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Framing types of child defilement cases by selected Nigerian newspapers

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Abstract

This paper examined the framing pattern of child defilement cases by selected Nigerian newspapers. The objective was to know the frames employed by the selected newspapers in reporting the menace of child defilement. Content analysis was the research method employed and three national and three local newspapers (The Nigerian Tribune, The Punch and The Vanguard, Osun Defender, PM News and Hope Newspaper) published in 2022 were purposively selected. Four month editions (February, April, July and November) were randomly selected. In total, 714 editions 102 news items were analyzed across the six selected newspapers. The unit of analysis (frames) upon which this study was premised were; Attribution of responsibility, Conflict, Human interest, Economic consequence and Morality. Findings revealed that majority of the stories, 62 representing (60.8%) out of 102 stories framed child defilement stories along the attribution of responsibility line. 14 stories representing (13.7%) were framed along the morality line. 13 stories representing (12.8%) were framed towards conflict frame. 8 stories representing (7.8%) were framed towards human interest angle while the least represented frame is the economic consequence frame which has 5 representing (4.9%) stories. This paper concluded that Nigerian newspapers majorly framed child defilement as an assault that someone should be held responsible for and child defilement is as a result of moral decadence in society. The paper recommends Thematic framing pattern which takes holistic view of child defilement cases as a societal problem focusing on causes and solutions instead of Episodic framing which places the spate of occurrence as individual or stand alone.

Keywords: framing, framing category, framing dimension, child defilement, Nigerian newspapers

Introduction

Over the past decades, parents confidently entrusted their wards to their neighbours for a temporary care while they were away for the business of the day and they would be well taken care of without any molestation. Essentially, children have relatively low exposure and cognitive ability to understand some vices that can affect them both positively and negatively while the society also accepted their innocence by treating them as invaluable assets which must be protected (Bejide, 2014) ^[6]. But, today, the situation has changed, as parents cannot simply entrust their wards to the care of any adult because of different news stories of child defilement by adults which emanate from different parts of Nigeria increasingly.

Child defilement refers to the behaviour which exposes a child under 18 to sexuality contents or using a child to obtain sexual stimulation and gratification (ANPPCAN, 2008) ^[2]. World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), defines child defilement as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity which s/he doesn't fully comprehend, that is, s/he is unable to give informed consent to, s/he is not developmentally prepared for and cannot give approval, or activity that violates the laws, do's and don'ts, and taboos of the society in question. In their view, as cited in Akani, Imasiku, Paul and Hazemba (2015) ^[3], defined child defilement comprehensively as involving forcing or encouraging or luring a child to take part in sexual activities and such activities may include, penetration from the vagina, mouth, anus, fingers or other objects and other non-penetrative activities.

To them, non-penetrative activities may include any of the above listed acts and or fondling with or without clothes on, exhibitionism as well as forcing the child to watch people engaging in sexual acts or pornography. More importantly, these scholars held that the child is unable to give informed consent to those activities since they are above the child's head.

Many researches have been conducted on the occurrence and prevalence of defilement cases in Nigeria. In one of such which was an appraisal of an online report, Bejide (2014) [6] submitted that defilement of children was rare and hardly reported, but today, the rape of underage girls is assuming high proportions in Nigeria and across the country, reports of adult male defiling children are prevalent, adding to the misery of a population wracked by poverty, unemployment and crime.

Adeleke, Olowokere, Hassan, Komolafe and Asekun-Olarinmoye (2012) [1] in a study on sexual assault against women in Osogbo southwest Nigeria with the objective to review the patterns of sexual violence against women treated at the hospitals from January 1st, 2003 to December 31st, 2009 found that sexual assault cases constituted 2.1% of female consultation outside pregnancy during the period under study, while proportion of cases increased over the years under review. Mean age of victims were 15.8years ranging from 5 to 48years. Most (73.7%) was less than 18years while (93.20%) were single. About 81% of the victims less than 18years were sexually abused in the day time. A majority (79.6%) knew their assailant. About 40% of the victims presented 24hours of sexual abuse but none has had post exposure prophylaxis.

