



An Assessment of Level of Prominence Given to Children's Rights in The *Daily Nation* and *Standard* Online Newspapers in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the level of prominence given to children's rights stories in two major newspapers with extensive reach in Kenya and the East Africa region: The Daily Nation and The Standard. Specifically, the study conducted a content analysis to explore the volume of coverage dedicated to children's stories between January and December 2020. The study further examined the prominence given to children's rights to education, health, and protection from child labour in the selected newspapers. Agenda-setting theory was utilized, and a purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the two newspapers, as well as stratified random sampling for selecting the newspaper articles. Additionally, eight editors and reporters who write and report about children's issues for the selected media organizations were purposively sampled to participate in Key Informant Interviews. The study found 303 online articles which had general stories featuring children's issues but analyzed 93 articles (55 in The Daily Nation and 38 in The Standard) with relevant content where children were the main focus. The research findings revealed that most articles about children (72%) were presented as news reports, and there was generally low coverage of child rights issues. However, the media provided opportunities for children to comment on their issues without violating the ethical principles of journalism. Based on these findings, the study concludes that there was low coverage of child rights issues in the media. It recommends that media organizations hire and retain specialist journalists who write and report about children's issues, media stakeholders use awards to motivate and inspire outstanding child rights journalists, and that academia incorporate children reporting as a unit into journalism education curricula.

Keywords: Child Labour, Child(ren) Rights, Daily Nation, Education, Health, Media, Newspapers, Standard

I. INTRODUCTION

Although the debate on children's rights has been there since the 19th century, it came to the fore after the world wars in the 20th Century (Dirikoç, 2022). During the agricultural capitalism periods before the Industrial Revolution, children belonged to their fathers and were also used for domestic labour. This was the period of "no child rights" as they broke away from their homes. As children continued to provide cheap labour, the world realized the challenges they faced, leading to campaigns of the 1920s termed 'child rescue age,' which resulted in compulsory education as part of disciplining the child (Bendo, 2020; Dirikoç, 2022). These campaigns also led to the regulation of children's working conditions to ensure their rights were protected.

Despite being integral to nearly all aspects of public policy discourse and during international and regional gatherings such as World Children's Day (UNICEF, 2023), discussions involving children have historically been adult-dominated. Globally, children and their issues have not received adequate coverage in the media. Children are shunned or scantily reported in the media, and their coverage have often been relegated to brief mentions or fillers in newspapers or broadcasts (Internews Europe, 2014; Oyero, 2010).

Kalombe and Phiri (2019) recognizes media as a powerful tool in disseminating truthful information, connecting the society, and creating awareness for planned development and social change. Media portrayal of children, as highlighted by Mulugeta (2014), shapes public perceptions and influences decision-making processes, not only within governments but also among stakeholders advocating for children's rights. Media coverage of children has played a critical role in raising public awareness about child rights issues, yet Agboola (2020) argues that media institutions have failed to meet expected standards in advocating for child rights and development. For example, when media cover children's health issues, they tend to emphasize catastrophes and epidemics, rather than offering preventative health information before diseases occur (Mulugeta, 2014).



According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2020), children are a huge demographic, constituting about 46% (around 24 million) of Kenya's total population. This implies they cannot be ignored or left out of public discussions. However, media attention on children's issues has remained inadequate, with advertisements and content serving commercial interests often taking precedence over news (Oriare et al., 2010). Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori (2020) note that children's stories in Kenyan media frequently lack comprehensive coverage and are sometimes framed through stereotypical and patriarchal lenses, thereby overlooking the voice of a child. According to Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori, stories of child abuse, children's involvement in crime, and street children often dominate headlines, overshadowing broader child rights issues such as education, health, protection from child labor, and freedom from discrimination. This imbalanced portrayal often depicts children either as 'victims' or as 'dangerous.'

