



**NIGERIAN MEDIA REPORTAGE OF CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION:
ANAMBRA RESIDENT JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS
ABOUT CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

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Abstract:

This study investigated the challenges of child rights reporting in Nigerian media. It aimed at understanding the challenges as directly perceived and encountered by the key players in media content production; the journalists. To achieve the objective of this study, two research approaches were adopted – survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The participants for the study were drawn from the list of all registered journalists in Anambra State numbering 456. The study found out that reporting child rights issues in Nigerian media proved to be a herculean task as journalists are faced with a plethora of challenges ranging from media ownership policies to cultural and religious beliefs which do not conform to the Child Rights Acts. Suggestions that entail active participation of the various stakeholders in child care and development; the media, religious leaders, parents and the government were proffered by the journalists themselves as the best possible panacea to curb the identified challenges. On that basis, the study proposes government interventions on strict and uniform implementation of the Child Rights Acts across all states of the federation as well as media policies that prioritize child rights issues in their media contents.

Keywords: child rights, journalists' perception, challenges, prospects, media reportage

1. Introduction

The role of the media in advocating the rights of individuals in society cannot be over emphasized. Among the media roles in championing and sustaining developmental

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goals in the society is the arduous task of raising people's awareness on the various ills in the society and sensitizing members of the society on their various rights to an ill-free society. Children are not exempted from this very beneficial role of the media as it is one of the responsibilities of media practitioners to uncover, through various media genres, the various abuses and exploitations meted out on them on daily basis by the adult members of society; as well as advocating and educating members of the society on the rights of children as bona fide and integral part of the society.

Over the years, children all over the world have been known to suffer various forms and degrees of abuse and exploitation ranging from child labor, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and so on. According to Nsude (2021), an average child must have suffered one form of abuse or the other at one time in their life before age 18. This implies that the children are the most vulnerable members of society and as such, it behoves other members, institutions and agencies in the society to defend and protect these very crucial yet, vulnerable members of the society.

Among the various institutions that should be at the forefront of the crusade against child abuse of any kind, is the media. The media, through their informatory roles, are the key players when it comes to creating awareness about the rights of every child in the society and corresponding consequences of child abuse both on the children and the society at large. Unfortunately, such is not the case (Uzochukwu, Morah & Okafor 2015). With the resultant effect being that day-in day-out and at every turn of the event; children continue to be at the receiving end of abuses and neglect with little or no hope of respite.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) often regarded as the constitution for children (Nsude, 2021) grouped the various rights of the child into four broad categories;

- Rights to survival,
- Rights to development,
- Rights to participation, and
- Rights to protection.

Also, the Child's Rights Acts enacted by Nigeria on July, 31st 2003, to accommodate the peculiarities of the Nigerian child, emphasizes the rights of every Nigerian child to basic protection and care. With all these prominences accorded to child rights issues by the Convention and Acts, one would expect that children would be given pride of place in most aspects of the society; the media inclusive. The media, by way of carrying out their social responsibility roles to every group of individuals in the society, ought to project and make child rights issues part of public agenda by constantly raising public awareness of the existence of, and implications from, abuse of the child rights. The situation, unfortunately, is not as expected because, in addition to the dearth in the frequency of reportage of child rights issues, there are also several issues of negative portrayals of children in the media. It is against his backdrop that the study attempts to uncover the probable reason for the unbalanced attention child rights issues receive on Nigerian media.

2. Statement of Problem

The rate at which children are abused and neglected in our society today suggests that either the adult members of the society are not aware of every child's right to love, care and protection; are not versed on the implications of child rights abuse or are blatantly oblivious or unconcerned because they see children as both insignificant and irrelevant members of the society thereby, disregarding the fact that children are the leaders and the livewires of our society of tomorrow. Also, as opined by Ede and Kalu (2018) in Obiwuru (2020), children are the bedrock of any society and the greatest assurance of the continuity of the human race. They are the prime reason for our visualization of tomorrow. Therefore, an abuse on the children could be akin to an abuse of the future of our society and as rightly pointed out by the World Health Organization (WHO) a child who is abused is more likely to abuse others as an adult so that violence is passed down from one generation to the next; giving credence to the words of the then Governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi, *"the society we abuse today must definitely take its toll on us tomorrow"* It is therefore critical to break this cycle of violence, and in so doing create positive multi-generational impacts.