According to Musbau (2013) [27], 687 cases of defilement were recorded in Lagos state in 2012 with an average of two cases recorded in a day. A total of 100 cases of defilement were recorded in Kano state out of which 40 offenders were convicted. In Anambra state, The Guardian on Friday 7th, 2014 reported that some non-governmental organizations dealing only with rape recorded 115 incidents in which only 12 cases were taken up by the Police.

As much as child defilement occurrences have become rampant in the society, the role of the media in stemming its occurrence or eradicating the menace cannot be over emphasized. One of the key functions of the media is to influence people's behaviour. The media can also manipulate, influence and persuade the people on issues of importance to the society. (Kashaf, 2019) [17]. Corroborating the assertion of Kashaf, Chan (2007) [9] described the role of media in guiding opinion. He mentioned that guidance of public opinion is more indirect, flexible and subtle way of dealing with public opinion. He further elaborated that the media role in guiding public opinion is somewhat related to the concept of propaganda by shifting the focus on "what people think" to "what people think about". This is the main hub of media, to give issues to public for what they think and act accordingly to the perceptions they have. In many cases what the media give them is what they perceive and act on. Many studies support the fact that people gain knowledge about public events, politics and social trends from the media (Lecheler & Dereese, 2013; McQuail, 2005) [22, 25].

Findings revealed that much research has been conducted by scholars on child sexual abuse from the medical, sociological and psychological parlance (Bickley and Beech, 2009; Kendall-Tackett, Williams and Finkelhor 2003; Kevin, 2004; Olumodeji, 2008) [7, 18, 19, 28]. Typically, little has also been

done in Africa and precisely Nigeria to discover the frames used by the media in reporting child defilement cases which is believed to influence perception of people on the case considered a huge public health concern for parents and policy makers.

The perceptions made from media discourse on issues can bring about policy change and positive impact on such discourse. Anneke (2015) [4] posited that media discourses do not determine but help shape official regulation, for example, by putting paedophiles on top of the government agenda and creating an impetus for legal activity. Furthermore, media discourse is notable for encouraging and legitimizing punitive legislation and for aiding the conceptualization of specific laws. This specified law and punitive legislation concerning child defilement through the media salience and framing, especially newspaper framing as the focus of this study would be of help towards shaping parents' perception of victims and perpetrators as well as reducing the prevalence of the menace in society. Thus, this study will investigate the framing category (attribution of responsibility frame, conflict frame, human interest frame, economic consequences frame or morality frame) with which Nigerian newspapers reported the cases of children defilement in Nigeria. Hence, child defilement as a social problem needs media concentration as media framing of the menace could lead to a better comprehension of the problem and better comprehension would lead to solution.

Objective of the Study

1. The specific objective of this study is to investigate the pattern of frames used by the Nigerian newspapers on child's defilement cases.

Literature Review

Child Defilement

Child defilement, is a worldwide threatening public health problem with huge adverse effects on the victims, the family and the community at large, (Laila, 2015) [21]. It has been a topic with vocal view in the public domain for more than three decades ago, even among many legislative and professional initiatives. Though there are ensuing facts but there are some basic facts about the problems which remain mysterious, unclear or in dispute (Laila, 2015) [21].

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) [38] child defilement is the act between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development are in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, but the activity being intended is to gratify or satisfy the sexual needs of the other person solely. Essentially, the definition by WHO also placed emphasis on consent unlike that of ANPPCAN that placed emphasis on penetration.

Meanwhile, as noticeable from the various definitions listed above, a victim of defilement can be a lad (boy) or a lass (girl). This invariably means that a male child can be a victim of defilement in the hand of an adult. However, it is imperative to note that the abuse of defilement is much more common against girls than boys and such defilement process causes pain and leaves painful cut on the child's private part. Defilers, otherwise called pedophiles, are individuals who engaged in pedophilia (Banda, 2016) [5]. Pedophiles are also called perpetrators. Pedophilia is a sexual interest in children. It is the act of going after children for sexual exploits or taking advantage of their innocence, by force or by intimidating. According to Banda, fathers who were incestuous

might be pedophilic in their orientation but the term "pedophile" is mostly used for abusers in extra familial abuse, that is, perpetrators whose victims were outside the family.

