

## Child Abuse in Nigerian Polity: A Content Analysis on Two Major Newspapers

Joshua Kayode Okunade<sup>1</sup>, Martha A. Odutola<sup>2</sup>, Timothy Ekeledirichukwu Onyejelem<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Department of Journalism and Media Studies Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State

### Abstract

*This study employed a content analysis on child abuse in Nigerian polity regarding two major newspapers in Nigeria, The Nation and The Guardian newspapers from January to December, 2022. Specifically, the study sought to find out the frequency of the coverage of child abuse in Nigeria newspapers, determine what category of story has the highest report in the newspapers, ascertain which newspaper shows a higher commitment to the coverage of child abuse, examine the level of prominence given to child abuse by Nigerian newspapers, and assess the direction, tone, and slant used in the reports by Nigerian newspapers. Adoption of systematic random sampling, which was used to select the sample size of the study, and purposive sampling, which was used to select two major newspapers to enable adequate knowledge of all issues in the selected newspapers for the study, were used as the sampling techniques in the process of selecting the issues for the newspapers that were analysed. The occurrences were analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics include frequency counts and percentages with the use of SPSS version 23. The study adopted the Agenda Setting Theory. The findings showed that child abuse stories were under-reported. Only 55 issues out of 146 issues that were analysed have reports on child abuse, this means only 38% of news stories for the year 2022 from January to December 2022 had reports on child abuse while 62% had none. From this study, it was discovered that newspapers do not commit to reporting stories on child abuse. The study, therefore, recommended that efforts should be made by newspaper houses to ensure all child abuse stories are reported with in-depth analysis and are positioned on the front page of every newspaper. More so, the selected newspapers should put more attention on the fight against child abuse, because so many Nigerians are waiting to be educated and informed by the press.*

### Keywords

Child Abuse,  
Frequency,  
Commitment,  
Prominence, Slant



## I. Introduction

Child abuse refers to the act of involving children in any form of sexual activity that they cannot fully make sense of. Section 277 of the Child Rights Act (2003) describes a child as a person under the age of eighteen years. Abuse of children is a persistent societal issue in Nigeria that has been present throughout the country's history. According to Chime et al., (2021) Nigeria has an alarmingly high rates of all types of child abuse, including sexual molestation, child labour, and physical punishment. Abuse of a child can be done by a parent, guardian or even a neighbour against a young person in their care. According to David et al., (2018), it includes all types of child mistreatment, abuses, and violations of child rights, and

it can result in the child suffering serious bodily and emotional harm or even death (Aondover et al., 2025). According to statistics provided by the World Health Organization and quoted by (Onyejelem et al., 2025), each year there are 40 million children under the age of 14 who are victims of abuse and neglect around the world. There are several forms of child maltreatment and neglect, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, child labor, and domestic violence.

Females have a greater likelihood of being sexually abused than boys do. There is exploitation in all its forms, including emotional abuse and child street trading. Child Street trading occurs when parents utilize their children as a means of income. According to Akin-Odanye (2018), the most obvious cause of trafficking of children is a lack of financial resources. Batra, Mishra (2022) observed that each year in the United States there are 3 million complaints of child abuse made, 28.3% of adults were reportedly mistreated physically as a child, 20.7% of people were sexually maltreated as a child, and 10.6% of adults were psychologically abused as a child. These statistics are based on the fact that in the United States each year 3 million allegations of child abuse are made (Vitalis et al., 2025).

Abuse of children in Nigeria has a detrimental impact not only on the children's futures but also on the reputation of the country. The welfare of children has been the focus of a significant number of laws and programs that have been enacted in recent years. McElvaney et al., (2020) are of the view that these programmes have not been successful for a variety of reasons, including ineffective enforcement methods, widespread poverty, pervasive corruption, inadequate provision for the rehabilitation of sexual offenders, unfavourable attitudes held by parents, and inefficient legal procedures.

