

AN APPRAISAL OF MEDIA REPORTAGE OF CHILD RIGHTS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION: IMPLICATIONS FOR JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES

Joan N. Odedede

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Delta State University,
Abraka, Nigeria

odeonyechoa@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT: This study examines the media coverage of child rights issues in the Niger Delta Region, by assessing the accuracy, depth and ethical considerations of reporting practices. The study adopts the mixed methods approach complementing the quantitative results and interviews with journalists and child rights experts which reveal significant gaps in media reports such as sensationalism, lack of control and inadequate representation of children's voices. Further research findings revealed that 61 (34.85%) strongly agreed that media reports on child rights are not fair and balanced in terms of representing diverse viewpoints and stakeholders, and 65 (37.14%). Agreed that media reports on child rights prioritize sensationalism over factual accuracy. The interview questions related to the child rights advocate's responses show that 73 (41.71%) strongly disagreed that media reports do not reflect child rights issues in their work. Moreover, 69 (39.42%) respondents agreed that media reports on children account for 69 (39.42%) that state that media reports on child issues can influence public perceptions of child rights in Nigeria. The study highlights the need for improved journalistic practices, specialized training, ethical guidelines, and collaborative efforts with child rights advocates. The study suggests that enhanced media reporting can shape public perception, influence policy and promote the protection and realization of child rights in the region.

Keywords: Child Rights, Media Reportage, Niger Delta Region, Journalistic Ethics, Public Perception

INTRODUCTION

There is growing visibility that numerous children are living with fear, insecurity, physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, exploitation, neglect, beating, kicking, slapping, punching, emotional abuse and the children in Niger Delta region is faced with similar plagued, poverty, malnutrition, limited access to education and healthcare. Thus, many children have experience violent discipline and neglect at home (Hills et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2014). Violence, child labour, poor education and ineffective policy implementation pose significant threats to children in our society. Studies have revealed that approximately one billion children worldwide have experienced recurrent physical violence inflicted by their caregivers (Devries et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2014). Additionally, Nsude (2021) reported that an average child has suffered from one form of abuse at any time in their life before the age of 18. Moreover, 83% of children in Africa have experienced violent disciplinary practices at home (UNICEF, 2016). This makes it important and a collective responsibility for individuals, families, communities, organizations and the government to advocate the rights of children the most vulnerable segment of society champions the Sustainable Development - Goals (SDGs) Goal

16; and Target 16.2 to end all abuses, exploitation, trafficking and all forms - of violence against children and protect them. Additionally, the media is a powerful instrument for raising awareness of the rights of people especially children (Guru et al., 2013) and they are responsible for uncovering stories of abuses that involves children (Agboola, 2019). Through its informatory roles and gatekeeping, it creates awareness of children's rights (Obiwuru, 2020). In general, children are considered minority groups that are underprivileged and vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and inability to seek justice thereby silencing their voices. Notably, Nigeria has made no significant efforts to domesticate the Child Rights Act which was signed into law by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2003 with the aim of protecting every child and providing sanctions on all violations of children's rights. Children are being coerced into child labour, early marriage, school dropout, prostitution, and rape and killed by people whom they claim to be their caregivers or guardians. Many children are faced with many indices of abuse, but the way in which child right's issues are reported can have significant implications for public perceptions and policy action. This requires urgent attention from stakeholders to help save them from inhuman activity. Against this backdrop; this study examines media reports of children's rights in Niger Delta region, implications for journalistic practices.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of legal frameworks and international conventions such as the United Nation Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC), safeguarding children's rights. The Niger Delta region is characterized by socio-economic challenges with significant violations of child rights and protection of children. The media plays a crucial role in protecting children's rights but there's a perceived lack of adequate and sensitive reporting of child rights issues in the region where child rights violations are eminent and underreported. This raise concerns in examining the media reportage on child rights in Niger Delta region, implication for journalistic practices.

Research Objectives

The objectives are as follows:

1. To determine whether media reports on child rights in the Niger Delta is accurate, fair and objective
2. To examine the impact of media reporting on child rights while considering public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward children in the Niger Delta?
3. To determine how journalists in Niger Delta adhere to ethical standards and guidelines when reporting on child rights issues?
4. To identify the challenges that inhibit Journalist from reporting child rights issues,

Research Questions

1. To what extent are media reports on child rights in Niger Delta accurate, fair and objective?

2. What is the impact of media reportage on child rights considering public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards children in the Niger Delta?
3. How do journalists in Niger Delta adhere to ethical standards and guidelines when reporting on child rights issues?
4. What are the challenges that prevent journalists from reporting child rights issues?

