



GIVING INSUFFICIENT PRIORITY TO VIOLATION: ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF RAPE CASES IN NIGERIA, FROM JULY 2018 TO JULY 2020.

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to ascertain the direction, prominence, depth and frames of coverage of rape cases in Nigerian newspapers. The agenda setting and self-control theories were used to situate the study. Content analysis served as the method of the study. From the four selected newspapers namely *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *Daily Sun* and *the Blue Print* newspapers, 35 news stories were identified as rape or rape-related stories. These 35 news stories were studied using the census principle. Code sheet and coding guide served as the instrument of data collection. Using the Holsti's (1969) formula, inter-coder reliability revealed 0.8, 0.7, 0.8, and 0.9 reliability result for each of the content categories. Data collected were analysed and presented in tables. The findings revealed that 80% of the news stories were favourable as they showed actions of security agencies and/or concerned persons to arrest and/or prosecute suspects. It was also revealed that rape cases were given least priority in their placement on the pages of the newspapers as 100% of the stories on rape were located on the inside pages of the newspapers. Further analysis indicated that 60% of the news stories were given the depth of 1-5 inches, which also shows low priority. The researchers recommended that rape cases should be given more in-depth coverage in Nigeria. The current practice of just reporting rape cases in straight news is not a true reflection of the seriousness of the problem.

Keywords: Newspaper, Coverage, Rape, Insufficient, Priority, Violation.

Introduction

The media are currently awash with reports of rape cases all over the country. *Premium Times* (2020) reports that the Nigerian police recorded 717 cases of rape in Nigeria from January 2020 to May 2020. Similarly, Adebayo (2020) noted that Lagos State Police Command alone recorded over 32 separate cases of rape in the last six months. The rise in the cases of rape in the country is a thing of concern to everyone. Isiaka (2020) observed that the alarming rate of rape in the country forced the governors of the 36 states of the federation to declare a state of emergency on rape in June 11, 2020. The Chairmen of the Nigeria Governors Forum, Dr Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State, in a communique, called on ‘all state governors that have not already domesticated relevant gender-based protection laws to domesticate the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, the Child Rights Act and the updated Penal Code to increase protection for women and children and ensure speedy investigation and prosecution of perpetrators’ (Sahara Reporters, 2020).

Rape is a particularly harmful victimization experience in terms of negative consequences for health and post-assault functioning (Resnick et al., 1993). Due to the increasing incidence of rape and several other cases such as sexual abuse, the Federal Government and Law Enforcement Agencies, especially the police have been urged to always ensure that culprits are sent for psychological assessment. According to Prof. Ebenezer Oluntope Akin, a Professor of Clinical Psychology, Department of Behavioural Studies, Redeemer’s University, Ede, Ogun State;

Flipping through the pages of our national dailies and taking note of the age gap existing between the perpetrators and victims of this unacceptable behaviour; for example, a 65-year-old perpetrator versus six-year-old victim and interestingly, most times the status of perpetrators are landlords, fathers, brothers, teachers, clergy men and community leaders, among others, you will agree with me that rape is unarguably a psychopathological sexual behaviour (The Masquerade of a sweet poison, 2017).

In Nigeria, rape against the female gender seems to be rampant today even gang rape. There are reported cases of little children of less than one year being raped. Most petrifying is the fact that some of the victims have been killed by the perpetrators after they have been assaulted, while some victims have also killed themselves much later due to pain and the stigma associated with the act. The Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Senator Pauline Tallen has condemned the upsurge of rape cases nationwide. She noted with concern that no fewer than 3600 cases of rape were recorded during the lockdown. She affirmed that ‘reports that we received from Commissioners of Women Affairs across the 36 states of the federation revealed among other things that each state recorded close to 100 cases of rape during the Covid-19 induced lockdown’ (*Punch*, Monday July 13, 2020).

The Minister stated this when she visited the Deputy President of the Senate, Senator Ovie Omo-Agege for sponsoring the sexual harassment bill, which was passed in the senate on the 7th of July 2020. Omo-Agege reiterated that the approval of the sexual harassment bill “was in furtherance of the legislative agenda of the 9th Senate, to protect Women’s rights. The bill is meant to prevent, prohibit and redress sexual harassment of students in tertiary institutions (*Punch*, Monday July 13, 2020).