Type of Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse as noted by Crosso-Tower (2012)^[11] can be classified into types based on the perpetrator's identity. Similarly, Bolen (2011)^[8] said abuser's modus operandi gave the basis on which child sexual abuse was classified, thus, giving room to lack of definite knowledge about the victims. Essentially, this study discusses two types of Child Sexual Abuse as corroborated by scholars (Bolen, 2011; Crosso-Tower, 2012; Mather & Debye, 2014)^[8, 11, 23]. The types are: Intra familial child sexual abuse or incest and extra familial child sexual abuse.

According to Fridell (2009)^[15], intra-familial sexual abuse or incest is a defilement case where the perpetrator of such abuse is a relative to the child, either by blood or marriage. To Mather and Debye (2014)^[23], incest is an abuse of a child sexually by a person who is a member of a child's family or possesses kind of kinship role in the life of the child. Subsequently, described it as the intimate or close sexual or anal contacts between and among relatives. In this regard, incest can be perpetrated by members within the nuclear or the extended family and the perpetrator could be, brother to the child, the father, uncle, the mother, grandfather, step family members or between siblings. Essentially, the forms in which incest can occur, as noted by Shovelar and adopted by this research, are father-daughter, mother-daughter, father-son, mother-son, stepfather- daughter, sibling incest, and grandfather-granddaughter.

On the other hand, extra-familial abuse is a sexual abuse by anyone other than a relative. Although much has been known about intra-familial abuse as noted in the previous paragraphs, especially about father-daughter incest, almost nothing has been written about specific types of extra familial abuse and little is known about certain types of extra familial abuses than simply how prevalent they were despite being the majority of all sexual child abuse. Extra familial child sexual abuse, according to Fridell (2009)^[15], was the type of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) where the perpetrator was someone outside the family circle. Those outsider perpetrators might be friends of the family, neighbors, people with professional functionality such as teachers, medical professionals, care giver, church leader, community leader etc. Only few numbers of perpetrators of CSA were complete strangers (Faller, 2009)^[14].

Causes of Child Defilement

Child defilement as a threat to the world's children's population as opined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is caused by sexual perversity (Banda, 2016)^[5]. Sexual perversity, according to referred to the situation whereby defilers have no control of their sexual desire and urge; as such, they predated and took advantage of children within their reach. Essentially, majority of defilement cases were connected to sexual perversity.

This belief of having sex with minors to cure HIV/AIDS, according to was campaigned against by HIV/AIDS activities in media of communication such as billboard, radio, television etc. Apart from this, there are also superstitious beliefs that sleeping with minors boosts business prosperity, increases promotion at work chances, and enhances other spiritual power. These beliefs, according to are handiwork of

witch doctors and traditional healers.

Surprisingly, this belief that having sexual intercourse with children can cure sexual diseases was also found in the developed countries. According to de this belief has its parallels in 19th century Europe, when it was thought that venereal diseases could be cured "by means of sexual intercourse with children". Similarly, cited in reported that, there were groups in 20th century America who still believed that, just as one can catch venereal disease from an infected partner, so one can also 'catch' purity and cure such infection by having intercourse with one's pre-pubertal daughter.

In Nigeria, these beliefs as held in Malawi and Zimbabwe were unconnected with the reasons adults engage in defiling children (Bejide, 2014)^[6]. Different unscientific factors had been adduced as reasons, such as; money rituals, age elongation, sexual belief that children's genital organ is still 'tight' which will increase sexual pleasure, demonic possession for such obsession etc. However, this research acknowledged that this body of evidence was only anecdotal and that further research in this area is required.

Nundwe (2003)^[28] also highlighted lack of parental care as a factor causing child defilement. According to Nundwe (2003)^[28], some parents left home very early in the morning when their children were sleeping and came back late at night when they had gone to bed. This lack of parental care, as noted by Philip (2016)^[30], manifested in many forms; from denial of scholastic materials, to lack of care at home which mainly exposes children to abuse.