Scope of the study

The study examines how child rights issues are portrayed in the media via a case study of the Niger Delta Region.

Significance

This study is significant for the following reasons:

- i. This study will empower child rights protection in Niger Delta.
- ii. This study will ensure that government, institutions and individuals are accountable for their actions in safeguarding the rights of their children.
- iii. By examining the media reportage of child rights in Niger Delta region this study will contribute a better understanding of the role of the media in promoting and protecting child rights and identify areas for improvement in journalistic practices.”

Literature Review

Research has shown that millions of children regardless of their colour, race, religion and ethnicity, have been deprived of their rights to live and enjoy life to the fullest rather they are exposed to dangers, abuses, pains, hunger, poverty, slavery and exploitation. For example, Eze and Kalu (2018) opined that child abuse is seven-fold. The Global Childhood Report (2020) stated that Nigeria has the highest rank among countries where children are robbed of significant portions of their childhood. Ihechu et al., (2022) stated that Nigerian children are habitually plagued by harsh realities of life from all angles. Additionally, the United Nations Secretary General (2006) stated that millions of children are engaged in child labour and that 85 million children are exposed to hazardous work that poses danger to their health and safety. Violence against children remains a significant challenge worldwide where there is not enough attention to accumulate reports of violence across children, deficient investment in early childhood care and development and positive parenting programs. National strategies for violence against children remain disjointed. Legislations remain unconsolidated and badly enforced with remarkable gaps in the legal protection of children flanked by law in numerous countries (United Nation Secretary General, 2006).

There is a high rate of violence perpetuating children worldwide and these precipitating factors traumatize their emotions and destroy their self-esteem. Female rape and sexual abuse, increase the risk of violence leading to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, exploitation, and early child marriage. An estimated 17.1 million children under eighteen years of age have lost one parent or both parents to AIDS and millions more are affected by high increases in poverty, homelessness, school dropout, discrimination and loss of prospects (Secretary General on violence against children, 2013). Moreover, poverty, dispossession, inequality and violence against children are

interrelated and have adverse effects on the development of children. Distress and poor health conditions that result from the imbalance between household demands and parents' inability to satisfy household demands can result in violence. Children growing up in poverty are less likely to access basic social services or to benefit from preventative initiatives or protection mechanisms (Secretary General on violence against Children, 2013). Additionally, an estimated of 45% of African children and adolescents live on the street including teenage mothers who are forced to raise their own children (African Child Policy Forum, 2013). Violence has torn down the essential entity in society. Women and children have taken the responsibility to cater to themselves and their children. Many people are deserted by their intimate partner, live in injurious places to suffer from physical abuse, social inequality among class grades, oppression, mental disorders, hunger and ill health which hinders and violates the child rights of the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. (Adedokun, 2013). Violence against children is a serious and insidious problem in society that is detrimental to life. Most violence is a deliberate act that deprives children of their right to freedom and lives with lasting consequences for their well-being. According to UNICEF (2006) numerous children are born with stunted growth because of malnutrition in third tier countries such as Nigeria with estimates of 33%, Niger 43%, Malawi 42%, Rwanda 38%, and Madagascar 49%. Despite the Basic Education Act of 2004, children are denied and right to high quality education, free basic health care from birth until 18 years of age, and prone to diseases, violence, crime, abuse, exploitation and discrimination. These anguish factors are contrary to African Child Rights (1999), Article 12 of the UNCRC and Article 7 of the African Charter on the rights welfare of the child which specified children's right to freedom of expression and right to listen to and hear that they still stagger in pains.