In 2004, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) observed that media suppresses children's voices when covering children's rights issues. It further contended that children and young people are inadequately covered in the news, often portrayed within sensationalist contexts such as educational or health neglect, exploitation, and violence (Gigli, 2004). In response, UNICEF developed the Principles and Guidelines for Media Reporting on Children in 2018, aimed at guiding journalists to cover children's issues in the public interest while safeguarding their rights and minimizing risks (Waddell, 2018).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Media coverage of children can help policymakers and the public understand what should be done to address issues facing children. However, the coverage tends to focus on certain issues, including sexual violence and abuse (Mejia et al., 2012; Döring & Walter, 2020; Kitzinger, 2004), while ignoring others, such as the rights of children. Saint-Jacques et al. (2012) analyzed 1,211 articles in Canada to examine child maltreatment and child protection services (CPS) and found that the number of newspaper articles dealing with child maltreatment and CPS increased by 65%. Furthermore, Ramabu (2020) examined 101 newspaper articles in Botswana from January 2017 to April 2020 and found that a quarter of articles on child sexual abuse (26%) were not reporting on the incidents.

Despite efforts to strengthen the accuracy, quality, and utility of the media's portrayal of children and their rights, prior studies examining news coverage of child abuse and neglect have demonstrated significant distortion, under-representation, and inadequate reporting (Davies et al., 2017; Gillespie et al., 2014). These findings point to concerns about how reporting may be skewed or sensationalized to compete for readers, and how the media may be perpetuating common misconceptions about these issues facing children. Failure by the media to give attention to children's issues is a missed opportunity to inform policymakers and the public about the issues, contributing to inaction of the relevant stakeholders.

While there are studies on media coverage of children, only few have focused on Kenyan newspapers, especially on child rights (Bitrus-Ojiambo & King'ori, 2020; Ortum, 2013), and thus a gap remains. A report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2021) indicate that media outlets in Kenya, whether state-owned or private, tend to shun topics that could jeopardize their revenue streams due to political influence. Media practitioners and organizations in Kenya also attribute the minimal or lack of comprehensive coverage of children's stories to many laws and policies that discourage photographing or interviewing children on sensitive issues without parental consent. This potentially discourages journalists from pursuing stories related to children, leading to lower coverage.

Therefore, this study sought to assess the level of prominence given to children's rights in *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers in Kenya between January and December 2020, confining itself to three themes: education, health, and child labour.

1.2 Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to assess the level of prominence given to children's rights in *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers in Kenya between January and December 2020. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Explore the volume of coverage given to child rights stories by *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers.
- ii. Examine the prominence given to children's education, health and child labour in *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study borrowed heavily from the agenda-setting theory, put forth by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, which posits that members of the audience not only learn about public issues through mass media, but also attach meaning to such issues depending on the emphasis placed to it by the media (Blasco-Duatis, et al., 2019). Thus, the media influences the importance of topics on the public by attaching prominence and frequency to the coverage of issues. According to McLeod et al. (2009), it also involves the ability of media to control the topics which are perceived by members of the public as important. Audiences care more about certain topics or believe they are more salient in their lives based on the frequency with which media cover the topics (McCombs, 2002). In other words, the more salient a news issue is, in terms of frequency and prominence, the more important the audience will regard the issue to be.

Agenda-setting hypothesis has been outlined by McQuail (2010) as follows: A public debate is represented by a set of important issues; An agenda originates from the public opinion and proposals from political interests; Competing interests seek to promote the salience of their issues; Mass media news select issues for more or less attention depending on pressure, especially from interested elites, public opinion and real-world events; Media gives public recognition to the current agenda and further effects on the public and evaluation of the political scene; and Agenda effects are peripheral and short term.

The study adopted agenda setting theory since it offers explanations on how media prioritization of children in its coverage is likely to mount pressure on government and other stakeholders to develop interventions that prioritize the wellbeing of children. If the media set the agenda of public discussion, then we assume that sustained media coverage of children's rights will directly influence the level of attention people put on children's stories.

2.2 Empirical Review

Even though members of the public learn about certain issues touching on children through first-hand experience and interactions with close family members, West et al. (2011) note that the public often depend on media outlets to broadly inform their thinking about schooling. This demonstrates the important role media plays, though not fully understood, in the formation of children's issues (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007). Sustained media coverage of children's issues such as child labour, education or harassment, can potentially influence how the public and policymakers think about important educational issues, and which issues are deemed "important". It is for this reason that media has become a platform for debates over school or educational reforms, with child rights advocates investing substantial resources to framing educational "problems" and "solutions" (Malin & Lubienski, 2015).

