



**International Journal  
of  
Social and Management  
Sciences**

**Year: 2011**

**Vol. 4 N0.1**

**ISSN: 1504-8446**

**AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION  
(NBA), 2005-2006: DEMOGRAPHY AND EARNINGS - AMADU JACKY KABA**

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- ADEBOLA OGUNBA**

**HOW CHILDREN ARE REPORTED IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS: IMPLICATIONS  
FOR THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD - OLUSOLA OYERO**

# International Journal of Social and Management Sciences

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# **HOW CHILDREN ARE REPORTED IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REALISATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

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## Abstract

*The newspapers as gender-setters have influence in ordering the course of events by framing issues around such events in certain ways. Such pattern of framing can attract attention and bring about desired response to such issues. It is in this regard that this paper, through content analysis research design, studied two Nigerian newspapers in order to understand the news environment in which child rights is portrayed and the consequences it has for the realisation of the rights of the child. The finding shows that the current coverage of children's issues by the Nigerian newspapers may not deliver much benefits as regards the realisation of the rights of the child due to low coverage and inadequate prominence given to children, lack of good treatment of the issue with appropriate genres, as well as poor engagement of children themselves on issues that affect them.*

**Keywords:** *Children, Newspapers, Coverage, Prominence, Primary subjects*

## 1. Introduction

News coverage may have influence on how the public and policy makers interpret and respond to social issues (Woodruff and Dorfman, 2001). To advocate effectively for policies that will improve child rights, advocates must be able to articulate a clear message that resonates with specific audiences. They have to make their case well, and make it publicly. This means they must understand the current public conversation regarding children and how they are being framed in the news. Similarly, if journalists are going to tell the story of children and their rights as they are debated by different stakeholders, they should know what parts of that discussion are being emphasized and which, if any, are being neglected.

For these reasons, we wanted to know how the news was covering children beginning from the year that Oslo challenge was launched and thereafter. To find out, we analyzed a sample of Nigerian newspapers to determine the child rights issues being reported, dominant subjects, spokespeople, and arguments being used on the issue. The purpose of the content analysis research is to give advocates a thorough grounding in the way their issue is being portrayed in the news and thus, by extension, being presented to policy makers and the public.

## 2. Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on the agenda-setting theory of the media. The theory posits that the mass media determines the issues that are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. That means that the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion; and though it may not be able to tell its readers what it thinks, it does successfully tell them what to think about (Cohen, 1963:13). In other words, our perception of the world is dependent not only on our personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for us by the media practitioners.

McCombs and Shaw's (1972) investigation lends great credence to the agenda setting hypothesis. They did a content analysis of newspapers and television coverage of the 1968 American presidential election. The analysis considered the time and space accorded to various issues and served as a representative of media agenda. McCombs and Shaw then interviewed 100 undecided voters in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina area and asked them what issues they believed were most important. This public opinion polling served as representation of the public agenda. In looking at the relationships between the two variables (that is, media agenda and public agenda), McCombs and Shaw found an incredible correlation. The public agenda was a virtual reflection of the media agenda.

Littlejohn (2002) also established a relationship among media agenda, public agenda, and policy agenda. The media assigned importance to the issues discussed in the news- media agenda. The issues discussed in the media have an impact over the way the public thinks, this is referred as public agenda. Ultimately the public agenda influences the policy agenda. Furthermore "the media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda." (Littlejohn, 2002:320).

As McCombs (n.d.) observed that people do not only acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, but readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news – lead story on page one, other front page display, large headlines, etc. Similarly, television news offers numerous cues about salience – the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story, etc. These cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic. Thus, the news media can set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion forms.



The elements involved in agenda setting include the quality or frequency of reporting, prominence given to the reports in terms of headlines display, layout, timing on radio and TV set etc; the degree of conflict generated in the reports and cumulative media-specific effects over-time. The agenda setting theory thus provides the basis for examining how Nigerian newspapers have been reporting issues about children and the implications of such reports for the realisation of the rights of the child.

### 3. Child Rights and Sustainable Human Development

The rights of children are very central to sustainable development. The World Commission on Environment and Development's definition of sustainable development, as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", makes it clear that the future generation is focal to sustainable development. Hammarberg (1990:105) points out that "our children belong to the future; they are the future...Life's aspirations come in the guise of children".