Child rights are essential for the liberty and intrinsic rights of children under the age of eighteen years regardless of the child's parents, legal guardian, colour, race, gender, religion, political, ethnicity, origin, etc. Assuring children's rights is the foundation for securing a better future and moulding the children to be responsible citizens of society at large. According to the United Nations (2012), the committees on the rights of children interpret Article 19 as prohibiting corporal punishment, commenting on the obligation of all state parties to move quickly to prohibit and eliminate all corporal punishment. Article 24: (a) and (b)(c) Recognize the rights of a child to enjoy the highest standard of health, facilities and treatment of illness and rehabilitation. Furthermore, Njoku (2007) noted that the dignity of the child should be respected at all times. Statistics have shown that children who live in poverty are marginalized and deprived of their rights and are victims of abuse, violence and discrimination. These increases in child chances threaten education, poverty, violence, and separation of parents from children as they leave their homes to hawk on the street or migrate to other places to serve as house helpers or slaves. This shows that the Child Rights Act is yet to be ratified in all Nigerian states (Akinwumi, 2010). Moreover, religion, ethnicity and cultural diversity have remained critical factors hindering the adoption and implementation of Child's Rights Act in Nigeria. For example, the Supreme Council for Shariah in Nigeria refers to the Child Rights Act as anti-culture, anti-traditional and anti-religious (Assim, 2020). Additionally, 18 years has a conflict with the Nigerian law of the "Young Person's Act" section 2 of the law and the interpretations of a child by the two laws make it difficult to be practicable because it creates conflict in the meaning of a child in Nigeria. Although primary education is officially free and compulsory, poverty, economic barriers, and insurgency in the Northern States affect children's education and welfare, and other forms of abuse recorded in other geopolitical zones of the country are not left out. However, there are passages in the Quran that are compatible with the Child Rights Act of 2003 e.g. the right to custody or guardianship and education.

Clauses that are contrary to the Act include (i) child marriage (Child Rights Act, 2003), which contradicts the Islamic doctrine that a girl's father may betroth her without obtaining her consent (Opeloye, 2016) and (ii) adopting a child and taking away the birth parents' rights and withholding corporal punishment from children is said to be un-Islamic and un-African (Opeloye, 2016). The above mentioned reasons pose a great uphill task for the execution of the Child Rights Act in Nigeria. Moreover, the dysfunctional norms and belief of Nigerian society which has led to male dominance over female dominance, has demoralized many families, enslaved women and made them unable to fulfil their responsibilities with respect to their children as enshrined in the Geneva declaration of the rights of a child. Furthermore, violence against children has adverse effects on their development and hampers their rights. In northern Nigeria, Child's Rights Act is perceived as challenging practice, legitimized by religion for instance, chapter 33 of the Qur'an states a valid marriage between an adoptive parent and an adopted child since there is no blood relationship between them. This practice can be viewed as child exploitation. Children are not subjected to equal rights as Nigeria's current practice involves' great difficulty in enforcing child rights acts. Child marriage is a practice in the northern part of Nigeria where children aged 10 or 12 years are betrothal and 18 years as the minimum age is not in tandem with the doctrine. Other common practices in Nigeria such as the abandonment of babies, sexual abuse, harassment, killing, child labour, harmful traditional practice maltreatment, child hawker and child street begging among others are unattended to by the gatekeepers of children in Nigeria. Nigeria needs to make frantic efforts in enforcing and adopting child rights as practices in other countries worldwide to save the lives and future of children.

Media Report on Child Rights

The mass media plays a substantive role in the sensitization of child rights in Nigeria. According to Guru, Nabi & Aslana (2013), the media is a powerful instrument for raising awareness of people's rights, especially their children. The media plays an important role in informing and influencing people's attitudes and behaviours. Oyero (2010) stated that the media provides a unique avenue through which related issues are brought to the forefront of the public discourse. Brawley (1995) affirmed that the media constructively, may be used as an essential tool for those who advocate for children, young people and their families. Considering the importance and provision of the declaration of child rights adopted by the General Assembly (1989) Article 12 recognizes the important function of the mass media in promoting child rights and ensuring that the child has access to information materials from diverse of national and international sources (CRC, 1989). Thus, Ademokun (2002) opined that the media is a persuasive instrument in which people struggle for self-liberation and development. CRIN (2009) confirmed in the British media that children are portrayed as troublemakers and deviant or as victims. Oyero (2010) stated that the poor coverage and placement of child rights stories is an indication of weak newsworthiness among media practitioners. Moreover, the understanding of the media influences how to use the media constructively, and may be an essential tool for those who advocate for children, young people, and their families (Uzochukwu et al., 2015; Brawley, 1995). Studies have shown how children are represented in the media. Uzochukwu et al. (2015) analysed the program contents of six broadcast stations and reported that there is a dearth of frequency and prominence attached to child related cases. Omotosho et al. (2015) reported that the media outlets whose responsibility is to create awareness of child rights issues do not carry out this responsibility properly. Similarly, Ihechu et al. (2022) reported that 78% of journalists believe that the media does not prioritize child training awareness about child rights issues in society. Nwodu and Ezeoke