A study by Campanella (2015) analyzed education and school stories from 5000 news sources for a period of 25 years to give a view of the media broader landscape beyond national news. This study discovered that coverage of education constituted 7% of the media coverage in 2014, depicting a change. Comparatively, Campanella's study found less coverage of education in the national news (2%), which concurs with West et al. (2009) who focused on sports, events and school funding.

Numerous studies have also revealed evidence of inadequate coverage of education, while some observing that coverage tend to be "thin" or superficial, lacking historical, moral, and practical context (Moses & Saenz, 2008; Taiphapoon and Muthitacharoen, 2009). Other studies note that the coverage is not well-informed by education research and offer a biased position on issues by highlighting some voices and perspectives, such as those of government officials, over others, such as those of teachers (Tamir & Davidson, 2011).

Nkwam-Uwaoma and Ndukwu, (2020) analysed two national newspapers in Nigeria, to explore how they covered violence against children. Their study dwelt on the frequency, length, level of prominence, direction and sources of information reported on the topic. In total, 168 articles were analysed for a period of twelve months indicating inadequate length and space given to reports on violence against children. Similarly, Asare-Donkoh (2017), concluded that the Ghanaian newspapers devoted minimal attention to children's issues leading to low coverage. Politics and other subjects dominated in the newspapers as opposed to children's issues. This study utilized agenda-setting theory, recognizing the immense potential media has in shaping narratives. According to Asare-Donkoh, children's issues are never prioritized in public discussion and as a result, children do not find a place on the national agenda of policymakers. This low coverage of children has also been emphasized by Oyero (2010).

Media in Malawi successfully highlighted activities by various stakeholders in the child protection sector, including government officials, non-governmental organizations, and other key players, leading to enhanced child protection (Mang'anda, 2012). For instance, *The Nation* newspaper consistently covered child labor issues for the past decade and maintained a library with a dedicated section compiling all the stories related to child labor and numerous news pieces. On the contrary, Mengal et al. (2019) uncovered a significant lack of children's rights coverage in both Pakistani (*The Nation*) and Indian (*The Hindu*) print media, particularly in areas such as their developmental,



education, health, and safety rights. The study notes these critical aspects of children's rights were rarely featured in the Indian and Pakistani press, creating challenges in identifying and addressing significant issues related to children's rights.

Ashaba and Agaba, (2018) attempted to analyse 185 child abuse stories published in *The New Vision* in Uganda and findings revealed bias in coverage with most of the news stories centred around cities mainly Kampala, ignoring stories of children in rural areas. The study further found that journalists in Uganda lack special training on child rights reporting and that media houses are driven by commercial interests. On their part, Ho and Chan, (2018) reviewed a total of 579 newspaper articles on child maltreatment from four local newspapers in Hong Kong in 2016, by examining differences in reporting style, media framing, newspaper credibility, and drew a comparison between free versus paid newspapers. Their study found a vast majority of news reports focused on specific cases or events and seldom discussed child maltreatment as a broader social issue.

Tenor and Himma-Kadakas (2024) were interested in assessing the impact of editorial processes on the representation of young people in news coverage in Sweden and Estonia to address the historical imbalance and misrepresentation of young voices in previous studies. Their study discovered that children were underrepresented in the news. Tenor and Himma-Kadakas argue that prevailing editorial interpretations of media accountability not only limit the presence of young voices in the news but also fail to effectively address potential harm. The researchers also analyzed ethical breaches related to minors and conducted semi-structured interviews with editors as part of their methodology.