Since the future generation will naturally comprise the children, empowering them to maximize the future for their own development is very significant (Gathia, 1997). Thus, fulfilment of the rights of children is an issue in sustainable development. This point is well emphasized by UNICEF (2006), stressing that chapter 25 of Agenda 21 of the 1992 Earth Summit is devoted to children to ensure that the development needs and rights of today's children will be met without compromising those of future generations. UNICEF also notes that central to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in its entirety is the development – as well as the survival – of children. This guarantees them the right to education and leisure and to special protection from abuse, neglect and all forms of exploitation which interfere with their development.

It is useful to observe that the core of the CRC is encased in Article 3, where the best interests of the child form the basic criteria by which the most critical decisions regarding children should be made. The CRC makes it clear that children are not objects of charity or welfare, but active participants in their own lives. The conclusion drawn is that development cannot be sustainable without fulfilling the needs and rights of children who make up the future generation. In the same vein, UNICEF emphasized that meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) requires fulfilling the rights of children. It states

that six of the eight MDGs can best be met as the rights of children to health, education, protection and equality are protected. They will only be sustained as the rights of every child are realized.

## 4. The Media and the Oslo Challenge

In late 1998, the Norwegian Government and UNICEF responded to a request from the working group set up by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1997 to initiate a longer process that would continue this work – meaning, for example, to identify examples of good practice in fulfilling Articles 12, 13 and 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), to forge co-operative links among the many sectors involved in the issue of children and media, and to produce a checklist for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to facilitate consideration of submission by State Parties in relation to these articles. In connection with an international working group of media professionals, young people, UN and voluntary sector workers, researchers and creative thinkers from different continents, The Oslo Challenge was launched on the 20th of November 1999 – the 10th anniversary of the UN CRC. The Challenge is a call to action with the aim to ensure that the overwhelming power of the media for good in the lives of children is identified, encouraged and supported, while the potential harmful effects are recognised and reduced.

*It is a call to action. It goes out to everyone engaged in exploring, developing, monitoring and participating in the complex relationship between children and the media (The Mediawise Trust, 2003). This includes governments, organizations and individuals working for children, media professionals at all levels and in all media, the private sector, including media owners, children and young people, parents, teachers and researchers. The challenge wants the cooperation of all the stakeholders with the media to ensure the fulfilment of the rights of the child as required in the UN Convention on the rights of the child. Specifically, the Challenge to media professionals at all levels and in all media is:*

- *to raise awareness in the media professions about the rights of children and how they can be protected and promoted by good professional practices or harmed through inappropriate policies or actions;*
- *to work ethically and professionally according to sound media practices and to develop and promote media codes of ethics in order to avoid sensationalism, stereotyping (including by gender) or undervaluing of children and their rights;*

- *to resist commercial pressures that lead to children's issues and the rights of children to freedom of expression, fair coverage and protection from exploitation, including as consumers, being given low priority;*
- *to work to enhance the relationship between children and the media so that both grow and improve in understanding of the positive and negative power and potential of the relationship*  
(The Mediawise Trust, 2003)

Aside from the task given to the media by the Oslo challenge, Hammarberg (1996) has also outlined the specific functions that the media can perform for the realisation of the requirements of the Convention on rights of the child. The media are supposed to monitor abuses of children and progress made on the realization of children's rights. It is hoped that violations of children's rights be reported in the media. Such scrutiny would probably be more effective than the international procedure prescribed by the convention which requires the government itself to report to the monitoring committee on steps for implementation. However, the media could also draw from the official documentation in their reporting. The convention could be seen as the yardstick against which reality could be measured.

The media also have the responsibility to respect the integrity of the child. One of the important aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that it presents a truly modern attitude towards children themselves. A major emphasis in the convention is that each child is unique and this can be undermined through negative stereotyping. Thus when reporting on, for instance, crime and sexual abuse, the media should ensure that the child would not suffer stigma or loss of self-esteem as a result of her public association the report.

Furthermore, media organisations should give opportunity to children to participate in media production. One of the principles of the convention is that the views of children be heard and given due respect. This is also reflected in articles about freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion. It is in the spirit of these provisions that children should not only be able to consume information material but also to participate themselves in the media. The idea is that children, in fact, should be able to express themselves and that their views be sought.