Theoretical Framework

Framing theory

The term framing among media communication scholars was developed as a way to examine media influence on audience. Framing focuses on the nature of news coverage rather than the amount of attention devoted to the issue. Framing and agenda setting always worked together in shaping the perception of audience on matter of public importance as portrayed by the media. While agenda setting deals with making the audience discuss an issue the media termed as important, framing has to do with "how" the media want the audience to think about the issue.

Notably, some scholars distinguished framing from biases, stating that the former is more complex than a simple pro or con position on an issue. Then, Tankard (2011)^[37] opined that framing techniques are basically designed to elicit cognitive and emotional responses and possess the ability to define subject matter, which is of interest as the correct side of a debate, with the audience oblivious of this subtle emotional response getting trick.

Entman (1993)^[13] defined framing as the selection of some aspects of perceived reality and increasing their salience in communicating in such a way as to promote and uplift a particular problem definition, moral evaluation, casual interpretation cum treatment recommendation. Subsequently, frames, by uplifting some aspects of information, rightly elevate their salience via repetition or placement, or association with symbols that are culturally familiar. Then, frames omit and or take other aspects of the matter into obscurity.

The definition by Entman goes in tandem with that of which defined frames as the persistent patterns of cognition, interpreting, presenting, selecting, emphasizing and excluding by which media/contents handlers routinely organize discourses. This definition by Giltlin emphasized

the concept of selection, emphasis and exclusion. Those three points go beyond giving the world a meaningfully structured contents but also to providing frames to transform otherwise hazy realities into such meaningfully constructed structures. Little wonder that Sieffe (2003) ^[36] cited in Ebenezer (2018) ^[12] argued that the way an issue is seen is shaped by the repetitive presentation of such news frames to the public. Entman has noted that media framing informs the interpretations given to issues/events by audience through the selection and salience process. Succinctly, frames lead audience thoughts in carefully designed and predictive ways to a conclusion that is logical. Thus, it is wise to say that frames have influences on how issues are reported.

Literature of framing, as highlighted by Ebenezer, *et al.* (2018) ^[12], discussed two types of framing which are; Episodic and Thematic Framing. For episodic framing, it will show particular instances and tend to be individuation in approach without giving recourse to broader context of the issue. This episodic framing, is argued, to be the predominantly used frame form in media news coverage (Ebenezer, 2018) ^[12]. In practical, in a case of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), if the particular instance favoured by the frame in a news report is that the girl-child dresses provocatively or she is too beautiful to wear a singlet outside, the media with such episodic frame will blame the victim for the offence, thereby exonerating the perpetrator.

On the other hand, thematic framing will consider the issue from deeper and broader perspective and the social context. Using the above example again, the issue of the CSA will be in-depthly considered from the broader angle to what causes it, the societal view of such to even eliciting societal as well as structural support for the victim.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) ^[34] further categorized framing into five media framing scale for easy measurement of framing concept in research. The five categories are; attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequence and morality. These five scales will be tested in this study to measure the media frames used by Nigerian newspapers on the menace of child defilement.

Essentially, media framing across the globe on CSA has been widely studied. There is a belief that, Journalists' choice of words and language in addition to the types of frames

employed, as discussed by Ebenezer, *et al.* (2018) ^[12] above, exerted impact and influence on how the perpetrators and/or victims of CSA are perceived. This places a lot of role and commitment on media in promoting children's right, in which protection from Child Sexual Abuse is among.

Methodology

Examination of newspapers framing pattern of child's defilement cases in Nigeria is the focus of this study. And going by this, the most suitable research method with the stated objective on framing is content analysis.

The population of the content analysis were all the National Dailies in Nigeria. The sample size of study were six newspapers that were purposively selected with much circulation strength and coverage of the issues relating to child sexual abuse in South West Nigeria. Three newspapers are national newspapers and three local newspapers were picked. The selected national newspapers were (The Nigerian Tribune, The Punch and The Vanguard) while the local newspapers are (Osun Defender, PM News in Lagos and Hope Newspaper in Ondo). In total, two thousand, two hundred and two (2202) editions across the six newspapers published in year 2021 was the study's population.