Whichever be the case, it implies that the media are not living up to their expectation in making sure that the rights of every member of the society are consistently spelt out and made to resonate at all times in the minds of every member of the society by continuously giving the issue a pride of place on media agenda. Why the media do not live up to these expectations is what this study is poised to discover. In other words, the study dwelt on the challenges that impede journalists' efforts and desire to keep child rights issues afloat on the media agenda and also, proffered solutions to the problems of under and negative reportage of these issues.

2.1 Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to ascertain the challenges that impede child rights reportage in the media and to also, ascertain probable panacea to the identified challenges. To this end, the following specific objectives shall guide the study;

- 1) To ascertain journalists' perception of the level and theme of coverage of child rights issues as reported in the media.
- 2) To identify the challenges that militate against proper and fair coverage of child rights issues in the Nigerian media.
- 3) To identify a possible solution to the challenges as identified.

2.2 Research Questions

The following research questions shall be addressed in relation to the above objectives;

- 1) How do journalists perceive the amplitude and quality of media coverage of child rights issues in Nigerian media?
- 2) What are the challenges or obstacles to proper and quality coverage of child rights issues in the media?

3) What are the possible solutions to the identified obstacles/challenges?

3. Literature Review

From a plethora of available academic evidence on the state of children in the world, it would appear that Nigerian children are habitually and perpetually plagued by harsh realities of life from all angles. According to the Global Childhood Report (2020), Nigeria ranks among the 7 hardest countries to be a child; where children are robbed of significant portions of their childhood. According to the report, with 119.9 deaths per 1000 live births, Nigeria ranked highest in the under-5 child mortality rate. This of course could be attributed to many factors which include malnourishment, poor health facilities, lack of parental formal education etc. (Bolu-Steve, Adegoke & Kin-Ju 2020).

According to a study by UNICEF, State of the World's Children (2019), a lot of children are merely surviving but not thriving as a result of malnutrition, hidden hunger and a host of preventable sicknesses. Healthy feeding is a necessity for children's mental physical and psychological development. Unfortunately, this in Nigeria, is far-fetched as unavailability and accessibility of healthy meals occasioned mostly by poverty, remains an overwhelming barrier to healthy feeding in Nigeria.

Abuses of different forms and kinds are also some of the various problems faced by Nigerian children. Child abuse exists in seven-folds according to Eze and Kalu (2018) in Obiwuru (2020). They include child labour, child abandonment, vagrancy, sexual abuse, girl child marriage, child trafficking, and female genital mutilation.

Going by the Global Childhood Report (2020), about 31.5% of Nigerian children aged between 5- 7 engage in one form of labor or the other with the intent of generating income for the family. Oftentimes, these children work long hours in dangerous environments which exposes them to different forms of vices and conditions imminent to their mental, physical, social and psychological wellbeing and development. These children are, as a result, deprived of education or are forced to work part-time for their education; thereby, placing the statistics of out-of-school children of Primary and Secondary school age in Nigeria at 38% despite the efforts of the Federal Government to rid the streets of children and get them into classrooms through the Universal Basic Education Scheme. Closely related to this form of abuse is the issue of child trafficking which entails the recruitment, transportation, receipt or harboring of a child/minor for the purposes of exploitation. This condition is prevalent in most parts of Nigeria and is an infringement of the right of a child.

The incidence of early marriage/child bride is another area of concern about the plight of Nigerian children. With a 22.8% of girls between ages 15 to 19 currently married or in a union, the percentage of child-bride in Nigeria is said to be moderate compared to other developing countries. Encouragingly, this data suggests a decline of the percentage in the prevalence of child marriage since 2003 with a projected further decrease of 6% by 2030 (UNICEF 2020). Female genital mutilation (female circumcision), sexual abuse (10% of boys and 1 out of 4 girls) are also prevalent in Nigeria with the most discouraging

situation being that of the children who reported any of such abuse, fewer than five out of 100 received any form of support (UNICEF 2020).