There is also the need to protect children against harmful influences through the media. While the convention requests access for children to the media, it also reflects concern about the risk of children being harmed by some reports and information material. The idea is that the integrity of the child should be respected in the reporting. Another article says that the state should encourage guidelines to protect children at large from injurious media output, for instance certain violent and pornographic materials.

Article 17 of the Convention on the rights of the child specifies the role the media should play in the promotion and protection of children's rights (UNICEF 2002:65-66). The Committee on the Rights of the Child (1996) believes that the media- both written and audio visual- are highly important in efforts to

make reality the principles and standards of the Convention. The media can play a pivotal role in monitoring the actual implementation of the rights of the child.

The media penetrate every segment of modern-day society and effectively influence, in some ways, how people view themselves, their neighbours, their communities and their world. Media representations are the primary source of information on social problems for many people (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). Maley (2000: 37) for instance, notes that: "In social and cultural matters, the various media provide the main platforms of debate, and their choices of subjects, participants and opinions shape the agenda and much of its content." The media play a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behaviour (Brawley, 1995). Thus the media have significant roles to play in ensuring that the rights of children are brought to the plane of discussion and subsequently realised.

## 5. Method of Study

The method adopted in this study is content analysis research design. Content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:141). With the use of stratification, the newspapers were separated along the lines of ownership- those owned by the government and those that are privately-owned. Besides, only national newspapers were considered. Daily Times was the only government newspaper during the period under study; it thus constituted the selected sample. The Guardian was randomly selected (through a simple random technique) from the list of the privately-owned national newspapers. The study covered a period of five years; from 1999, the year that Oslo challenge was launched, to 2003, the year that Nigeria's national assembly passed the Child Rights Act. It is hoped that the study will be a continuous one as to monitor the trend of the coverage of children's issues by the Nigerian press.

A total of 600 issues of the newspapers constituted the sample size. Through the use of simple random sampling, 5 issues were selected in every month for the five year period. Thus, 300 issues per newspaper yielded 600 for the two selected newspapers. The unit of analysis comprised all articles or stories on child issues in the form of news, features, opinions, editorials, pictures or letters to the editor. They were examined for frequency of child rights issues reported, prominence given to the reports in terms of newspaper page placements and people quoted as regards individuals that were contacted as news sources in the reports. The data were analysed using percentages.

## 6. Content Categories

The units of analysis were examined under the following categories:

- Child right issue - This refers to any of the issues on the rights of the child. These include:
  - Education: formal education in school situation.
  - Child health: physical, mental and social well being of the child.

- Freedom of expression: Right of the child to voice his/her opinion publicly without fear of censorship or punishment.
- Freedom to play, recreation and rest.
- Trafficking: includes recruiting, harbouring, obtaining, and transporting persons by use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjecting them to involuntary acts, such as commercial sexual exploitation.
- Abduction: Kidnapping of a child by an older person
- Sexual exploitation,
- Epidemic: an outbreak of a disease in a locale.
- Natural disaster a: an event that has an effect on children resulting from the natural process in the environment.
- Armed conflict: the use of children in war.
- Child labour: the term for the employment of children with little or no compensation or consideration for their personal development, safety, health, and future prospects.
- Natural disaster: an event that has an effect on children resulting from the natural process in the environment.
- Child neglect: failure to provide for the child's basic needs, be they physical, educational or emotional.
- Journalistic genres (Types of editorial matter): Be it news, features, opinions or editorials
- Prominence – using the front-page items as most prominent, back page as prominent and inside pages items as least prominent.
- People quoted: individuals that were contacted as news sources in the reports.
- Child abuse exposure- frequency of reports on physical injury upon a child, assault of a minor, sexual abuse, neglect, armed conflict and trafficking.
- Source of report- whether it is locally sourced or from wire services.
- Primary subjects: included the issues or themes that the stories focused on.

## 7. Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability refers to levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instrument (Wimmer and Dominick 2003). High agreement among coders establishes the appropriateness of coding instructions, category definitions and unit of analysis. The guidelines provided by Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2005) were followed in arriving at the intercoder level of agreement in this study. Two coders, including the researcher, were involved.