Kagunda and Nabushawo (2020) discovered in their study that children experiencing mental health issues were frequently confined to their homes and restrained, justified by concerns that "they might harm themselves and harm others." During interviews with mental health professionals, the study found that certain journalists exhibited considerable apprehension, particularly the fear of potential attacks when invited to cover events related to mental health, including visits to rehabilitation centres. To overcome these challenges, the study suggests the need to enhance the capabilities of health journalists, who play a crucial role as guardians of health-related matters in the mass media industry. This will enable journalists to effectively utilize contextual, thematic, and economic viewpoints in their coverage of children with mental health issues.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This included content analysis and key informant interviews (KIIs). Content analysis was chosen because, since the 1920s, it has evolved as the best research technique in social sciences (Collins, 2011; Robson, et al., 2014). Content analysis has been described by Mayring (2000) as a systematic and rule-guided technique used to analyze the informational contents of textured data. Furthermore, Forman & Damschroder (2007) observed that this technique combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to make sense of textured data.

3.2 Target Population and Sample Size

All licensed newspaper publications in Kenya, totaling eight newspapers – *The Daily Nation*, *The Standard*, *The People Daily*, *Business Daily*, *The Star*, *Taifa Leo*, *X News*, and *The East African* – comprised the target population for this study. Furthermore, all newspapers and digital stories on child rights issues (specifically education, health, and child labor) presented as advertisements, commentaries, documentaries, news reports, and other programs formed the unit of analysis.

Content analysis involved examining coverage of child rights issues published by the newspaper articles in the selected major newspapers in Kenya, during the study period (January to December 2020). The two newspapers were selected based on a number of factors, such as wider coverage and distribution, frequency of publication, accuracy and speed of their reporting, their political stance as independent newspapers, and their availability and accessibility in different formats, among other factors.

Findings from the *State of the Media Report* by Media Council of Kenya (2022), indicate *The Daily Nation* (53%) and *The Standard* (22%) as the most dominant newspapers with the highest number of readerships. Based on evidence, the study selected only two newspapers of the eight existing newspaper brands in Kenya through a purposive sampling technique, and employed a stratified random sampling in selecting the newspaper articles. Through stratification, the newspapers were categorized based on ownership. All the newspapers selected are privately owned, and since the publications are available in both hard and digital copies, the study focused on the digital/online version because of its availability within the required time frame for the researcher.



The researcher also conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 8 purposeful selected individuals (reporters and editors) from *The Nation* and *Standard Media*, who are professionals and experts who have first-hand information and knowledge as they write and report about the children's rights issues in Kenya. According to Kamal et al. (2018), KIIs are an effective way to gather first-hand knowledge about a particular issue.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were collected using a coding tool/guide, while qualitative data were collected by taking notes. To ensure control for the study, the researcher engaged two research assistants who pre-tested the coding tool, and coded items were tested for validity and reliability by assessing the level of agreement or disagreement between the two researcher assistants. Quantitative approaches involved analyzing the coded descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage, using the statistical package for social science (SPSS), which were then presented in the form of tables and graphs. On the other hand, qualitative data were sorted and summarized based on themes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 General Information on Newspaper Coverage of Child Rights Issues

This study assessed the level of prominence given to children's rights stories in the two selected newspapers in Kenya. Specifically, the study explored the volume of coverage dedicated to children's rights stories by both *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers. It also examined the prominence given to education, health and child labour in these newspapers. The study identified 303 general stories featuring children's issues but analyzed 93 stories with relevant content on child rights (mainly education, health and child labour) over a period of twelve months. The 210 stories were deemed irrelevant, as they primarily focused on politicians, challenges faced by pregnant and lactating mothers, doctors' strikes, press releases by government and its agencies, and COVID-19 updates where children were either just mentioned, or their pictures used, thus the researcher omitted them because they did not directly focus on child rights. It is worth noting that this study relied mainly on online publications of the selected newspapers.

4.2. Volume of Child Rights Content Covered in *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* Newspapers

The findings show that *The Daily Nation* provided more coverage of child rights in 55 (59%) and *The Standard* in 38(41%) of the stories analyzed. The majority (72%) of the stories on child rights were covered in form of news reports, with other story formats including opinion/feature at 15%, press releases at 4%, and photographs/cartoons at 9% of the stories analyzed.

As shown in Table 1, both newspapers depicted images of child rights mainly in photographs/cartoons. On the other hand, *The Daily Nation* increasingly covered child rights in news reports, and this shows the level of attention the newspaper gave to children, ensuring they represent issues in a way that appeals to the emotions of stakeholders who can then address children's issues.