(2012) noted that cases related to women's and children's rights are poorly presented and usually denied prominent positions in the Nigerian press. Raheem et al. (2015) revealed that in addition to children being underrepresented, they are more often portrayed as victims of societal problems or beneficiaries of various handouts from individuals, institutions or corporate organizations. Moreover, children's identities are sometimes bald by the media. Oyero (2011) reported that children's issues were not given extensive treatment in the media and were not seen as newsworthy and that their voices were poorly represented even in issues that affected them while examining the media content of Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers. Europe (2014) stated that patronizing attitudes towards children and youths severely limit the space that the mainstream media can use to speak out. Generally, reporting on child issues and children's rights is not widely recognized as a specialized field and many journalists are not motivated or even capable of producing in-depth coverage of child issues (Europe, 2014).

Media Implications for Journalistic Practice

Broadcast journalists are responsible for uncovering stories of abuses occurring in societies that involve children and adults (Agboola, 2020). According to Lynn Geld of the UNICEF Communication Advisor for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, media professionals are well placed to keep children's rights- and their abuse on the news agenda, by scrutinizing policies, legislation and challenges that fail to meet their commitments to children (Mediawise, 2010). The Six guidelines for reporting on children enunciated by UNICEF (2005; 2006) are as follows:

- 1) Journalist should avoid categorizations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals
- 2) Journalists are charged with the responsibility of providing an accurate context for the child's story or image
- 3) Obscure the visual identity and name of a child who is identified as a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation, a perpetrator of physical abuse, an HIV positive or living with AIDS (unless consent given by parents or guardians), charged or convicted of a crime.
- 4) In potential risk or retribution, change the name or obscure the identity of any child.
- 5) In certain cases, using a child identity is in the child's best interest. They must be protected and supported at all times.

(6) Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say either with other children or an adult or with both. Thus, journalistic practices surrounding child rights issues carry significant implications, affecting how stories are reported, perceived and acted upon. Child rights issues in Nigeria look like arduous tasks as journalists are faced with numerous challenges from media ownership policies to cultural and religious beliefs which do not conform with the child rights Act across all states of federation or media policies that prioritize child rights issues in their media contents (Ihechu et al., 2022).

Challenges that prevent journalist from adhering to guidelines when reporting child issues

The fragmented nature of Nigerian media has led to the multiplication of media outlets and platforms and content fragmentation; as a result, increased competition and specialization have led media outlets to cater to specific target audiences rather than mass audiences. Journalists

often face difficulties in accessing information, pressure in the discharge of their duties and checkmated by repressive laws of the media that prohibit reporting on sensitive or classified information (Europe, 2014). Thus, media practitioners are restricted from reporting on child rights issues such as censoring reports on child abuse or exploitation. However, Europe (2014) identified several factors that prevent the media from reporting child issues as cited in Uzochukwu, Morah & Okafor (2015);

1. Children voices are lacking: inadequate representations of children's views and concerns are overlooked or downplayed.
2. A lack of coverage: can manifest when child rights issues such as child labour, child sexual abuse or trafficking receive little attention.
3. A lack of professionalism: can manifest when children's identities are exposed without consent or when issues concerning children are handled without care and respect for those affected.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-setting theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The media has the power to influence public opinion by; selecting certain issues or topics to report on, determining the importance of these issues and shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward these issues. The way in which news stories and topics that impact public opinion are presented is influenced by the media. An audience considers an issue to be more significant when it receives more media attention for instance if there is consistent journalistic coverage of an issue over a period. Agenda setting theory has two core assumptions; first, it is believed that the media controls reality which means that media does not report reality but rather filters and shapes it. Second, the media gives importance or saliency to its topics, the more likely is that the media focuses on certain issues; the more likely is that the public perceives such issues as important and therefore demands action.