All of the above indicate the sad realities of the vulnerability of the Nigerian child and what's more, these sad realities are deeply rooted in the peculiar cultural beliefs of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

3.1 Media Representation of Children

Many studies abound that shows how children are represented in the media. Uzochukwu, Morah and Okafor (2015) for instance studied the program contents of six broadcast stations with the aim of ascertaining the extent, level and nature of media coverage of child rights and protection issues in Nigeria. They analyzed the programme contents of six broadcast stations and observed that there is a dearth in the frequency and prominence attached to child-related issues. Also, the nature of the few media content about children was observed to be more for children's educational and entertainment purposes with no iota of child rights awareness issues.

Also, while examining the programs as aired on Nigerian television stations against the backdrop of responsibilities of the media as partners in protecting the interest and rights of the child, Omotosho, Oyero and Salawu (2015) observed that apart from children being under-reported in the media, child rights issues were never featured in any of the programmes aired by the three stations studied. This goes to show that the media whose responsibility it is to create awareness about child rights issues do not really carry out this responsibility to the later. Little wonder why the issue of abuses against children seems not to be in any haste to fizzle out because most people are not aware of the existence of any form of child and the resultant consequence of the breach of such rights.

Similarly, a content analytical study carried out by Raheemat, Suleiman, Ajaga and Jimi (2015) on the presentation of children in Nigerian news media found out that aside from children being under represented, they are more often portrayed as victims of societal problems or as beneficiaries of various handouts from individuals, institutions or corporate organizations. Cases of children suffering from one ailment or the other and therefore, in need of compassion were also observed as more prominent against a few reports that portrayed children as achievers and change agents.

This situation is incidentally is not peculiar to the Nigerian media alone. It cuts across many countries of the world. A study carried out by Poro and Banjac (2012) in South Africa for instance, noted that in a span of 20 month (2010 and 2011) children are still under represented in South African media. Even the few times stories about them were reported, they were rarely accessed or portrayed in a variety of ways considered as outright positive (Media Monitoring Africa 2012). The study equally noted that children are oftentimes stripped of their individual identities by the media. This the media does by negatively stereotyping them in the roles they occupy in the media and the media reporting and identifying them via the relationship they share with the adults whom the media considers as much more important even when the story is about the child. The

implication is that children are therefore not seen as persons in their own right but merely as an extension of the family.

In a similar vein, Oyero (2011) while comparing media contents of Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers found out that the under representation of children by the two countries' newspapers do not give room for the expected understanding of child rights issues. Key among his finding include; children's issues were not given extensive treatment in the media; children's issues were not seen as newsworthy and children's voices were poorly represented even in issues that affect them. Given that both countries under study (Nigeria and Ghana) were signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), leaves much to be desired with respect to the media keeping up with their responsibilities.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The communication theories that provide the intellectual framework on which this study is hinged are the Gatekeeping theory and the spiral of silence theory. These theories were so chosen because they explain the roles the media play while making the choices of what to consider as newsworthy. The media in the process of producing news items determines what events should make headlines, how the event should make the headlines and why it is necessary that the event should be featured at all.

The gate-keeping theory was propounded by Kurt Lewin in 1947 and postulates that the media selects what events to prioritize or not in the process of news production and subsequent dissemination (Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma 2017, McQuail 2005, Ukaegbu 2018). Gate keeping as a concept, according to Hiebert *et al* 1985 in Okunna and Omenugha (2012) refers to the process by which news items travelling through channels, gains clearance at certain checkpoints along the way. These checkpoints are referred to as 'gates' while the individuals or organizations that gives the clearance are referred to as the gatekeepers. Journalists are important gatekeepers as far as news production and dissemination is concerned. They decide on what news to dish out to their audience and which to withhold following whatever criteria or biases they deem imperative.