Table 1

Volume of Child Rights Content Covered in the Daily Nation and Standard Newspapers

Story format	<i>Daily Nation</i>	<i>Standard</i>	Total	Percentage
News Report	42(57%)	25(43%)	67	72%
Opinion/features	7(50%)	7(50%)	14	15%
Advertisement	0(0%)	0(0%)	0	0%
Press Release	3(75%)	1(25%)	4	4%
Photographs/Cartoon	3(38%)	5(63%)	8	9%
Total	55(59%)	38(41%)	93	100%

In Figure 1, the study presents findings on trends of coverage during the twelve-month period. Higher coverage/more stories were observed in June (11) and October (16), with education issues dominating the coverage. Generally, these findings show that child rights remained an important topic in the media throughout the year, although the level of coverage might not be adequate compared to other topics such as politics, sports or crimes.

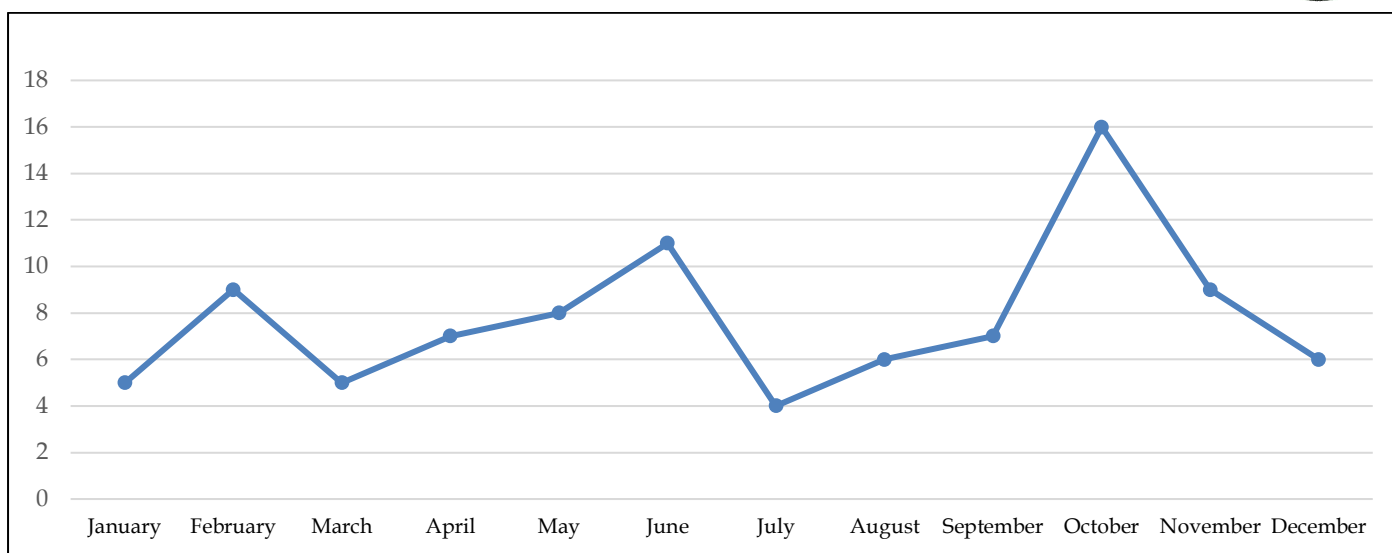


Figure 1
Trend of Coverage During the Twelve-Month Period

4.3. Level of Prominence Given to Child Rights Issues Across the Two Newspapers

Table 2 displays the frequency of coverage to explain the level of prominence given to child rights stories by the selected newspapers. The coverage of education issues was raised at least once in 48% of the stories included in the study, suggesting it was a critical component of debates about the closure and reopening of schools in Kenya. These articles highlighted the challenges that many children have faced in school, as well as the implications this could have on children's performance and career advancement in the future. As one article describes;

"...thousands of parents whose children are transiting from pre-school to primary usually spend a lot of money to allow their children sit entry exams, mostly done during Third Term. This is illegal according to both the Basic Education Act, 2013, and Basic Education Regulations, 2015" (The Standard, 2020).