Though there are several methods available for calculating intercoder reliability, Cohen's Kappa reliability (k) test method was adopted. The choice of Cohen's Kappa was informed by its appropriateness to the current study. It is the only method available on SPSS (the only software that the researcher has access to) for calculating intercoder reliability for content analysis. Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2005) strictly warn against the use of other methods available on SPSS like percentage agreement, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's and other correlation-based indices that standardize coder values because they only measure covariation and are not appropriate for reliability in content analysis. Thus, while these indices may be used as a measure of reliability in other contexts, reliability in content analysis requires an assessment of intercoder agreement rather than covariation.

Eight major variables were examined for intercoder reliability; they included child right issues, genres, prominence, source of report, exposure of abuse, primary subjects and people quoted in the reports. The values of Intercoder agreement were interpreted using Landis and Koch (1977) interpretation guidance. The values and interpretation of the seven variables examined are presented as follows:

- Child right issues- 0.71, indicating that there is substantial agreement between the two coders.
- Journalistic genres- 0.83, indicating that there is almost perfect agreement between the two ratings.
- Prominence- 0.91, indicating that there is almost perfect agreement between the two coders.
- People quoted- 0.73, indicating that there is substantial agreement between the two ratings.
- Child abuse exposure- 0.90, indicating that there is almost perfect agreement between the two ratings.
- Source of report- is 0.90, indicating that there is almost perfect agreement between the two coders.
- Primary Subjects- 0.82, indicating that there is almost perfect agreement between the two ratings.

## 8. Result

Table 1:  
Coverage of child right issues by the selected newspapers

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentages
<i>The Guardian</i>	96	49.7%
<i>Daily Times</i>	97	50.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 1 shows the coverage given to child right issues by the two newspapers. A total of 193 stories were covered over the five-year period of study. *The Guardian* had 49.7% of the stories while *Daily Times* had 50.3%. *Daily Times* reported child right issues more than *the Guardian*.

Table 2:  
Journalistic genres adopted in coverage of child rights

Journalistic Genres	<i>The Guardian</i>	Percentages	Percentages	Percentages
News	56	58.3%	58.3%	44.4%
Features	19	19.8%	19.8%	23.7%
Editorial	4	4.2%	4.2%	4.1%
Opinion	3	3.1%	3.1%	7.2%
Picture	14	14.6%	14.6%	20.6%
Total	96	100%	100%	100%

Table 2 shows that the newspapers reported children mostly, with straight news. The *Guardian* devoted 58.3% of its total stories to straight news, 19.8% to feature articles, followed by pictures with 14.6%. Editorials and opinion/letters followed with 4.2% and 3.1% respectively. *Daily Times* devoted 44.4% of its stories to straight news, 23.7% to Feature articles and 20.6% to pictures. Opinion followed, with 3.1%, and editorial with 4.2%.

Table 3:

Prominence of coverage by the newspapers

Story Placement	<i>The Guardian</i>	Percentages	<i>Daily Times</i>	Percentages
Front Page Lead	6	6.3%	8	8.2%
Front Page Minor	5	5.2%	3	3.1%
Back Page Lead	2	2.1%	4	4.1%
Back Page Minor	5	5.2%	2	2.1%
Inside Page Lead	40	41.6%	57	58.8%
Inside Page Minor	38	39.6%	23	23.7
Total	96	100%	97	100%

Table 3 reveals that most stories on child rights are found inside the pages of all the selected newspapers. *The Guardian* published 81.2% of all its stories on children (for both lead and minor stories) in the inside pages of the papers. The remaining 18.8% were found on the front and back pages. *Daily Times* had 58.8% inside page lead stories, followed by 23.7% inside page minor stories, 8.2% as front page lead and 3.1% as front page minor. Stories on the back page (lead and minor stories) were 4.1% and 2.1% respectively.