Propounded by Noelle-Neumann in 1984 on the other hand, the spiral of silence theory postulates that people tend to be silent when they hold views that are contrary to the dominant view in the society for fear of isolation Asema *et al.* (2017). According to the theory, people will be unwilling to voice out their opinion once they feel that they are in the minority while they become more vocal if they believe they are in the majority. In other words, the fear of being isolated could make minority opinion holders drop their opinion and consider that of the majority group. The theory according to Ukaegbu (2018), views the media as the major source of information and journalists disseminate dominant versions of news consistently while rendering minor views or ideas perpetually silent. Again, because the media do not exist in isolation and since the society rewards conformity and punishes deviance (Asemah *et al.* 2017), the fear of isolation and unpopularity can make the media conform to the majority public opinion. Hence, the

media work simultaneously with the majority opinion to silence minority beliefs on cultural, social and even political issues.

4. Methodology

The study engaged registered journalists in Anambra State who work in public and private media organizations either as full-time, part-time or contract journalists. The participants were editors, reporters, correspondents, presenters, photojournalists e. t. c. in print, broadcast media and government information agencies in Anambra State. The study combined both qualitative and quantitative research approaches; survey and Focus Group Discussion.

4.1 Sampling

In order to develop a sampling frame, the researcher compiled a list of all registered journalists in Anambra State. The list as obtained from the Office of the Secretary General, Nigerian Union of Journalists, Anambra State Chapter and as updated in 2019, comprises a total of 17 chapels which include; Correspondence Chapel. Onitsha Federated Chapel, NTA Onitsha Chapel, NTA Awka Chapel, ABS Chapel, National Light Chapel, Orient Daily Chapel, UNIZIK FM Chapel, Fides Chapel, Local Government Information Chapel, Federal Information Chapel, State Information Chapel, National Orientation Agency Chapel, Living Christ Mission Chapel, National Link Chapel, Moment FM Chapel and Community News Chapel with a total membership strength of 456 journalists.

From this total population, 210 journalists were selected for the study using Krejcie and Morgan's (1991) table of sample size determination. The table has established sample sizes against their corresponding populations at 95 % confidence level and 5 % sampling error. From this number of selected journalists, 6 were randomly selected for the Focus group discussion while a questionnaire was designed and administered to the remaining 204 journalists.

Out of the 204 copies of the questionnaire that were administered, 16 (8%) were either not returned or were invalidated, leaving the researcher with 188 (92%) valid questionnaires for analysis.

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 188 valid respondents, 132 (70%) were male while only 56 (30%) were female; giving the impression that journalism is a male-dominated profession. 104 (55%) of the respondents have first degree/HND and its equivalent as their highest educational qualification while 25 (13%) has Post Graduate degree (PHD/Masters/PGD, 58 (31%) have OND, NCE and equivalent and only 1 (1%) has SSCE as their highest educational qualification. This implies that the respondents are knowledgeable enough to read, understand and give answers to the questionnaire very well. In terms of respondents' duration of practice of journalism, 28 (15%) of them have practiced for up to 20years and above, 47 (25%) have practiced between 15 – 19years, 65 (35%) have practiced between 5

-9years and 48 (26%) have practiced for a period of between 1-4years. This implies that the respondents are well versed in journalism practice and as such, know the intricacies, ethics and principles of the profession well enough to give answers to the questions sought.

4.3 Journalists' awareness of Child Rights Acts

Table 1: Respondents' awareness of the Child Rights Act

Response	Score (x)	Frequency (f)	fx	(%)
Yes	3	170	510	90
No	2	11	22	6
Not sure	1	7	7	4
Total		188	539	100

The data in Table 1 shows that 170(90%) of the respondents are aware of the existence of the Child Rights Acts, only 11 (6%) and 7 (4%) of them said they either do not know of its existence or they are not sure of what the Acts is all about. Since 170 respondents are aware of these acts, only this number will be assessed subsequently.

4.4 The level of knowledge the journalists have about Child Rights Acts in Nigeria

Table 2: Respondents' level of awareness of Child Right Acts

Response	Score (x)	Frequency (f)	Fx	%
Very high	4	137	548	81
High	3	19	57	11
Low	2	10	20	6
Very low	1	4	4	2
Total		170	629	100

A whopping 81% plus 11% of the respondents (totaling 92%) have very high and high knowledge of the dictates of the Child Rights Acts respectively. While the percentage that either has just a little or no knowledge of it at all is a meagre 6% and 2% (totaling 8%) respectively. With a mean score of 3.7 on a 4-point scale, this goes to show that a majority of the respondents are well versed in the tenets of the Child Rights Acts and so can give credible answers to issues relating to children and the media.