Abuse of children is pervasive in Nigeria, despite the fact that the vast majority of cases go unreported. Both the cultural justification of specific types of abuse connected with cultural practices and the unwillingness of children to talk about previous harmful experiences are contributing factors in the underreporting of child abuse. This hesitation might be due to the fact that the victims are afraid of the threats made by their attackers or the response of their parents. In addition, there is a possibility that some of the children are either too young to comprehend what has happened to them or are unable to articulate their feelings (Aondover, 2024).

In accordance with the provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of 1999, children are required to be shielded from any and all types of torture, cruel, or humiliating treatment, as well as physical, mental, or sexual abuse, as well as neglect or maltreatment. Child marriage, child betrothal, tattoos and skin marks, exposure to and use of narcotic substances, kidnapping, removing or transferring the child from lawful care, child employment, and illicit sexual intercourse are all prohibited under the Child Rights Act of 2003. When children are taken advantage of or abused, they are unable to enjoy their childhood, which can have a number of negative repercussions in the long run (Garba & Msaughter, 2023a). On the other side, according to the Human Development Report (2016), when children are shielded from abuse during their formative years, they are more likely to mature in a way that is both healthy and self-assured, realize their full potential, and contribute to the growth of the nation (Garba & Msaughter, 2023b).

It is the responsibility of the media to pass across factual and reliable information to the public as well as to raise awareness about certain issues like child abuse and the causes, they can either initiate or support awareness campaigns that are dedicated to prevent child

abuse and also to ensure the safety of children. In-depth coverage of the problems facing children in society should be provided by the media, and it should be done in a reasonable, genuine, and factual manner (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). To help sensitize the society that they are contributing to the cause of the violation of the children's rights by their action.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What is the frequency of the coverage of child abuse in Nigerian newspapers?
2. What category of story has the highest report in the Nigerian newspaper?
3. Which Nigerian newspaper shows a higher commitment to the coverage of child abuse?
4. What is the level of prominence given to child abuse by Nigerian newspapers?
5. What is the direction, tone, and slant used in the reports by Nigerian newspapers?

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Empirical Review**

Nathalie (2021) carried out a study on “Representations of Child Abuse in Quebec Print Media and the Integration of Child Psychological Ill-Treatment into the Youth Protection Act: When Distancing Abusive Families Matters More”. In the study, the author pointed out that the media has played an important role in raising the public awareness and knowledge on child abuse. Yet, we do not know how child psychological maltreatment was presented in the media and how it might colour our common understanding of the problem. The study presented the results of a qualitative research on social representations of child psychological maltreatment in the Quebec media. More specifically, the study aimed to investigate how child abuse and child psychological maltreatment were presented in the Quebec media when psychological maltreatment was formally integrated into the Youth Protection Act in 2006. 85 newspaper articles were analyzed. The study identified various forms of anchoring and objectivation of social representations, including the emotional anchoring and objectivation of abuse in moral outrage, compassion, and fear, as well as various metaphors, personifications, and antinomies related to the issue.

Cross-sectional analysis of the data revealed the thematic anchoring of representations of child maltreatment in the thematic self/other and justice/injustice. The study discussed the implications of these results regarding social exclusion and the othering process of marginalized groups. Finally, the study addressed the repercussions of these thematic on current solutions and action plans to end child abuse and maltreatment. Findings of the study revealed that the objectivation and anchoring mechanisms analyses show that child psychological abuse is directly dependent on the social representations already constituted of child abuse. Furthermore, our findings show that both subtypes of objectivation, emotional anchoring and anchoring by metaphors all play a role in the thematic anchoring of child abuse into the thêmata opposing justice and injustice as well as the self and other. By doing so, we can see that the media’s narrative around child abuse and child psychological ill-treatment refers to the defensive function of the social representations which is manifested mainly through a process of othering.