Oludayo (2020) noted that the media in Nigeria have continued to play significant role in the report of rape cases, especially in areas where the reporting and tracking of rape cases are low in the

country. The media remains one of the major channels through which incidence of rape can be brought to the knowledge of the people, the relevant authorities, non-governmental organisations and the government that be. Recently, the Vice President of Nigeria, Prof Temi Osinbajo, turning to the new media, tweeted that 'gender based violence, rape and sexual assault have no place in our society. It is unacceptable behaviour and a blemish on our collective humanity and dignity as a people and as a nation' (Osinbajo, 2020). His statement which trended on Twitter shows how important the media are to society. Folayan et al (2014) provided list of media reportage of rape cases in Nigeria. This list might not have been comprehensive; it is important to note that this list has since increased since 2014 till date. Against this backdrop, therefore, this study sought to content analyse newspaper coverage of rape cases in Nigeria from 2018 to 2020.

Statement of the Problem

Rape has historically been shrouded in secrecy due to the stigma attached to it. The culture of victims being blamed for what happened to them, instead of the perpetrators, has made it difficult for victims to speak out and report their experience to the law enforcement agencies, due to fear of stigmatization (Gravelin, 2019; Eaton, 2019). The 2006 National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that 17.6% of women are raped during their lifetime, which is significantly greater than male victims of rape (0.3%). The NVAWS show that more women have been victims of a complete rape, (14.8%) than an attempted rape (2.8%) (Gonzales et al., 2006). Generally, the number of female victims are higher than male victims. The finding of Oludayo (2020) revealed that those between the ages of 11 to 20 are the most sexually abused (raped), which amounted to about 46% of reported cases in newspaper within the past five years. Most reported cases with the Nigerian police are covered by the media. The media also cover rape cases not reported in the media. Despite all the media reports and sensitization, cases of rape are still abounding. Therefore, this study sought to content analyse newspaper coverage of rape cases in Nigeria from 2018 to 2020.

Research Questions

1. What is the frequency of newspaper coverage of rape cases in Nigeria?
2. What is the depth of coverage of rape cases in Nigeria?
3. What is the level of prominence accorded the coverage of rape cases in Nigeria?
4. What are the frames in newspaper coverage of rape cases?

Literature Review

Rape and Media Coverage

The United States Department of Justice Archives (2012) define rape as 'the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with anybody part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.' The term 'rape' is usually, used interchangeably with the term sexual abuse. According to the American Medical Association (1995), sexual violence and rape particularly have suffered under report as one of the most violent crimes committed. Rape is one of the oldest crimes in human history. Rape is a crime in all countries of the world but definition and punishment differ from one country to the other. It has also been noticed that rape cases are reported more in western world than many other parts of the globe. In Nigeria, rape can only be committed by a man against a woman and not vice versa. In other climes, this is not the case because it has been recognized that a man may also be a victim of rape and it may be perpetrated by

any person, including a woman. Section 357 of criminal code clear that ‘...a person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl...’.

Rape is a criminal offence in the code and is consistent with the general principles stated in section 2(4) of the code. Principles of evidence and judicial precedents provides that the prosecution must prove the concurrence of both physical (*Actus reus*) and mental (*Mens rea*) elements before it can secure a conviction. The burden of proof lies squarely on the shoulders of the prosecution and it is to make its case beyond doubt. Proof of rape majorly relates to the physical element of the crime. According to Section 6 of the criminal code defines unlawful carnal knowledge as ‘carnal connection which takes place otherwise than between husband and wife.’ From this definition, all other forms of carnal connections are deemed unlawful in the eyes of the law, though there’s an absence of criminal liability except when the woman did not validly consent to it as valid consent is the hallmark of the offence of rape.

The media are a key disseminator of knowledge. With a great percentage of people solely dependent on it for facts, media reports have the tendency to influence public opinion at large, and even impact criminal case outcomes. In particular, media representations of rape and sexual abuse can affect the legal response to such cases on multiple levels. It is no doubt that, media representations of rape can potentially influence whether a victim reports the assault to the police and whether those in authority, find the perpetrator culpable for the crime. (Shaw et al, 2009). Newspaper framing and portrayal of rape cases are often influential in causing a reader to perceive the victim and therefore the assailant in several ways. This means that it is the portrayal and not just the facts of the case that dictate how a reader reacts to the parties involved. These portrayals can lead to reader bias for either the victim or the assailant; hence newspaper portrayal should accurately describe both parties to avoid inaccurate perception (Fountain, 2008).