Relevance of the theory - Agenda setting theory highlights the media's influence on public awareness and concern for child rights issues in Nigeria. The theory helps examine how media coverage of child rights issues can influence policy agendas and decision making in Nigeria. Moreover, understanding agenda-setting processes can guide child rights advocates in leveraging media to raise awareness and drive change.

Materials and Methods - This study employed a mixed methods research design to examine the following media reportage of Child Rights in the Niger Delta Region: its implications for Journalistic Practices. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to elicit information from the respondents. An in-depth interview was employed to validate the study findings.

Area of study: The area of study is the Niger Delta, which comprises nine states (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers). It is located in the southern part of Nigeria and is characterized by a vast network of rivers, creeks and mangrove forests. The region is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups and is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas.

Population of study: The population of study comprises 320 journalists and child rights advocates who work in 8 media houses in Niger Delta Region.

Instrument: A questionnaire comprising (12) item questions containing open and closed ended questions was used as an instrument for data collection with an in-depth interview guide made up of sixteen (12) item questions containing closed and open-ended questions based on the four.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are media reports on child rights in Nigeria accurate, fair and objective?
2. What is the impact of media reporting public on child rights considering public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward children in Nigeria?
3. How do journalists in Nigeria adhere to ethical standards and guidelines when reporting on child rights issues?
4. What are the challenges that prevent journalists from reporting child rights issues?

Validity of the instrument - The instrument was validated by experts to ascertain its accuracy.

Sample size and techniques - Three hundred and twenty (320) registered journalists were selected for this study and a sample size of 175 was determined from the population via Qualtrics (2023) sample size online calculator at the 95% confidence level and 5% margin error. Systematically, a random sampling method was employed and the data were analysed via the SPSS, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (see Tables 1 – 4).

Data Analysis - Data from the questionnaire were analysed via inferential statistics of frequency and simple percentage to test for the variation observed in the appraisal of media reports of child rights in the Niger Delta and its implications for journalistic practice. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' perceptions and opinions on media reports of child rights. The scale ranges from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Neutral (N) and Strongly Disagree (SD). This scale helps identify the level of agreement and disagreement of statements related to the media reporting of child rights. Qualitative results were used to enhance the validity and reliability of the study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Media organizations and respondents

S/N	Media Organizations	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Delta State Newspaper Corporation, (Asaba) – Government owned newspaper.	17	9.71
2.	Bayelsa State Broadcasting Corporation (BSBC) – Yenagoa	18	19.28
3.	Rivers State Newspaper Corporation, Port Harcourt	20	11.42
4.	Nigerian Observer (Benin City)	20	11.42
5	Nigerian Chronicle – Uyo	22	12.57
6.	Cross River State Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) Calabar	26	14.85
7.	Ondo State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC) – Akure	25	14.28
8.	Nigeria Tribune – Akure	27	15.42
	Total	175	100

Table 1; shows the presentation of media organizations in the Niger Delta region and the analysis of the selected respondents was calculated via the simple percentage to derive their frequency.

Table 2: Research Question One: To what extent are media reports on child rights in Nigeria accurate, fair and objective?

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	N	SD	D	TOTAL
1.	Media reports on child rights accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of children's issues?	20 11.42%	20 11.42%	-	73 41.71%	40 22.85%	175 100%
2	Media reports on child rights issues are not fair and balanced in terms of representing diverse viewpoints and stakeholders.	61 34.85%	43 24.57%	10 5.71%	30 17.14%	30 17.14%	175 100%
3	Media reports on child rights prioritize sensationalism over factual accuracy.	41 23.42%	65 37.14%	-	36 20.57%	33 18.85%	175 100%

Table 2; shows that 73 (41.71%) respondents strongly disagreed that the media reports on child rights do not accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of child issues. whereas 61 (34.85%) strongly agreed that the media reports on child rights are not fair and balanced in terms of representing diverse viewpoints and stakeholders and 65(37.14%).agreed that the media reports on child rights prioritize sensationalism over factual accuracy. The results obtained from the interview questions directed toward the child rights advocates responses are in line with the aggregate 73(41.71%) that strongly disagrees that the media reports do not reflect child rights issues in their work.

