate protection. The Media Monitoring Project (2008) added that “by providing children with opportunities to speak for themselves – about their hopes, fears, and achievements, and the impact of adult behaviour on their lives – media professionals can remind the public of children's rights”. The media can therefore set the agenda for children and other stakeholders to participate in, and address child-developmental issues by providing adequate coverage, proper representation, and in-depth analysis of children-related issues. Promoting children achievers and change agents can equally motivate others to achieve similar endeavours within their immediate environment.

2. What child-related issue is most reported in Nigerian print news media?

Findings from the study show that the Nigerian print news media focused mostly on issues relating to crime, followed by child health and child education, when reporting on children. Other child-developmental issues such as child labour, child rights, sports, and family, among others were given minimal coverage in the news. This finding on the tendency for the media to focus more on crime when reporting on children corroborates other studies on media coverage of children (e.g. Ikpe, 2007; Media Monitoring Project, 2004; **Williams-Thomas, 2010**).

Media Monitoring Project (2004) noted that the preponderance of “bad news” stories such as crime, violence, and abuse, in news reports “severely narrows the representation of

children and helps locate children more often as victims”. Writing based on findings of research conducted in thirteen Asian countries, Goonasekera (2001, cited in Media Monitoring Project, 2004) noted that the media equally contribute to societal discrimination against children through their silence and neglect of child-related issues. Goonasekera argues that in the hierarchy of importance, children are generally not considered newsworthy, except when they are involved in some other dominating newsworthy events such as crime; or sensational events like violence and accidents. **Williams-Thomas (2010) added that** media's pre-occupation with emotive children crime stories tend to “construct, replicate and re-affirm conservative ideologies within the public sphere”, and generate widespread public interest on such stories which media explore for economic gains.

3. What level of prominence is given to child-related issues in Nigerian print news media?

To determine the level of prominence accorded children stories in the Nigerian print news media, the study considered the placement of the children stories and forms of presentation of the stories studied. Findings from the study show that the prominence level accorded children in Nigerian print news media is low as majority of the stories are buried inside the pages of the sampled publications and mostly reported as straight news (see Tables 3 and 4).

This corroborated the findings of Oyero (2010) indicating that children issues continue to be buried in the inside pages of the newspapers in Nigerian a decade after his study. Such level of coverage does not augur well for the interest of the children as it does allow for in-depth analysis and extensive coverage of issues. The fact that the stories were not published on the first page could also be because the stories were not presented as being big enough to merit its placement on the first page.

4. What is the dominant slant of child-related issues published in Nigerian print news media?

Findings from the study showed that Nigerian print news media featured slightly higher positive stories than negative ones in their coverage children issues. As shown in Table 2 above, three of the four sampled publications (*The Guardian*, *Tell*, and *The News*) focused more on positive reports on children, with only *The Punch* having more negative reports. The dominance of positive reports contradicts findings in similar studies (e.g. Media monitoring Project, 2004; Oyero, 2010).

Although the study found stories that are more positive in three of the sampled publications, such dominance did not translate into positive portrayal of children among the publications as children were still relegated to roles of victims in three of the sampled publications (*The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *The News*). *Tell* is the only medium analysed that never reported any negative story on children. It also did not portray any child as victim in any of its children stories analysed in the study.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study found that children are generally under-reported in the Nigerian Press. Unfortunately, when they are reported, the focus is on children as passive members of the society incapable of making meaningful contributions to the developmental challenges facing them within the society. The paper thus calls for better representation and extended coverage of children in the media. The media need to rise up to this challenge and positively promote and set agenda for children and other stakeholders in their reportage of children-related issues.

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