Media reports that frame rape victims’ behaviour in a negative manner may reinforce rape myths and fuel public misconceptions of sex crimes, which in turn may have a negative consequence for a victim’s self-conceptions of his or her experience and the criminal justice’s response to sex crimes (Shaw et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important that the media not only objectively report individual cases of rape, but also that they accurately represent research findings on rape and sexual assault

Empirical Review

There have been studies on rape cases and stigmatization of victims. For instance, Aborisade and Vaughan (2014) opined that the occurrence of rape is a perverse social problem that has lasting effects on victims. The study found out that the most critical effect of rape on victims are post traumatic, depression, stress disorder etc. and the adjustment of victims is remarkably impeded social stigmatization, lack of support, care and concern from families and friends, ineffective justice system and burden of proof. Alao (2018) agreed that rape is severely under-reported in many parts of the world, rape is rarely reported due to the extreme social stigma cast on rape victims or the fear of being disowned by their families, or subjected to violence.

Nwabueze and Oduah (2015) agreed that rape cases are reported by Nigerian newspapers but their degree of coverage is minimal while most of the reported cases in the newspapers were straight news report, very few editorials on rape were ran; The three newspapers “the *Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily sun*”, mostly placed news stories on rape inside their newspapers than at the front or back pages. In most cases, the newspapers end up re-victimizing the rape victims by ascribing or making them

appear responsible for their trauma. Akinade et al. (2010), opined that people tend to shy away from legal and necessary administrative actions about rape due to police failure to record allegation properly and their laissez-faire attitude on rape cases which could be as a result of little or no training in that regard and it resulted often to discontinuing them midway and police end up prosecuting very few cases. Since rape is done in secret where observers may not be bold enough to serve as witness or evidence because of fear of victimization. Again weak political will of legislators to bring perpetrators to justice tends to influence spread of rape in Nigeria.

Aborisade (2014) posited that rape has been widely acknowledged as one of the most under reported crime in the world. The study revealed that refusal of victims of rape and other forms of sexual victimization in Nigeria to report has several social under pinnings. The negative attitude towards rape reporting as revealed in this study portends an ominous situation to crime control in Nigeria. Although there have been great strides in the movement towards assisting victims of sexual assault. Victims still face multiple barriers when coming forward to report victimisation. Further study revealed the need for the criminal justice system of the country to be revamped in such a way that it will be more effective in treating rape cases. Fakunmoju and Rasool (2018) agreed that adolescent in various regions of the world are directly (e.g. through victimisation) and indirectly (e.g. through witnessing) exposed to multiple forms of violence (e.g. physical, emotional, sexual) findings suggest that effective prevention programs are needed in both countries (Nigeria and South Africa) to mitigate exposure to violence.

Ernest-Onuiri et al. (2015) opined that the media should give prominence to the growing cases of sexual assault in Nigeria as part of their fundamental societal obligation, with the intent to inform the society as well as advocate against such menace. Findings revealed that rape was the most prominent type of sexual assault reported; there was an unsatisfactory level of prominent in the coverage of sexual assault by the Punch newspaper in 2015 as only 17.6% were cover page stories. Also, majority (72.6%) were placed as straight news reports while only 7.8% of the stories were directed towards advocacy. It suggested that more prominence be given to the coverage of sexual assault, especially in the areas of advocacy and counsel of victims. Seelinger, et al. (2011) agreed that process of taking a claim of sexual violence into the formal legal arena can be a harrowing proposition for many victims. Fact finding is wrought with difficulty in even the most straight forward cases: the often private nature of rape, rarely affords eye witnessing or documentary support that might be unearthed in other crimes. Akinwale and Omoera (2013) opined that incident of rape and gender to government, development planners and researchers across the globe. In developing countries such as India, Nigeria, South Africa etc. hardly a day passes without reported or rumoured cases of rape. Conclusively, Aborisade Richard (2016) agreed that the problem of rape aggravates if it is unacknowledged as a result of the influence of rape myth acceptance. The study found out that emotions and societal perception of rape are strong factors in determining personal conception and description of rape like experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory: The notion of Agenda setting by the media can be traced to Lippmann (1922), who suggested that the media was responsible for the “pictures in our heads”. Forty years later, Cohen, cited in Baran and Davis (1995), further articulates the idea when he argued that the media may not always be successful in telling people what to usually think, but however, they are usually successful in telling them what to think about through their various contents. Folarin (1998) implies that “the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a

given society” (p.56). In essence, this theory stipulates that whatever the media does not give attention to in any society is as good as non-existing. In their seminal paper titled; Agenda-Setting function of the mass media, McCombs and Shaw (1992) cited in Mustapha and Abdul-Baqi (2012) states that “in choosing and displaying news, the editors, newsroom staff and broadcaster play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in the news story and its position...” (p.121). The relevance of the Agenda setting theory to this paper is equally understandable if we accept the proposition that the media are capable of creating awareness and proactive campaign against rape and discouraging of victims’ stigmatization in our society.