4.5 Journalists' perception about the frequency of media coverage of child rights issues

Table 3: Frequency of media coverage of child rights issues

Response	Score (x)	Frequency (f)	Fx	%
Very high	4	0	0	0
High	3	36	108	21
Low	2	78	156	46
Very low	1	56	56	33
Total		170	320	100

Of the 170 respondents, only 36 (21%) believe that the media accords children issues high coverage while 79% believe that the frequency of media coverage of children and children issues are either low or very low (46 and 33 respectively). This result indicates that media coverage of child rights issues is on a very low ebb in Nigerian mass media. Similarly, results from the Focus Group Discussion revealed that media coverage of the issues pertaining to child rights is low compared to every other media content as a majority of the discussants strongly agree that the media pay little attention to issues relating to child rights. This is evident in the mean score of 1.9 on a 4-point scale indicating that the respondents strongly agree that the media coverage of child rights issues is on the minimal.

4.6 Journalists' perception about the theme of media portrayal of children

Table 4: Nature and theme of media coverage of children issues

Nature and theme of exposure		Score (x)	Frequency (f)	Fx	%
Positive	a) Hero b) Child star c) Gifted d) Etc.	3	28	84	17
Negative	a) Delinquents b) Victims of abuse c) Bullies d) Special needs/ Challenged	2	92	184	54
Not sure		1	50	50	29
Total			170	318	100

Table 4 above shows that only 17% of the respondents believe that the media portray children positively while 54% believe that children are portrayed negatively and the rest (29%) are not sure whether to categorize the exposure as positive or negative. With a mean score of 1.8 on a 4-point scale, this goes to show that the respondents strongly agree that the media coverage of children in Nigerian mass media is more negative than positive. Also, results from the FGD further revealed that the respondents agreed that children are much more portrayed negatively, as either victim of physical, social or sexual abuse, disaster, delinquent etc. and perpetually in need of help; than positively. Although some of the discussants pointed out that reporting negative stories of abuses on children is not in itself bad, as it serves to inform the public and subsequently, get help for the child victim, a greater majority are still of the opinion that the rate of negative reporting should at least tally with that of positivity if not more.

Thus, Tables I and II coupled with results from the FGD have combined to answer research question 1 to the effect that journalists perceive the amplitude of media coverage of child rights as minimal and usually, negative in nature.

4.7 Challenges that inhibit proper media coverage and portrayal of children in the media

Table 5: Journalists' responses about challenges inhibiting proper coverage and portrayal of children in the media

Response	Score (x)	Frequency (f)	<i>Fx</i>	%
Media Policies	5	12	60	7
Cultural and Religious beliefs	4	23	92	13
News value	3	17	51	10
Funding	2	13	26	8
All of the above	1	105	105	62
Total		170	334	100

Table 5 sought to identify the various challenges that inhibit journalists from giving children issues commensurate coverage and even more positive portrayal. Of the 170 respondents that attended this item, 12 (7%) blamed it on media policies, 23 (13%) blamed the various cultural and religious beliefs of the various parts of the country. Another 17 (10%) and 13 (8%) of the respondents pointed to news value and funding as the cause respectively while 105 (62%) agreed that all the above-listed challenges contribute to hinder them from giving proper coverage and positive portrayal to children issues in the media. Similarly, reacting to the question about what hinders proper and positive portrayal of children in the media, the FGD participants corroborated the above challenges and equally added that non-uniformity in the implementation of Child Rights Acts across all the states of the Federation.

The mean score of 2 on a 5-point scale invariably goes to show that various factors contribute to the challenges encountered by journalists while trying to cover and portray children's issues positively in the media. These responses thus answer Research Question 2 to the effect that the following constitute major challenges to proper media coverage and portrayal of children issues in the media.