Table 4:

People quoted in child rights reports of the newspapers

Categories of People	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	Percentages	<i>Daily Times</i>	Percentages
Government agents	11	15.5%	10	17%
NGOs/Advocates	29	40.8%	20	33.9%
Police/court	7	9.9%	7	11.9%
Parents/relatives	4	5.7%	1	1.7%
Individuals	3	4.2%	4	6.8%
Donors	2	2.8%	4	6.8%
Teachers/Administrators	3	4.2%	2	3.4%
Politicians	4	5.7%	3	5.1%
Researcher/Professor/	5	7%	4	6.8%
Children	2	2.8%	3	5.1%
Others	1	1.7%	1	1.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 focused on people quoted in the news. NGOs and advocates were mostly quoted in the selected newspapers, For *the Guardian*, NGOs and advocates received 40.8%, followed by government agents or officials, with 15.5% and police/court had 9.9%. Others were researchers/experts (7%), politicians (5.7%), parents and relatives (5.7%), individuals and teachers/school administrators received 4.2% each. Likewise, donors and children had 2.8% each. Other individuals quoted like clerics took 1.7%. *Daily Times* had 17% for government agents, 33.9% for NGOs/advocates, and 11.9% for police/court. Individuals, donors and researchers/experts had 6.8% each. Parents/relatives, school administrators/teachers, and politicians had 1.7%, 3.4%, and 5.1% respectively. Children had 5.1%, while other persons quoted had 1.5%.

Table 5:

Coverage of child abuse by the selected newspapers

	<i>The Guardian</i>	Percentages	<i>Daily Times</i>	Percentages
Child Abuse Stories	22	(22.9%)	8	(8.2%)
Non Abuse Stories	74	(77.1%)	89	(91.2%)
Total	96	(100%)	97	(100%)

Table 5 presents the extent to which the newspapers expose child abuse. *The Guardian* had 22.7% of its stories on children abuse while 77% was not on abuse. For *Daily Times*, 8.2% child abuse stories were reported, the remaining 91.2% were not on child abuse.

Table 6:

Sources of child rights reports by the newspapers

Sources	<i>The Guardian</i>	Percentages	<i>Daily Times</i>	Percentages
Local	69	71.9%	82	84.5%
Wire Service	27	28.1%	15	15.5%
Total	96	100%	97	100%

Table 6 above shows that most of the reports on children were locally sourced. *The Guardian* had 71.9% reports sourced locally, as opposed to 28.1% reports from wire services. *Daily Times* published 84.5% locally sourced news while 15.5% was from wire services.

Table 7:

Primary subjects (themes) covered by child rights reports

Child Rights Issues	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	Percentages	<i>Daily Times</i>	Percentages
Plights of children/Abuse	40	(41.7%)	35	(36.1%)
Advice to parents/children	6	(6.3%)	11	(11.3%)
Welfare stories on children/Philanthropy	4	(4.2%)	9	(9.3%)
Children involvement in sport/entertainment	2	(2.1%)	6	(6.2%)
Efforts to redress bad children's situation.	26	(27%)	27	(27.8%)
Juvenile delinquencies	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Children's efforts for their own care	5	(5.2%)	4	(4.1%)
Others	13	(13.5%)	5	(5.2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>(100%)</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>(100%)</b>

As shown in Table 7, the newspapers reported more on plights and difficulties confronted by children. In the Guardian, 41.7% of its stories were devoted to the plight of children. This was followed by efforts that are made to redress the poor situation of children, with 27%. Other subjects covered by the

Guardian were advice to parents (6.3%), welfare stories like philanthropic gestures to children (4.2%), children's involvement in sports and entertainment (2.1%), and children's efforts for their own care (5.2%). Other subjects that focused on events organised for children and meetings held to discuss issues affecting children accounted for 13.4%.

Daily Times carried 36.1% stories on the plight of children, 27.8% on efforts to redress the children's poor situation, 11.3% stories focused on advice to parents, 9.3% on philanthropic deeds to children, 6.2% on children's involvement in sport and entertainment, and 4.1% on children's efforts toward their own care. The remaining 5.1% focused on other issues and events organised for children and meetings held to discuss issues affecting children.

## Discussion of Findings

The coverage given to children's issues by the two Nigerian newspapers, the Guardian and Daily Times, shows a gross under-reportage of children's issues. A total of 300 issues of the newspapers were sampled for analysis for each of the newspapers, making an overall total of 600 issues. The Guardian reports an average of 180 stories daily, while Daily Times had an average of 120 stories. For the period under study, the Guardian carried an average of 54,000 stories all-together, while Daily Times carried 36,000 stories. It follows then that only 0.18% story belonged to children of all the stories carried by the Guardian while Daily Times reports on children was 0.27%. This is a gross underreportage of children by the newspapers.