Table 3: Research question two: what is the impact of media reporting on child rights considering public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward children in Nigeria?

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	N	SD	D	TOTAL/%
1.	Media reportage can influence public perception of child rights in Nigeria	69 (39.42%)	41 (23.43%)	10 5.71%	25 14.28%	30 17.14%	175 100 %
2	Media reportage on child rights has reduce violence and abuse on children	5 2.85%	30 17.14%	-	90 51.43%	50 28.57%	175 100%
3.	Media report on children's issues will have significant impact on public perception and attitudes towards child rights.	85 48.57%	71 40.57%	-	10 5.71%	9 5.14%	175 100%

Table 3 shows that 69(39.42%) strongly agree that media reporting can influence public perceptions of child rights in Nigeria. 90 (51.43% strongly disagreed that media reporting on child rights has reduced violence and abuse on children and 85 (48.57 %) strongly agreed that media reporting on child rights has a significant effect on public perceptions and attitudes toward child rights. The interviewees' responses support the assertion that with an aggregate of 69(39.42%), media reports on child issues can influence public perceptions of child rights in Nigeria because their awareness can change people's behaviour and attitudes toward the way they treat their children.

Table 4: Research Question Three: How do journalists in Nigeria adhere to ethical standards and guidelines when reporting on child rights issues?

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	N	SD	D	TOTAL/%
1.	Journalists balance the need to report on child rights issues with the aim of protecting children's privacy and dignity	34 19.42%	26 14.85%	30 17.14%	85 48.57%	-	175 100%
2.	Media outlets ensure accountability and transparency in reporting on child rights issues	10 5.71%	6 3.42%	-	100 57.14%	59 33.71	175 100%
3.	Journalists follow ethical standards and guidelines when reporting child rights issues	23 13.14%	27 15.42%	19 10.85%	73 41.71%	33 18.85%	175 100%

In Table 4, 85 (48.57%) strongly disagreed that journalists balance the need to report on child rights issues with the aim of protecting children's privacy and dignity. Fifty-nine (33.71 %) disagreed that media outlets ensure accountability and transparency in reporting child rights issues. Additionally, 33 (18.85%) disagreed that journalists follow ethical standards and guidelines when reporting child rights issues). To probe further the qualitative results (the in-depth interviews) support the assertion that when the same question is asked, the results strongly disagree with an aggregate of 85(48.57%) that journalists balance the need to report on child rights issues with the aim of protecting children's privacy.

Table 5: Research Question Four: What are the challenges that prevent journalists from reporting child rights issues?

S/N	STATEMENT	ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Journalists lack access to information and sources when reporting on child rights issues?	Strongly Agree (SA)	81	46.28
2.	Self-censorship does not limit reporting on child rights issues?	Strongly Disagree (SD)	64	36.57
3.	Journalists are faced with legal challenges when reporting child rights issues	Neutral (N)	30	17.14
		Total	175	100

The data in Table 5 show that 81 (46.28%) strongly agree that journalists lack access to information and sources when reporting on child rights. An aggregate of 64 (36.57%) strongly disagrees that self-censorship does not limit reporting on child rights issues. An aggregate of 30 (17.14%) respondents remain neutral claiming they do not know that journalists face with legal challenges when reporting on child rights issues. The interview responses agree that Journalists in Nigeria face challenges such as self-censorship due to a lack of access to information and sources, and inadequate regulation and enforcement of ethical standards inhibit the reporting of child rights issues.

DISCUSSION

This study employed the qualitative and quantitative methods to examine an appraisal of the media reporting of child rights in the Niger Delta Region: implications for journalistic Practices. The researcher complements the responses of the respondents to the questionnaire and interview instruments to propose answers to the four research questions set in Section 2 to guide the collection of data for the study.

Research Question one: To what extent are media reports on child rights in Nigeria accurate, fair and objective?