The sample size was 714 editions and a total of 102 news items were analysed across the six selected newspapers. The selected months were: February, April, July and November and the number of editions sampled was three hundred and fifty-seven (357) editions across the three national newspapers and three hundred and fifty-seven (357) editions across the three local newspapers selected. The unit of analysis upon which this study was premised were; Straight news, Editorial, Features, Pictures/Caricatures and Opinion/Letter to the Editor. The content categories were attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequence and morality. The data collection instruments were coding Manual (Guide) and Coding sheet (coding scheme). The data analysis for this study was done using the descriptive analysis.

Data Analysis

Research Questions 1: What types of frames are used in the reportage of child defilement by Nigerian newspapers?.

Table 1: Frames of Reporting Child Defilement Stories

Type of frames	Attribution of Responsibility	Conflict Frame	Human Interest Frame	Economic Consequences Frame	Morality Frame	Total
Newspapers	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %	N %
The Punch	15 (14.7)	4 (3.9)	0 (0)	3 (2.9)	3 (2.9)	25 (24.4)
The Nigerian Tribune	18 (17.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (2.9)	21 (20.6)
The Vanguard	8 (7.9)	3 (2.9)	4 (3.9)	0 (0)	2 (2)	17 (16.7)
Osun Defender	4 (3.9)	2 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)	2 (2)	9 (8.8)
PM News	10 (9.8)	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)	16 (15.7)
Hope Newspaper	7 (6.8)	2 (2)	2 (2)	1 (1)	2 (2)	14 (13.7)
Total	62 60.8%	13 12.8%	8 7.8%	5 4.9%	14 13.7%	102(100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1 shows that the majority of the stories, 62 (60.8%) out of 102 stories across the six newspapers sampled within the study period, framed child defilement stories along the attribution of responsibility line (that is, the framing was towards one of the following: victims and/or their parents are responsible for the assault (2/2%), society and the government are responsible for the assault (12/11.7%), perpetrators should solely receive the blame for the assault

(48/47.1%), 14 (13.7%) stories were framed along the morality line (that is, the framing was towards one of the following: stories contain message to end or reduce the menace (4/4%), stories present child defilement as a result of lack of moral in society (7/6.9%), stories offer moral prescription of how to behave so as to curb the menace (3/2.8%); 13 (12.8%) stories were framed towards conflict frame (that is, the framing was towards one of the following:

stories contain adjectives or vignettes that generate feeling of outrage towards the perpetrators (11/10.8%), stories presents child defilement as a conflict requiring urgent actions to curbing it (2/2%); 8 (7.8%) of the stories were framed towards human interest angle (that is, the framing was towards one of the following: stories employ words and vignettes that generate feeling of empathy, sympathy and compassion towards the victims (6/5.8%), stories show the negative impacts of defilement on the victim's life (2/2%); while the least represented frame is the economic consequence frame which has 5 (4.9%) stories (that is, the stories reflect some economic consequences of pursuing or

not pursuing actions to curbing the menace now or in the future (5/4.9%).

Based on the foregoing analysis on the types of frames used to report child defilement stories, it is concluded that Nigerian newspapers, in their reportage, framed child defilement as an assault that someone should be held responsible for. Another frame which came next to attribution of responsibility is that child defilement is as a result of moral decadence in society and the stories with such frame also contained prescription on how to behave as a way of restoring moral in the society. Generally, perpetrators are framed as those to be held responsible for the assault.