The low coverage of children's issues in this study is similar to others carried out on children issues. McManus and Dorfman's (2002) study on the portrayal of child care in U.S newspapers showed inadequate reportage. They noted that though child care was among the most rapidly growing business in the U.S., it was surprising that the issue was underreported. Moss' (2001) study on the economic impact of the child care industry in California also showed gross under reportage of child care. The study showed that about 5.5% of the stories on news section fronts, editorial and op-ed pages were focused on education. Stories about child care, by contrast, represented a fraction of 1% of the stories in the sample newspapers. Similarly, McNamara's (n.d.) study on the representation of young people in the Irish national newspapers revealed under-representation of children and young people.

It appears then that children are generally underreported in the media. There are many possible explanations for this. Journalists may consider young people to be unimportant in societal decision-making processes, immature, ill-informed or indeed, not interested in current affairs. Besides, young people do not purchase newspapers regularly, nor do they usually have disposable incomes to do so. Not only that, some codes of practice, such as code of ethics for journalists in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Kenya among others, suggest that journalists should not interview or photograph those under the age of 18 on subjects involving their personal welfare in the absence and without the consent of their guardian (Nigerian Guild of Editors, n. d.; Independent Media Commission, n. d.; Kenyan Code of Conduct for Journalists and the Mass Media, n.d.). This hurdle may discourage journalists from using young people as sources for stories as it may give rise to editorial delays. Journalists tend to feed at convenient tables

where information is readily available, easy to access and on the record. Thus, the special status of children and young people may serve to work against them in terms of media coverage. However, if children rights are to be realised, the newspapers will need to give adequate attention to them. This is because the news media has the power to place issues on the agenda for discussion and bring about better condition for such issue. It is thus necessary for Nigerian news media to use this power to bring children and their rights to the fore by giving adequate coverage to them.

The newspapers adopted a variety of print media genres in the reportage of child rights. The two newspapers used straight news format most in the reportage of child rights. It thus means that the newspapers are more concerned with delivering the news of child rights first hand to the public. Straight news comes in piecemeal and does not allow for a comprehensive report. Feature is more appropriate for thorough treatment of any issue. It allows background information to be gathered and provides detailed information to educate the readers on any issue. The newspapers, however, did not adopt much of feature in their reportage. We also observed that the two newspapers made use of a lot of pictures. This is quite good, as pictures give greater credibility and meaning to news coverage. Pictures help the readers to visualize the issue being reported on, and at times, pictures alone tell the whole story for readers to understand.

There is also low engagement of the public on the subjects of child rights, as reflected in the low coverage of opinion. The Guardian had 3.1% on opinion while Daily Times had 7.2%. This shows that the newspapers either did not carry the readers along actively on the issue of child rights or the readers were indifferent to the issue. We also see that the newspapers did not get involved in presenting much opinion on the child rights issues. The Guardian had 4.2% on opinion while Daily Times had 4.1%. There is therefore no balance in the reportage of child rights by the newspapers.

The level of prominence, in terms of page placement, given to a report has implication on the extent to which the newspapers have set agenda for the issue. The results show that reports on child rights were buried within the newspaper pages. Combining the inside page stories (both the lead and minor stories), we see 81.2% of The Guardian stories on inside pages, while 82.5% of Daily Times stories, also both the lead and minor, are found inside the pages of the newspapers. This is an indication of weak newsworthiness of child rights stories.

Monitor (n.d.), illustrated the significance of front page news as showing strong newsworthiness. It noted that every front page magnifies stories that appear on it. For example, the front page story in The New York Times will likely be broadcast on the evening news, summarized by the wire services, ripped-off by ten thousand bloggers, and otherwise spread everywhere. Times front page stories influence elections, national policy -- and even launch wars. The concentration of child rights reports on the inside pages then means that the newspapers did not consider child rights issues as a subject that deserved high focus.

We also examined the individuals quoted in the newspaper reports. This shows to whom the newspapers turn when they need information and reveals the dominant opinion represented in the news coverage. For the two selected newspapers, child rights advocates and NGOs are predominant voices that are quoted, followed by government officials and agents. This shows that the advocates have

been in the forefront of setting agenda for the rights of the child and that they are doing a good job in getting their voices into the news. We see a generally low coverage for other categories of people such as teachers, donors, politicians and parents, as well as children themselves. It is surprising however, that the newspapers gave fewer opportunities to children's voices on issues that seriously affect them. Advocates of child rights have always maintained dominant voice on the subject. Woodruff and Dorfman's (2001) study on newspapers coverage of child nutrition policies in the U.S. had advocates as most quoted on the issue of child nutrition. Advocates also came behind politicians and government representatives on the issue of children's health in the study conducted by Woodruff (1997). This means that advocates are the most sought after by journalists when in need of information on child rights or they are making all the efforts to get their voices into the news.