Kwagyang et al., (2016) conducted a study to investigate child trafficking in Nigeria: Causes, consequences, and the way forward. The study centered around the burden of child trafficking in Nigeria as a risen component despite different endeavours laid down by the Nigerian government to conflict the hazard. Aside from the actuality that Nigeria is a witness to countless worldwide and provincial mechanisms set out to battle against child trafficking, some local laws were initiated by the government to fight these conducts. The consequences

and outcomes of child trafficking in Nigeria, are having its costs on children who are the future heads in their family and society. The paper aimed to talk about child trafficking, causes, outcomes, and an answer to the issues. It additionally frames the point of the paper is talking about the mix of the causes; for example, poverty, ignorance, greed, peer pressure, and manipulation of religion, among others have been recognized as the significant reasons for child trafficking in Nigeria. However, almost no consideration has been given to these significant components. The methodology of the paper adopted is doctrinal and non-doctrinal, wherein related literature has been analysed. The paper's discoveries uncover that the causes are gigantic and rich that have underscored the regular commitment in the social and moral context of humanity inside the national law and the worldwide contracts. It further suggests that the government should see these causes and its subsequent impact as a catalyst to the improvement of a country and its laws of humanity.

Adeniran et al., (2015) investigated the challenges faced by Nigerian children during their journey through life. The study examines the extent of the coverage accorded children in the mass media. Content analysis research design was adopted for the study to analyze selected national newspapers and magazines to examine the major child-related issue(s) mostly reported in the media, as well as direction, function, and prominence level, accorded stories published on children. The agenda-setting and framing theories provide the theoretical framework for the study. The study found that children-related issues are generally under-reported in the Nigerian press but when the children are involved in crime-related issues, the media give them "adequate" coverage.

Kayode and Adeniran (2016) also conducted a study on Nigerian Press Coverage of Children as Victims and Perpetrators of Crimes. Adopting the social responsibility theory as its framework, and content analysis as a method, the paper examines how Nigerian newspapers adhere to these basic guidelines on reportage of children involved in crime and other social vices. It examined the level of identifying information (either explicitly or covertly) provided on children in media reports. The study found that cases of sexual offences were dominant during the study period and that the identities of the children involved were not adequately protected. Most of the stories were reported as isolated straight news with few instances of follow-ups on later developments on individual cases reported. Hence, Nigerian newspapers were urged to ensure in-depth coverage of children involved in crime stories, while protecting them from secondary victimisation by ensuring that they remain anonymous in their reports.

Marie-Christine et al., (2012) carried out to ascertain the, 'Role of Media in Reporting Child Abuse'. This study looks at the short-term impact that the media coverage of children in need of protection had on the number of cases reported to child protection agencies. The number of reports (N = 11,646) made to these agencies in Canada was tallied each week during a 24-month period. During the same period, a content analysis of print media was conducted regarding child maltreatment and/or child protection services (CPS) to identify and count the number of articles published (N = 1,211) and single out media frenzy events. Results of the study shows a statistically significant relationship between media coverage and the number of cases reported to child protection agencies.

The literature review fills the gap of coverage of child abuse in two major Nigerian newspapers; The Nations and Guardian newspapers; it addresses how child abuse affects not only the individual is affected emotionally, physically, and psychologically but also tears the individual's family apart and affects the society, because non-patriotic citizens are raised who would not function socially, physically and economically. This review would help media organization, academia, and the government takes necessary steps in the coverage of child abuse in Nigeria, also to bring an end to child abuse in Nigeria.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Agenda-Setting Theory, which was originally proposed by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald Shaw in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1972, which discovered the assumption of the hypothesis in an analysis during the 1968 US presidential election. They study 100 occupants of Chapel Hill, North Carolina on what they felt were the most important issues of the election, how the most important problems were relative to what nearby and national media reported (Maradun et al., 2021). Freeland in Maradun et al., (2021) says "in its most basic sense, agenda-setting is the production of public alertness and worry of striking issues by the news media. The two most fundamental presumptions of agenda-setting theory are: the press and the media do not reflect reality; they channel and shape it; media focus on a couple of issues and subjects drives the society to see those issues as more significant than other issues". The agenda-setting theory in this work of study looks to comprehend the degree of reportage of child abuse by two major Nigerian newspaper; The Nations and Guardian newspaper.