Another article adds;

"...more than 150 children, including 20 Class Eight pupils, are reportedly pregnant in Tana Delta Sub-County, according to Moving the Goal Post, an organisation advocating for the rights of the girl-child." (The Daily Nation, 2020).

Also evident in Table 2, the health dimension (32%) was a prominent topic amid the health risks to children and child labour issues. When we look at the prominence of specific components of child rights in the individual newspapers, we find that *The Standard* gave more prominence to health (57%) and child labour (56%). On the other hand, *The Daily Nation* gave prominence to the education stories of children during the period under study.

An in-depth analysis of some newspaper articles shows an attempt to prominently highlight issues of children's rights. These articles challenged stakeholders to ensure every child's right is protected, especially where they live, learn, and play. While highlighting the plight of children, the media was acknowledged for its role in sensitizing and increasing societal awareness and responses to the educational needs of children. For example, *The Standard* newspaper invited education expert Dr. Domentier Kalthula to critically examine the rights of children during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"All this means that when schooling restarts, disadvantaged children will find themselves even further behind their peers. For students with learning disabilities, and those living in remote areas, the situation is bleak. Besides missed learning opportunities, students from poor backgrounds are also losing access to the meals that are made available by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Kenya through The School Feeding Program that was initiated in 2009" (Standard, March 2nd 2020)

The findings also indicate that journalists always try to look out for news stories that attract a significant audience or readership. By selecting certain children's stories, they discovered that some were newsworthy, as evidenced by the comprehensive reviewed of the status of children at school during the reopening, which depicted the image of children as the weaker links who needed support. For instance, shortage of handwashing facilities in schools was highlighted as a problem with some children being disadvantaged. An article from *The Daily Nation* on October



2, 2020, illustrates this, “While his age mates are asleep, he wakes up at 6am, dresses in long sleeve shirt, jeans cut into shorts and old rubber shoes and heads to farms nearby to look for work.” Similarly, *The Standard* reported on October 13, 2020, “Shortage of hand washing facilities is a problem in our school. We are contemplating how to engage parents to acquire them...”

Media coverage of children's rights during the period under scrutiny also highlighted challenges in girl child's education. For example, some dropped out of as a result of school closures prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that schools serve as a haven for girls. As one article illustrates:

“Girls are married off at 12 years when they are anatomically immature and that has a domino effect, stated Dr Mohamed during the meeting organized by UN H6 (Global Health Partnership) partners - UNAids, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, UN Women and World Bank, joint implementers of the \$21 million programme, in collaboration with the Government of Kenya” (The Daily Nation, December 18, 2020)

Table 2

Level of Prominence by Topic Across the Two Newspapers

Topic	Daily Nation	Standard	Total	Percentage
Child labour	8(44%)	10(56%)	18	19%
Education	24(53%)	21(47%)	45	48%
Health	13(43%)	17(57%)	30	32%
Total	45(48%)	48(52%)	93	100%

During in-depth interviews with reporters and editors who cover children's rights, it was confirmed that inequalities facing children while at school or at home are normally given attention by the media. In fact, media houses are keen in highlighting government policies which promotes children's right to quality education.:

When covering education issues in the lens of children, we hold a critical role in addressing disparities and advocating for equitable access to education. We shine a light on inequalities, whether they stem from socioeconomic or gender-based barriers, while ensuring that children's voices are heard loud and clear. We examine government policies and systemic issues within the education system, we hold authorities accountable for providing quality education for all children. We also spotlight successful interventions and grassroots efforts, empowering communities to stand up for children's rights and fostering dialogue to instigate change.

(Key Informant 3,2024)

The media has also been keen to highlight challenges ailing the education sector like cases of children who fail to transition to the next level in their academics due to poverty, thus, they were unable to afford school fees. Other students missed out on the bursaries allocated by government.