Self-Control Theory: The proponents of self-control theory opined that men’s sexual energy is difficult to control and that women have a key role in its loss of control, since women deny sexual pleasure to men who have to relieve their sexual urge. The theory can be tied to Gottfredson and Hirchi’s (1990) low self-control theory. Low self-control theorists maintain that, since criminal acts provide immediate gratification, criminals will engage in them because they are unable to defer gratification. The implication of this theory is that most people with the inability to control their sexual drive are the ones who are most likely to look for avenues to have sex without any relationship. This increases their ability to commit rape.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the quantitative content analysis design to analyse newspaper coverage of rape cases between 2018 to 2020. The study examined the news stories on rape from four major national newspapers in Nigeria namely; *Daily Sun*, *Blue Print*, *The Guardian* and *Punch*. The number of stories on rape cases from the selected newspapers were 35 in number. This figure formed the population of the study. The census principle was used to study the entire population of the study (Obayi et al., 2016).

The unit of analysis of this study is news stories. Code sheet and coding guide served as instruments for data collection. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the content categories were: direction of coverage, depth of coverage, placement of coverage and frames. The researcher conducted inter coder reliability test on seven news stories against the four content categories of the study namely; direction, depth, placement and frames. The inter coder reliability of this work was calculated using Holsti’s (1969) formula revealed a reliability of 0.8, 0.7, 0.8, and 0.9.

Data Presentation & Analysis

This study content analysed 35 news stories from four selected newspapers. These papers are: *Guardian*, *The Blue Print*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Sun*. The analysed data were first presented in simple percentages and numbers with the use of tables.

Table 1: Analysing the direction of newspaper coverage of rape cases in Nigeria

Option	Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral	Total
<i>Blue Print</i>	8	2	-	10
<i>Guardian</i>	8	2	-	10

<i>Punch</i>	10	1	-	11
<i>Daily Sun</i>	3	1	-	4
Total	29	6	-	35
Percentage	80%	20%	-	100%

This study reveals that 80% of news stories covered by the selected Nigerian newspapers were favourable in the reportage of rape cases in Nigeria for the period under study. The implication is that the news stories showed pro-active measures taken to either arrest perpetrators or prosecute them.

Table 2: Analysing the depth of coverage of rape cases in Nigeria

Option	1-5 inches	6-10 inches	11-5 inches	Total
<i>Blue Print</i>	9	1	-	10
<i>Guardian</i>	5	5	-	10
<i>Punch</i>	7	4	-	11
<i>Daily Sun</i>	1	3	-	4
Total	22	13	-	35
Percentage	60%	40%	-	100%

This study revealed that 22 (60%) of the news stories on rape were within 1-5 inches of story length, while 13 (40%) were within 6-10 inches of story length. The implication is that the importance accorded to the story was not much as the least length requirement for news stories is 1-5 inches.

Table :3 Analysing the level of Prominence accorded to coverage of rape cases in Nigeria

Option	Front Page	Inside page	Centre Spread	Back Page	Total
<i>Blue Print</i>	-	10	-	-	10
<i>Guardian</i>	-	10	-	-	10
<i>Punch</i>	-	11	-	-	11
<i>Daily Sun</i>	-	4	-	-	4
Total	-	35	-	-	35
Percentage	-	100%	-	-	100%

This study revealed that 35 (100%) of the news stories on rape cases were placed on the inside pages of the selected newspapers. The implication is that the news stories were given the least priority as the order of priority for news stories gave front and back page stories higher priority, while inside pages attracted the least priority.

Table 4: Analysing the dominant frames used in the coverage of rape cases in Nigeria

	Stigmatization frame	Shame frame	Government Action frame	Negligence frame	Fear frame	Regret frame	Total
<i>Blue Print</i>	2	1	6	1	5	1	16
<i>Guardian</i>	5	2	7	1	4	1	20
<i>Punch</i>	3	1	9	2	2	3	20
<i>Daily Sun</i>	1	1	3	-	-	-	5
Total	11	5	25	4	11	5	61
Percentage	18%	8.2%	40.9%	7%	18%	8.2%	100%

This study revealed that 40.9% of the news stories showed government action in tackling rape cases in the country. This implies that most rape cases on the pages of the newspaper show that steps have been taken by security agencies or the court to arrest and prosecute the suspects.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that 80% of the news stories covered by four selected newspapers were favourable in the reportage of rape cases in Nigeria for the period under investigation. The implication is that stories showed pro-active measures taken to either arrest perpetrators, prosecute them or campaign against stigmatization. The finding of this study is related to that of Seelinger et al. (2010) revealed several promising strategies in the handling of sexual violence cases. These strategies have emerged in both the domestic and international contexts. It ranges from attempts to mainstream awareness about sexual violence, (as with universal training throughout an investigation agency or the roll-out of mobile courts into remote districts). Akinade et al. (2010) revealed that a set of social and legal factors influence the spread of rape in Nigeria. This finding resonate well with the agenda setting theory, as their favourable reports on cases of rape will have a way of influencing how the people think about rape cases.