The agenda-setting theory of mass communication endeavors to decide how the famous agenda of the media influences society and endeavors to clarify why mass media has gotten such a great amount of control over the opinions of individuals everywhere. The principle target of this theory is to discuss the presumption that the media through its profitable procedures and gatekeeping capacities offers conspicuousness to certain socio-policy-driven issues (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022). Similar to 1922, when Walter Lippmann expresses his concern about the fundamental role that the mass media can do in influencing the setting of a certain image on the consciousness of the mass, the beginning of the agenda-setting theory can be followed. Lippmann suggested how the mass media can develop a clear plan that can have an effect on people's assessment in general. Nevertheless, he never uses the expression "agenda setting theory" in his book. In any case, he produced the founding for the agenda-setting theory. Agenda setting is the media's effort to make and move notable issues into the public domain to empower the society to examine, intentional, or banter on these issues to settle on educated choices (Obasi & Msughter, 2023).

Agenda setting theory is divided into three forms and they are:

1. Public agenda setting, when the general community decides the plan for which stories are viewed as significant. The most important public issues are measured by the opinions of the public. This type of agenda-setting is based on what the news media organization as what the public wants to see when reading a newspaper.
2. Media agenda-setting, Pattern of news inclusion across print and Media estimated by significance and extent of reports.
3. Policy agenda setting, laid down issues and approaches spread out by political gatherings (policy agendas obtain their emphasis dependent on the objectives and intentions of legislators).

According to Onyejelem and Aondover (2024) the Media adjusts certain strategies or procedures which are utilized to draw the consideration of the crowd on the issues being talked about or prospective issues. Some of these issues furnish the crowd with a 'window' of the survey of the "world" or "reality". These eye-getting issues which are for the most part caught in features and on front pages from time to time do not have any association with the primary articles or substance of the pamphlet. Images appended to these headlines are extremely upsetting, particularly in most private-owned newspapers and magazines. The human brain will in general store the majority of the things the eyes are presented to.

Also, Ojiakor and Etodike in Oreoluwa et al., (2024) this theory has more of a scientific than a humanistic approach, because human beings are very unpredictable and their wants/needs may differ from time to time. He also stated that the media focuses on specific

issues that are considered important, thereby leaving the remaining news uncovered to the audiences. This theory neglects to think about the individual enthusiasm of the person. Any issue considered most important by this theory neglects to put into consideration the enthusiasm of the person, because it might not be necessarily salient to in the public or individual's interest (Saint et al., 2024). The crowd deliberately chooses a media item that gives him delight or addresses his issues; that is what the audience considers as important to him/her. This theory expects that once the Media considers any issue and gives it strength, the members of the society naturally picks it as significant (Vitalis et al., 2025).

The role of agenda-setting in the reporting of child abuse is important because whatever the Media publishes is what the public think about, the media publishing news stories on child abuse will enable members of the public know the negative sides to child abuse and would increase their interest in curbing all forms of child abuse.

### III. Research Methods

Content analysis was employed as a research method for this study. The quantitative content analysis of the purposively selected newspapers, The Nations and Guardian Newspaper reports from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022, was selected for this study. The newspapers The Nations and The Guardian were the only ones that were looked at for this study, despite the fact that the population of the study includes all instances of child abuse from January 2022 through December 2022. The selection of newspapers is determined by a number of factors, including the data that the researcher intends to investigate, which pertains to the portrayal of child abuse, prominence, frequency of coverage, types of story, topics, and more characteristics that are reflected in the research questions (Abba et al., 2021). The diversity of topics covered and audiences reached by the selected newspapers is the second justification for the selection of those particular publications. The total population for the selected newspapers are broken down in the table below.

**Table 1.** Total Breakdown of the Population

N/P	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
The Guardian	31	28	31	30	31	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	365
The Nations	31	28	31	30	31	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	365
													= 730

The overall population is 730 editions of the newspaper. Systematic random sampling was used to select the sample size of the study, which was used to select two major newspapers in order to enable adequate knowledge of all issues in the selected newspapers for the study, were used as the sampling techniques in the process of selecting the issues for the newspapers that were analysed. The Nations and the Guardian were chosen because of their widespread recognition and circulation in Nigeria, as well as the ease with which they may be obtained.