Table 2: Dimension of Each Frame of Reporting Child Defilement Stories

Dimension of Each Frame	The Punch N %	The Nigerian Tribune N %	The Vanguard N %	Osun Defender N %	PM News N %	Hope Newspaper N %	Total N %
Attribution of Responsibility Frame							
Dimension 1	0 0	0 0	1 1.1	0 0	1 1.1	0 0	2 (2)
Dimension 2	2 1.9	0 0	2 1.9	2 1.9	3 2.9	3 2.9	12 (11.7)
Dimension 3	13 12.7	18 17.6	5 4.9	2 1.9	6 5.9	4 3.9	48 (47.1)
Morality Frame							
Dimension 1	0 0	1 1.1	1 1.1	1 1.1	1 1.1	0 0	4 (4)
Dimension 2	2 1.9	1 1.1	1 1.1	0 1.1	1 1.1	2 1.9	7 (6.9)
Dimension 3	1 1.1	1 1.1	0 0	1 1.1	0 0	0 0	3 (2.8)
Conflict Frame							
Dimension 1	3 2.9	0 0	2 1.9	2 1.9	2 1.9	2 1.9	11 (10.8)
Dimension 2	1 1.1	0 0	1 1.1	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 (2)
Human Interest Frame							
Dimension 1	0 0	0 0	3 2.9	1 1.1	0 0	2 1.9	6 (5.8)
Dimension 2	0 0	0 0	1 1.1	0 0	1 1.1	0 0	2 (2)
Economic Consequence Frame							
Dimension 1	3 2.9	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 1.1	1 1.1	5 (4.9)
Total	25 24.5	21 20.6	17 16.7	9 8.8	16 15.6	14 13.8	102(100)

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the content analysis revealed that the majority of the stories 62 (60.7%) out of 102 stories across the six newspapers sampled within the study period framed child defilement stories down the attribution of responsibility line. The stories were saying one of the following: victims and/or their parents are responsible for the assault, society and the governments are responsible for the assault, perpetrators should solely receive the blame for the assault.

Stories along morality line came next to this; 14 (13.7%). Such stories included one of these attributes: stories contain message to end or reduce the menace, stories present child defilement as a result of lack of moral in the society and stories offer moral prescription of how to behave so as to curb the menace.

Next were the stories titled towards conflict frame: 13 (12.8%). Those stories included one of the following: stories contain adjectives or vignettes that generate feeling of outrage towards the perpetrators, stories present child defilement as a conflict requiring urgent actions to curbing it. Further, stories tilted towards human interest angle (that is, the framing was towards one of the following: stories employ words and vignettes that generate feeling of empathy, sympathy and compassion towards the victims, stories reflect the negative impacts of defilement on the victim's life) were next with just 8 (7.8%) stories having such frame. Meanwhile, the least represented frame is the economic consequence frame which has 5 (4.9%) stories (that is, the stories reflect some economic consequences of pursuing or

not pursuing actions to curbing the menace now or in the future).

The finding of this study has established that stories on child defilement are majorly along the attribution of responsibility frame. This goes in tandem with the findings of Jane (2012) [16] on Framing Child Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Content Analysis of Newspaper and Television Coverage of eight national news organizations in the United States from 2002 to 2012. The study's findings indicated majority of the contents that were analysed shifted towards the attribution of responsibility claim, maintaining that child sexual abuse, over the past decade, jumped from an individual-level problem with individual-level solutions to a societal-level problem with institutional culpability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that continued salience and framing of child defilement on a proactive basis especially coverage that views child defilement from thematic frame approach rather than episodic approach by Nigerian newspapers would help to reduce the alarming rate of the menace or eradicate its occurrence in the society.

Recommendations

1. Stories on the dangers of child defilement, ways to avoiding such menace and the punishment for such dastardly act should be pushed into the mainstream agenda on frequent basis not just being abandoned till the

- perpetrators strike (media should be proactive rather than being reactive).
2. Thematic framing pattern which takes holistic view of child defilement cases as a societal problem focusing on causes and solutions should be adopted by Nigerian journalists for the menace to be eradicated instead of episodic framing which places the story as individual or stand alone as seen in most of the selected newspapers for this study.
 3. Since there are mass media (print and broadcast) owned and financed by the government, these stations can take the lead by creating a segment on their various media outlets to campaign against child defilement, highlight the dangers and state the consequences on the defilers. This awareness can also be done with the production of jingles, advertisements, documentaries, docudramas in radio and television stations, including the print medium (as adverts) on the dangers and consequences of child defilement.
 4. Further study can investigate the framing pattern of child defilement by Nigerian newspapers on thematic and episodic classification.

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