The data in Table 2 show that 73 (41.71%) strongly disagreed that the media reports on child rights do not accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of children. For example, Ihechu et al's. (2022) study reported that (78%) of journalists believe that the media does not prioritize awareness of child rights issues in society. This is in conforms to the research findings. Nwodu and Ezeoke (2012) suggested that cases related to women and children are poorly presented and usually denied prominent positions in the Nigerian press. Similarly, 65 (37.14%) agreed that media reports on child rights prioritize sensationalism over factual accuracy. Oyero (2011) findings show that children's issues were not given extensive treatment in the media and were not seen as newsworthy and that their voices were poorly represented even in issues that affect them while examining media contents of Nigerian the interview responses in agreement with the research findings that

“Media only prioritizes attention-grabbing headlines over factual reporting such as child rights issues and lack expertise in understanding and presenting child rights “issues”

Research questions 2 – What is the impact of media reporting on child rights considering public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours toward children in Nigeria?

The results of the study (Table 3) show that 69(39.42%) strongly agree that media reporting can influence public perceptions of child rights in the Niger Delta. Oyero (2010) attests that the poor coverage and placement of child rights stories is an indication of weak newsworthiness among media practitioners. Moreover, Omotosho et al. (2015) reported that the media whose responsibility is to create awareness of child rights issues does not carry out this responsibility properly. Ninety (51.43% strongly disagreed that media reporting on child rights has reduced violence and abuse of children. For example, statistics have shown that children who live in poverty are marginalized and deprived of their rights and are victims of abuse, violence and discrimination. These threaten child education, and poverty, and increase violence, separating of parents from children as they leave their homes to hawk on the street or migrate to other places to serve as house helpers or slaves. This shows that the Children's Rights Act has yet to

be ratified in all Nigerian states (Akinwumi, 2010). Furthermore, 85 (48.57%) strongly agreed that media reports on child issues have a significant effect on public perceptions of and attitudes towards child rights. The media is charged with promoting good ethical conduct to avoid sensitization, stereotyping, or undervaluing of children and their rights (Child Rights International Network, 2009). The interviewee responses support the assertion that aggregate 69(39.42%) that state media reports on child issues can influence the public perception of child rights in Nigeria because

“Its awareness can change people’s behaviour and attitudes toward the way they treat children.”

Research Question three –. How do journalists in the Niger Delta adhere to ethical standards and guidelines when reporting on child rights issues?

Table 4) shows that 85 (48.57%) strongly disagreed that journalists balance the need to report on child rights issues with the aim of protecting children’s privacy and dignity. Fifty-nine (33.71%) disagreed that media outlets ensure accountability and transparency in reporting child rights issues. Additionally, 33 (18.85%) disagreed that journalists follow ethical standards and guidelines when reporting child rights issues. European studies (2014) support the research findings that reporting child issues and children’s rights is not widely recognized as a specialized field and this which means that many journalists are not motivated or capable of producing in-depth coverage of child issues because of the difficulties faced in accessing information and pressure in the discharge of their duties which are still being checked by repressive laws of the media that prohibit reporting on sensitive or classified information. To probe further the qualitative results (the in-depth interviews) support that when the same question is asked the results assertion when asked same question disagree with an aggregate of 85(48.57%) that journalists do not balance reporting with protecting a child’s privacy. Owing to

“Limited training and expertise on child rights and ethical reporting and pressure to sensationalize stories for rating and circulation.”, Additionally, religion, ethnicity and cultural diversity remain critical factors hindering the adoption and implementation of the Child’s Rights Act in Nigeria. For example, the Supreme Council for Shariah in Nigeria refers to the Child Rights Act as anti-culture, anti-tradition and anti-religion (Assim, 2020).”

Research Question four - . What are the challenges that inhibit journalists from reporting child rights issues?

The results in Table 5 show 81 (46.28%) strongly agree that journalists lack access to information and sources when reporting on child rights. An aggregate of 64 (36.57%) strongly disagreed that self-censorship does not limit reporting on child rights issues. and an aggregate of 30 (17.14%) respondents remain neutral claiming that they do not know that journalists are faced with legal challenges when reporting on child rights issues. The interviewees agreed that journalists in Nigeria face challenges such as self-censorship due to political and economic pressure, inadequate regulation and the enforcement of ethical standards which inhibits the reporting child rights issues. The assertions of Uzochukwu, Morah and Okafor (2015) assertions is in line with the research findings that

“The “lack of professionalism and access to information and sources inhibit reporting child right issues in Nigeria” (Uzochukwu, Morah & Okafor(2015).