The newspapers, The Nations newspaper and Guardian newspaper, were selected using the process of purposeful sampling in order to track the coverage of child abuse in Nigerian politics. For the purpose of this investigation, the issues of newspapers were selected using a systematic sampling size; the odds of being selected for each individual in the population were kept equal in this regard. This collection includes issues of the newspapers Nations and Guardian that were published between the months of January 2022 and December 2022. In the year 2022, the following months were chosen to undergo

analysis: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and December. The dates for each month were chosen at 5-days intervals, that amounts to 20% of the Newspaper editions.  $20/100 * 365 = 73$  editions for each newspaper which resulted in a total of 146 issues being examined.

**Table 2.** Total Editions Selected for the Study

Year	Month	Issues	Issues	Issues	Issues	Issues	Issues	Issues
2022	January	5 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>	30 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	February	4 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	24 <sup>th</sup>		
2022	March	1 <sup>st</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>	21 <sup>st</sup>	26 <sup>th</sup>	31 <sup>st</sup>
2022	April	5 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>	30 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	May	5 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>	30 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	June	4 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	24 <sup>rd</sup>	29 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	July	4 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	24 <sup>rd</sup>	29 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	August	3 <sup>rd</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup>	23 <sup>rd</sup>	28 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	September	2 <sup>nd</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	22 <sup>nd</sup>	27 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	October	2 <sup>nd</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	22 <sup>nd</sup>	27 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	November	1 <sup>st</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>	21 <sup>st</sup>	26 <sup>th</sup>	
2022	December	1 <sup>st</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>	21 <sup>st</sup>	26 <sup>th</sup>	31 <sup>st</sup>

The many articles, news stories, feature stories, and views that concentrate on child abuse and that are published in selected Nigerian publications are the sources of the data. The frequency of coverage, the genre of story, the prominence of the story, as well as the tone and slant of the narrative, are the pieces of data that should be monitored. Texts and images were employed as primary sources of information for each and every story. The instrument used to gather the information was the coding sheet. The coding sheet is utilized as an effective data collection for content analytical research. The study used descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics include frequency counts and percentage with the use of SPSS version 23.

#### IV. Result and Discussion

**Table 3.** Number of Headlines in *The Nations* and *The Guardian* newspapers on Child Abuse from January-December 2022

Variables	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
January	4	3	7	12.7%
February	2	3	5	9.1%
March	1	2	3	5.5%
April	3	2	5	9.1%
May	1	3	4	7.3%
June	3	1	4	7.3%
July	2	1	3	5.5%
August	2	1	3	5.5%
September	1	0	1	1.8%
October	4	5	9	16.4%
November	1	3	4	7.3%
December	4	3	7	12.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis, 2023

Table 3 shows the highest number of child abuse cases within the timeline (January to December 2022) as published in *The Nations* and *The Guardian* newspapers falls in October with 9 records (16.4%); followed by January and December with 7 records each (12.7%). Number of cases in other months are as follows; February and April with 5 records each (9.1%), , March, July and August with 3 records each (5.5%), May, June and November with 4 records each (7.3%), and September with 1 record (1.8%).

**Table 4.** Frequency of Coverage of Child Abuse in the Nations and the Guardian Newspapers

Coverage	Frequency	Percentage
The Nations	28	50.9%
The Guardian	27	49.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>(100%)</b>

Source: Content Analysis, 2023

Table 4 presents the frequency to which the newspapers (*The Nations* and *The Guardian*) covers child abuse by reporting them within the timeline (January to December 2022). The Nations newspaper reported child abuse cases 28 times (50.9%), while The Guardian newspaper reported 27 times (49.1%). This shows shows that The Nations newspaper had more coverage of child abuse stories than The Guardian newspaper.

**Table 5.** Category of Story in the Nations and the Guardian Newspapers

Nature	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
News stories	25	25	50	90.9
Feature articles	3	2	5	9.1
Editorials	0%	0%	0%	-
Opinion letters	0%	0%	0%	-
Pictures	0%	0%	0%	-
Others	0%	0%	0%	-

<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>
--------------	-----------	-----------	-----------	-------------

Source: Content Analysis 2023

Table 5 indicates that The Nations newspaper and The Guardian newspaper used the news story section to cover most of their child abuse stories with 50 records (90.9%), while a small number of 5 records (9.1%) of the child abuse stories were placed in the feature story section.