- Media ownership and policies that do not make provision for allocation of time and space for children's programme and issues to be discussed in the media
- Cultural and religious beliefs that are usually not in tandem with the provisions of the Child Rights Acts that places undue pressure on journalists in deciding how and what to publish that would not jeopardize media relationships with host communities.
- News value; because news thrives on oddity, negative news about children sells more than normal news.
- Lack of funding for children's programmes in the media.
- Non-uniformity in the implementation of Child Rights Acts in Nigeria by the government.

4.8 What are the possible solutions to identified challenges?

Table 6: Possible solutions to challenges as identified by journalists

Response	Score (x)	Frequency (f)	Ex	%
Better media policies	5	12	60	7
More sponsors for children programmes	4	15	60	9
Religious leaders, parents and cultural custodians to be better informed about Child Rights Acts	3	24	72	14
Journalists to be more objective in covering news about children	2	16	32	
All of the above	1	103	103	70
Total		170	327	100

Table 6 shows the various solutions proffered by the respondent journalists as to how the previously identified challenges can be doused. Of the 170 respondents, 119 representing 70% of the respondents believe that better media policies, sponsorship of more children programme in the media coupled with educating various stakeholders in child care can abate the challenges inhibiting positive portrayal and coverage of children and children's issues in the media. As evident in the mean score of 1.9 on a 5-point scale, the results in Table 6 indicates that it is not the sole responsibility of the journalists to ensure that children and child rights issues are well represented in the media. Also, a majority of the FGD participants equally opined that the media, journalists themselves, the government. Religious leaders and parents all have the keys to the solution to the challenges of child rights issues in the media. Thus, the results in Table 6 coupled with responses from the FGD participants proffer answers to Research Question 3 to the effect that various stakeholders hold the key to abating the challenges of proper media portrayal and coverage of Child Rights Issues in Nigerian media. From their responses, the ways these challenges could be abated include;

- Media houses should make policies and regulations that allow allocation of more media time and space to Child Rights issues.
- Federal government should move for and facilitate the adoption and implementation of Child Rights Acts in every state of the federation.
- Religious leaders, parents, cultural custodians and various other stakeholders should be properly educated about the various rights of every child to love, care and protection so as to reduce incidences of abuse on children and as such prevent much of negative news about children finding their way into media contents.
- Individuals, groups and organizations should be encouraged to sponsor more children programmes in the media.
- Journalists to strive for more balanced news about children and eschew from the incessant portrayal of children as victims and miscreants.

5. Discussion of Findings

As evident from the findings of the study, 125 (78%) of the journalists believe that the media do not prioritize child rights issues in the media and as such, do not live up to their responsibility of creating and sustaining awareness about child rights issues in the society. These findings support studies by Uzochukwu *et al.* (2015), Nwolikpe (2018) and Oyero (2011) that child rights and children related issues are not given prominence in the media. Again, going by the fact that the respondents in the study were drawn from practitioners in both print and broadcast media, show that this issue is not peculiar to a particular media. Rather it points to the fact that every media, irrespective of types and ownership are guilty.

The study equally found that out of the little coverage the media allocate to children's issues, the major themes of such coverage is that of victims and delinquents. In other words, children are oftentimes portrayed negatively in the media. This gives credence to the study by Raheemat *et al.* (2015) that children are mostly portrayed as victims of crimes, accidents, natural disasters among others; and scarcely, as achievers and change agents.

Ruminating on the factors that constitute challenges to proper media representation of children and child rights issues, the journalists pointed out several factors which include;

- Lack of media policies that provide for the allocation of ample time and space to accommodate child rights issues. This implies that media owners do not see children's issues as important enough to make headlines in the media space. This further confirms the postulations of the gatekeeping theory which states that the media has the exclusive right and power to dictate what news item is newsworthy enough to make headlines and that this power of the media to choose can also be influenced by the ownership interest of the media involved (Asemah *et al.* 2017)
- Cultural and religious constraints. According to the respondent journalists, the media is sometimes compelled to ditch reporting child rights issues especially when it seems to go against the religious and cultural inclinations or dictates of the community. This is usually evident when it comes to the issue of child-marriage / early marriage and child-labour. According to them, the Child Rights Acts of 2003 postulates that a child is anyone below 18years of age and as such, marriage to persons below 18years is considered illegal within the limits of the Child Rights Acts. Whereas, to certain cultures, puberty is considered a yardstick for determining ripeness for marriage. In such situations, the media is torn between the option of reporting incidence of early marriage and risk being termed enemy to the community or tactfully looking the other way and retaining the goodwill of the community. This upholds the tenets of the spiral of silence theory that the fear of isolation or rejection may cause the media to align more with popular beliefs and opinions.