On the other hand, findings from research question two revealed that 60% of the stories on rape were within 1 – 5 inches’ story length. This is the least length requirement as contained in the variables of analysis. This means that the importance accorded to the news stories was not much. This finding was in line with Nwabueze and Oduah, (2015). The study revealed that cases that bothered on rape are reported by Nigerian newspapers but the degree of coverage by the three selected newspapers is minimal especially the Guardian newspaper coverage of rape cases. While most of the reported cases in the three selected newspapers appeared straight news report, very few editorials on rape were

run; These three newspapers “the *Guardian*, *the Punch* and *the Daily Sun*”. Mostly, they placed news stories on rape inside their newspapers than at the front or back pages.

Findings from research question three revealed that 100% of the stories on rape cases were located on the inside pages of the newspaper studied. In the order of priority in news placement, front page and back page are given higher priorities, to place news stories on the inside pages means they attracted least priority. This is in line with Ernest-Onuiri, et al. (2015) findings that rape was the most prominent type of sexual assault reported; there was an unsatisfactory level of prominence in the coverage of sexual assault by the *Punch* newspaper in 2015 as only 17.6% were cover stories. Also majority (72.6%) were straight news reports on cases of sexual assault, while only 7.8% of the stories were directed towards advocacy. The media is expected to give a high level of prominence to social ills such as rape.

Also responding to research question four, it disclosed that several frames were used in the coverage or reportage of rape cases in Nigerian newspapers prominent among these frames were; Government Action frame (40%), Stigmatization frame (18%) and Fear frame (18%). Other frames include; Shame frame (8.2%), Regret frame (8.2%) and Negligence frame (7%). This is in line with findings made by Alao, (2018) who made it clear that, rape is severely under-reported in many parts of the world due to extreme social stigma cast on the victims or the fear of being disowned or subjected to violence. In line with the finding, Nwabueze and Oduah (2015) noted that the dominant frame of rape stories in the newspapers was Innocence frame which portrayed victims of rape as innocent of the crime. Also it revealed that most victims do not report these cases for fear of societal stigmatization and shame. Aborisade, (2014) in his study found that rather than societal stigma, the fear of retaliation by their assailants dominated the concern of the university rape victims. Aborisade and Vaughan, (2014) revealed that the victims are not willing to seek for medical or psychological counselling, due to ignorance, negligence and stigmatization.

Conclusion

This study has brought to the fore the insufficient priority given to the coverage of rape cases in Nigeria. Although government action appeared to be the most dominant frame in this study, there are other frames like stigmatizations, shame, fear, negligence and regret from the findings. The media placement of rape cases is not encouraging, given that 80% of news stories on rape are placed in the inside page and over 85% of the length of the coverage of news stories appeared most in 1-5 inches’ space in the newspaper.

Recommendation

The researchers therefore recommend that:

1. There is need for the media to report more in-depth rape cases in Nigeria. The current practice of just reporting rape cases in straight news is not a true reflection of the seriousness of the problem. Rape cases should be made more prominent by publishing them on the front pages of the newspapers. The prevalence of rape cases in Nigeria is such that should be treated with utmost priority.
2. Government should create multidimensional approaches to help reduce the rising incidence of rape and sexual abuse in the country. The national assembly should enact laws and more bills such as; the Sexual Harassment Bill of July 7, 2020 which prohibits sexual harassment of students in tertiary institutions and prescribes jail term ranging from 2 – 14 years for various

degrees of offence as well as a fine of 5 million Naira for the offenders. Such laws help in speeding up justice and bringing the perpetrators to book. The victims of rape (girls and women) should be adequately empowered to speak up, report the perpetrators and be bold enough to prosecute the cases to its logical conclusion.

3. The study recommended that journalists through their umbrella organization, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), should play more active role and take initiative to encourage victims of rape to come out of silence, fear and stigma.
4. Victims of rape should be sensitized and encouraged to report cases of rape irrespective of the fear of stigmatization.

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