**Table 6.** Level of Prominence in the Nations and the Guardian Newspapers

Prominence	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
Front page	2	2	4	7.3%
Inside page	26	25	51	92.7%
Back page	0	0	0%	-
Center spread	0	0	0%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

Table 6 shows that The Nations newspaper and The Guardian newspaper had more child abuse stories in inside pages with 51 records (92.7%), while very few of the child abuse stories were placed on the front page with 4 records (7.3%).

**Table 7.** Depth of the Story in the Nations and the Guardian Newspapers

Depth	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
Quarter page	19	19	38	69.1%
Half page	9	8	17	30.9%
Full page	0	0	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

Table 7 shows the extent to which the newspapers reported the stories of child abuse. The Nations newspaper had a greater percentage of their stories in quarter pages, few child abuse stories in half pages, no child abuse stories were in full pages. The Guardian newspaper also had a greater percentage of their stories in quarter pages, very few child abuse stories in half pages, no child abuse stories were in full pages. This table reveals that most child abuse stories were reported in quarter pages with 38 records (69.1%), which shows the little or no relevance the newspapers attributed to child abuse stories in their reportage.

**Table 8.** Sex of Victims

Sex	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
Male	5	5	10	18.1%
Female	21	20	41	74.5%
Not stated	2	2	4	7.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

Table 8 indicates nearly all child abuse stories in The Nations newspaper showed females as the victims of child abuse. The Guardian newspapers also showed most of its child

abuse victims as females. This table showed that, female child abuse stories were reported more with 41 records (74.5%) than male child abuse stories with 10 records (18.1%). Sometimes, the newspapers did not state the sex of the victims.

**Table 9. Age Range of Victims**

Age Range	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
0-5 years	5	5	10	18.1%
6-10 years	7	7	14	25.4%
11-15 years	9	8	17	30.9%
16-17 years	4	4	8	14.5%
Not stated	3	3	6	10.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

According to Table 9, most of the victims of child abuse within the timeline (January to December 2022) as published in *The Nations* and *The Guardian* newspapers fell within the ages of 11-15 years (30.9%), followed by 6-10 years (25.4%), 0-5 years (18.1%), and 16-17 years (14.5%). Victims who were not identified and fall into the variable of ‘Not stated’ are 6 (10.9%).

**Table 10. Number of Paragraphs**

Paragraphs	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	6	5	11	20%
6-10	4	4	8	14.5%
11-15	11	11	22	40%
16-20	5	5	10	18.8%
21-25	0	0	0	0
26-30	2	2	4	7.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

As shown in table 10, most of the news stories were between (11-15) paragraphs with 22 records (40%), followed by (1-5) paragraphs with 11 records (20%) while (16-20), (6-10) and (26-30) had 10 records (18.8%), 8 records (14.5%) and 4 records (7.2%) respectively.

**Table 11. States with most cases recorded**

Variables	The Nations	The Guardian	Total	Percentage
Lagos	5	4	9	16.3%
Bayelsa	2	2	4	7.2%
Bauchi	2	2	4	7.2%
Benue	3	3	6	10.9%
Ekiti	2	2	2	3.6%
Jigawa	4	4	8	14.5%
Delta	1	1	2	3.6%
Zamfara	2	2	4	7.2%
Yobe	1	1	2	3.6%
Sokoto	1	1	2	3.6%

Nasarawa	1	1	2	3.6%
Kaduna	1	1	2	3.6%
Katsina	2	2	4	7.2%
Not stated	1	1	2	3.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

According to Table 11, majority of the Child abuse cases published in *The Nations* and *The Guardian* newspapers took place in Lagos State with 9 records (16.3%); followed by Jigawa state with 8 records (14.5%); Benue state with 6 records (10.9%); Beyelsa, Bauchi, Zamfara, and Katsina states with 4 records each (7.2%); Ekiti, Delta, Yobe, Sokoto, Nasarawa, and Kaduna had 2 records each (3.6%) and also the story with the location labeled ‘Not stated’ each had 2 records (3.6%).