As a journalist, I have covered numerous stories concerning access to education. When the government announced the introduction of free and compulsory primary education, Kenyans expected all children would have the opportunity to enroll in school and attain the highest standards education from nursery through secondary (high) school. Unfortunately, I have covered many cases of children missing out of school because they lack school levies. (Key Informant 6,2024)

4.4 Discussions

Based on the above findings, this study argues that although child rights issues are portrayed in the two newspapers as important, their coverage is still low, similar to findings from previous studies conducted by Asare-Donkoh (2017), Ortum (2013), Oyeru (2010), and Bitrus-Ojiambo & King'ori (2020). Journalists interviewed during key informant interviews (KIIs) admitted that the media does not give children's stories the attention they deserve compared to other topics such as business, governance, politics, and sports—sentiments confirmed by studies conducted by Collings et al. (2016) and Larsen (2017). Some journalists reported political interference in Kenya as a major barrier in their coverage of children's rights issues: “Sometimes our media organizations tend to avoid topics that could jeopardize their revenue streams due to political influence” (Key Informant 7, 2024). This is in tandem with findings from a Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2021) report. Other journalists mentioned the existence of punitive laws, policies and guidelines on reporting about children as a major setback, hampering their coverage of children's stories.

Generally, these findings agree with the agenda-setting theory, which explains that the media sets an agenda by telling people what is more important through the frequency of reporting, and if a story is not reported, it indicates that the story is considered unimportant. Therefore, much of what the public knows about issues around them depends



so much on the map created by stories in the media (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). Further, these findings have been reinforced by the notion of media framing, which, according to Entman (1993), “attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, might lead audiences to have different reactions.” By reporting children’s issues in news reports or editorials/opinions, the media can structure and determine the importance attached to news information based on the importance it attaches to an issue, how the issue is packaged, and how it is presented to the public for consumption.

This study also found that the media raised an alert on child labour and other violations of children’s rights, for example, children being misused on farms: “*While his age mates are asleep, he wakes up at 6am, dresses in long sleeve shirt, jeans cut into shorts and old rubber shoes and heads to farms nearby to look for work.*” (Daily Nation, October 02, 2020). However, Saint-Jacques, et al. (2012) argue that no matter how much the media pretends to be concerned about child protection, they do not publish as many articles as they need to influence child protection services. The study also notes that certain media outlets in Kenya tend to avoid topics that could jeopardize their revenue streams due to political influence, which is consistent with findings from a report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2021).

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study analyzed newspaper coverage to assess the level of prominence given to children's stories. The findings reveal that there was low coverage of children, even though the media offered opportunities for children to comment on their issues without violating the ethical principles of journalism. This low coverage is attributed to the commercial interests of many media organizations, lack of specialized journalists who write and report on children’s issues, and the lack of motivation for journalists who devote their time to covering children’s stories, according to KIIs. There was diversity in the voices of stakeholders, including subject matter experts, who addressed issues related to children. For example, experts in the education and health sectors delved into specific issues affecting children. This was evident from the sustained awareness created by the media on children missing school and those engaged in child labour. The two selected newspapers also provided an in-depth coverage of government laws, policies and interventions. Media coverage also addressed discrimination against children, particularly focusing on the challenges girls faced, including health issues like period poverty, and other barriers preventing them from accessing education. Based on these findings, it can be argued that these newspapers did not give children’s issues the expected prominence, a conclusion confirmed by reporters and editors during key informant interviews.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the two selected newspapers’ coverage of children's rights (which cannot be considered fully representative) for one year, this study recommends that future research conduct a case study of all the major newspapers circulated in Kenya for a longer period, and examine specific components of child rights, such as child labour, education, and health, to assess the prominence given to children's stories by the newspapers. The study also recommends that academia incorporate children's reporting as a unit into journalism curricula to ensure journalists understand its importance and implications at an early stage. Additionally, it suggests that media organizations hire and retain specialist journalists who write and report on children’s issues for improved and sustained coverage. To increase media coverage of children, the study urges media stakeholders and child-focused organizations to use awards to motivate and inspire outstanding child rights journalists. This can be achieved through collaboration with the Media Council of Kenya during the Annual Journalism Excellence Awards (AJEA). Since the media is interested in stories that sell, the study also recommends that journalists explore opportunities to ensure children's stories that meet public interest are well covered in the media.

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