The study went further to examine the extent to which the newspapers reported child abuse. The abuse here is not limited to sexual abuse alone; other forms of abuse such as child labour, neglect, armed conflict and trafficking were considered. We observe that the newspapers did not give much attention to child abuse; since only 22.9% and 8.2% cases were recorded by the Guardian and Daily Times. Child abuse is an important content of child rights. Saunders and Goddard (2002) noted that media coverage of child abuse and neglect of children performs an important and significant role in placing issues on the public and political agenda. They emphasized that such media role increases society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect, as well as positively influence public, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves. The limited report on child abuse by the newspapers is an indication of inadequate agenda setting on the subject. This is not a good situation for child rights fulfilment in Nigeria. Exposing abuse of children and placing it on public agenda will give greater opportunity to curbing the practice.

We found that more than two-third of stories reported by the newspapers were from local sources. This is a good development as it indicates that the child rights issues, at the local level, are of interest to the newspapers. It also shows some commitments on the part of the newspapers to have dedicated local news staff to reporting children's issues rather than depending on wire services. The large amount of local news, as reported by the newspapers gave opportunity for understanding the children's situation within the local space.

The analysis of the reports also focused on what was being said about child rights. Most of the substantive pieces concerned difficulties that confront children. These challenges included cases of abuse, children suffering from some kinds of diseases, children that are out of school, those who are victims of accidents and disasters etc. The newspapers also reported on efforts being made to redress poor situation of children. These included government's activities to that effect, the efforts of advocates and NGOs, such as fora held to discuss promotion of child rights and to increase advocacy on them. The newspapers also reported the subjects of children's involvement in sports and entertainment, as well as children's own efforts to improve their situations. Other subjects that the newspapers covered included appeals to NGOs and motherless babies home operators to help children, the subject of birth registration as every child's right, disciplinary actions against some secondary school students and the like. While all these are good for children, we do not see much of them specifically aimed at calling the

attention of those who have the responsibility to take definite actions towards meeting the rights of the child.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The foregoing calls for improvement on the part of newspaper reporters and editors to step up the attention given to children. Against the backdrop of child rights as a development issue and the fact the media have great roles to play in the realisation of these rights, there is need for newspaper organisations to expand the coverage given to child rights. One way of doing this is to devote specific pages to children matters where issues affecting their rights could be featured. The awareness by the public that children issues are treated on specific pages can influence their looking out for such pages when information on children is needed.

Our data showed that the use of straight news dominated the present coverage; this only enables the news to be delivered first-hand to the public. But there is the need for news media to use other print media genres in reporting about children. Presenting some stories in feature format will allow background information to be added to the report, thus giving the readers the full import of such stories. Similarly, the use of opinion articles and letters to the editor will allow expression of divergent views which would help policy-makers in understanding the public perspectives on the issue.

Furthermore, setting agenda for children's rights requires presentation of the issues as newsworthy. It follows then that efforts should be made by the newspapers to present more of the children's stories on the front and back pages of their papers. When someone reads newspapers, the first port of call is the front page and then the back page before checking the stories inside those papers. Putting children's stories on the front page will thus increase their newsworthiness. Though, there are many stories competing for the front page, one way around this is to set some children's news headlines in the front page, while the stories continue in the inside pages. This will to some extent raise child rights issue to the right plane.

Finally, children also need to be heard directly and so should be given the opportunity. Ridgard (n.d.) notes that children's voices are valuable and have the potential to enhance reporting enormously. He adds that taking a few extra minutes to ask child sources what they think of the news-making process, how they would like to be portrayed and building trust by treating them with respect and dignity, reflects in the reports and makes more interesting and engaging reading or viewing with which audiences are able to identify. It is thus believed that greater achievement can be made in realization of child rights if more conscientious efforts are made in the way children are reported in the media.

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