- Non-uniformity in implementation of Child Rights Acts across all states of the Federation. This makes it difficult to identify, prosecute and punish defaulters in many parts of the country. As pointed out by Usang (2020), because Nigeria runs a federal system of government, the Acts does not automatically become applicable to all the states in the federation; each of the 36 states legislatures must make laws applicable to its territory. Unfortunately, out of the 36 states of the federation, 11 states are yet to legally adopt the Child Rights Acts because it goes against their cultural and religious beliefs. The implication, therefore, is that what is right within one community might be wrong within another and as such, making it difficult to identify and prosecute offenders of some child abuse.
- Other factors as identified include news value and lack of funding for children's programmes that can raise awareness of child rights, because children's issues are not regarded as important, most media houses find it difficult to get sponsors for such children's programs and media contents. The fact that most media are profit-oriented, they tend to dump children's programmes that would not fetch money and go for those programmes that would generate revenue for the media house. This, in fact, validates the claims of Omotosho *et al.* 2015.

5.1 The way forward

Fortunately, discussion with the respondents yielded some suggestions or panacea to the identified challenges. According to them, the media have a lot of roles to play in curbing these challenges. First off, the media, irrespective of the ownership pattern, should as a matter of responsibility, prioritize child rights issues and develop and allocate ample time to children-related issues so as to be able to give more coverage and voice to the children. They should also, strive to be more objective and eschew disseminating much of negative issues about children.

Secondly, the government should move for uniformity in the adoption of and implementation of the Child Rights Acts across all the 36 states of the federation. This will give the press more confidence to call out culprits of child abuse thereby, discouraging them and others from future abuse of children. Also, the respondents suggested that with heavy creation of awareness of Child Rights issues and more positive portrayal of children in the media, more individuals, groups and organizations would begin to identify more with children's programs and thereby, increasing sponsorship for the programmes.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study focused on the challenges encountered by journalists that make proper media portrayal of child rights issues seem a herculean task with probable solutions to the identified problems. Summary of the study identified some of the challenges as;

- Journalists are usually handicapped by the cultural and religious beliefs in the society some of which are oftentimes not in tandem with the dictates of the Child Rights Acts.
- Media ownership policies which the journalists must adhere to and which most of the times do not accommodate children's issues as they do not have much news value.
- Lack of funding for children's programme.

Solutions to these challenges, fortunately, is not far-fetched and expectedly, lies with the media as the watchdog of society. Creating and sustaining individual, groups or organization sponsored campaigns and programmes with child rights as the theme should be at the forefront of every media policy. This is necessary as it would encourage more coverage of children's issues and increase and sustain people's awareness of the rights of every child to life, love and care.

The government are also not left out. They should as a matter of responsibility to the people they represent, push for the implementation of the Child Rights Acts as adopted by the country in 2003. This will help in dishing out uniform sanctions and punishments to culprits of child abuses and at the same help to deter future incidences of child abuse.

Relatedly, the researcher recommends that besides from calling out child abusers on the media, journalists should also be encouraged not to stop at just informing the public about child abuse offenders. They should also follow up on the events and equally keep the public informed about the legal process and eventual punishment bagged by offenders. This also, will serve as a deterrent for other child abusers and boost children's morale to speak up in the face of abuses and demand and receive justice when necessary.

The researcher further recommends more of such studies in other regions of the federation to ascertain other challenges journalists in those regions might be facing while striving to report children's issues positively and objectively.

Conflict of Interest Statement

This is an original report from an empirical research carried out by the authors. All the materials referenced in the work are dully acknowledged. Therefore, anyone making reference to this work should acknowledge the authors accordingly.

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