Recommendations

1. Media Organizations should prioritize child centred reporting by ensuring that stories about children are accurate, sensitive and respectful of their rights and dignity.
2. Journalists should receive training on child rights and ethical reporting practices to increase their knowledge and skills in covering issues affecting children.
3. Media outlets should establish a child rights desk or a specialized unit focused on reporting child rights issues to ensure consistent and in-depth coverage.

REFERENCES

- Adedokun, N. (2013). Has Nigeria truly made any progress? The Punch (Electronic version). <http://www.punchng.com/opinion/has-nigeria-really-made-any-progress>
- Ademokun, F. (2002). Children and the Lawmaker. *The Guardian*, Isolo: Guardian Newspaper Limited, Thursday, November, 14
- Agboola, A. K. (2020). Constraints and challenges of the media in child rights advocacy and development in Nigeria. *Information Media and Technology*, DOI:10.4018/1978-17998-0329-4.Ch005
- Ajanwachuku, M. (2017). The Nigerian Child and the Right to participation: A peep through the window of the ‘Best Interest Clause of the Act’. *Beijing Law Review* 8, 162pp
- Akinbola, B.R. (2010). The Right to inclusive Education in Nigeria: Meeting the needs and challenges of children with disabilities. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 458p
- Akinwumi, O. (2010). Legal impediments on the practical implementation of the Child Rights Act 2003. *International Journal of Legal Information*, 37:388
- Assim, U.M. (2020). Why the Child’s Rights Act still doesn’t apply throughout Nigeria. www.conversation.com/amp/wt
- Awosola, R.K. & Omoera, O.S. (2008). Child Rights and the Media: The Nigeria Experience. *Studies on home and community service*, 2 (2), 125 - 131
- Beiter, K. (2005). The protection of the Right to Education by International Law. Netherlands: *Martinus Nijhoff* .13 (82),719
- Brawley, E. (1995). *Human Services and the media*: Harwood Academic Publishers, Australia
- Child Rights Act (2003). Government of Nigeria, 451 – 673.
- Child Rights International Network (2009). Representation of Children in News Media: Revisiting the Oslo Challenge.
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nation, 20th November.
- Guru, B.P., Nabi, A. & Raslana, R. (2013). Role of Television in Child Development. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 18, 38

- Ihechu, I.P., Umeh, K.C. & Ekweonu, C.L. (2022). Nigeria Media Reportage of Child Rights Protection: Anambra Resident Journalists' Perceptions about Challenges and Prospects. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 7, (3)
- Internews Europe (2014). Protecting the rights of children; the role of the media, lessons from Brazil, India and Kenya. Retrieved from <https://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/InternewsEurope-childRightsMedia->
- Landsdown, G. (2005). Children's welfare and Children's Rights in Hendnek, H. (2005): Child welfare and social policy: An essential Reader, *The policies press*, 177 pp
- Mediawise (2010). The Media and Children's Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.mediawise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/>
- Njoku, G. (2007). The Child's Rights Act Communication Office UNICEF Nigeria.
- Nwodu, L.C. & Ezeoke, C.B. (2012). An Evaluation of Press Coverage of Children's and Women's Rights in Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://www.google.com>.
- Omotosho, Y., Oyero, O. & Salawu, A. (2015), Children's programme on Nigerian television stations: A case of media neglect. *Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 10(1) 135-153.
- Oyero, O. (2010). Children as invisible and voiceless as ever in the Nigeria news Media. *Estudos em comunicaco*, 7(2), 25 – 41
- Opeloye, M. (2016). Child Rights Act 2003 in Nigeria. What are the implications for the application of Children's Rights in Islam? Ist International Conference on Women and Children legal and social issues 183 -189.
- Qualtrics (2023). Sample size calculation. Accessed July 22nd, 2024 from <http://www.Qualtrics.com/blog>
- UNICEF (2005). State of the World's Children Excluded and Invisible. New York: Retrieved January 30th, 2021 from <http://www.unicef.org.sowe06/pdfs>
- UNICEF (2006). The state of the world's children. New York
- United Nations (1990). Convention on the Right of the Child. www.childrenrights.ie/files/UNCRC
- United Nations and OAU (1990). Charter on the rights of the Child. Lagos.
- Uzochukwu, C. E., Morah, N.D. & Okafor, E. G. (2015). Coverage of Child Rights and Protection Issues: Analysis of selected Broadcast Media in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 12 (1), 272 – 297