**Table 12.** Direction of Story in Selected Newspapers

Slant	The Nations	The Guardian	Frequency	Percentage
Favorable	3	3	6	10.9%
Unfavorable	25	24	49	89.1%
Neutral	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Content Analysis 2023

Table 12 shows that The Nations newspaper and The Guardian Newspapers had 10.9% of favorable stories, and 89.1% of unfavourable stories. The direction of child abuse coverage in the selected newspapers, were unfavorable to the cause of child abuse reporting in Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that out of the 146 issues published in The Nations and The Guardian newspapers, 55 issues have stories of child abuse. About the frequency of coverage by The Nations and The Guardian newspaper. This indicates that the frequency of child abuse in The Nations and The Guardian newspaper is shallow. Estimating the frequency of coverage by The Nations and The Guardian newspapers, it can be stated that these newspapers did not consider the reporting of child abuse as significant enough to be published in their newspaper. The data shows that the frequency of child abuse stories in The Nations newspaper is higher than the frequency of coverage of child abuse stories in The Guardian newspaper. There was 50.9% of frequency coverage in The Nations newspaper and 49.1% of frequency coverage in The Guardian newspaper.

Consequently, this means there were days in which child abuse reports were not featured. Children are underreported in these newspapers; 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 (Akin-Odanye, 2018). In a study done by Chime et al., (2021), on the coverage of child labour from May 2022 to August 2022 on The Nations newspaper, Nigerian Tribune newspaper and The Guardian newspaper; The Nations newspaper had the majority of child labour stories, while The Guardian newspaper had the lowest coverage of child labour stories. With a comparison also done with a study on coverage of child rights and protection issues in selected broadcast media in Nigeria, there was no difference in the level of coverage. It was

also discovered that apart from children issues not given prominence, matters related to child's rights and protection were also not salient in Nigerian broadcast stations. The stories depicting child rights came with these titles 'New Child Labor Policy in Nigeria' And 'Lagos State Government Rescues 25 Children from Suspected Child Trafficker', which were both reported by the FRCN (Purity Fm). The third issue was contained in a children's magazine programme by Purity FM titled 'Uzo Esi Emegbu Umuaka' 'Children's Holiday Camping' also came from Anambra broadcasting service. It can now be said that both the print media and broadcast media do not cover stories on child rights (which covers child abuse).

Similarly, the data shows no child abuse stories in editorial, opinion letters, pictures, and other sections within the given time frame of the research (January to December 2022). News stories accounted for 90.9% of the child abuse stories, while feature articles accounted for 9.1% of the child abuse stories. The Nations newspaper had 25 records of its child abuse stories in the news story category and 3 records of its child abuse stories in its feature articles category. In comparison, The Guardian newspaper had 25 records of its child abuse stories in the news stories category and 2 records of its stories in the feature article category. Ferragut et al., (2021) agrees to the importance of news and features. He said news and features could be used to report child abuse cases, research, and intervention strategies. Such media attention paid to child abuse can positively influence public opinions, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves. Other forms like opinion letters and pictures could have been used for in-depth analysis and a better description of child abuse ills in our society. There is also the public's low engagement on the subjects of child abuse, as reflected in the low coverage of opinion. This shows that the newspapers either did not carry the readers along actively on child abuse issues, or the readers were indifferent to the issue. In a study by McElvaney et al., (2020), in the second quarter of 2013, the result showed The Nations, and The Guardian newspapers published two and four editorials on children during the period under study. However, the two sampled magazines had most of their stories analysed in the research being features with few of the stories reported as straight news. This may be expected considering the differences like newspapers and magazine stories. Akinsulire (2017), also states the columns' critical roles, he said columns offer readership with independent and knowledgeable perspectives to issues, especially where the columnist is coming from outside the organisation.

Ashimi et al., (2015) agree that a tiny proportion of all child abuse and neglect cases receive media attention. The stories reported on are often sensational and may involve tragic outcomes such as injuries or even death. The report of Ashimi et al., (2015) is very evident in the findings of child abuse reportage in The Nations newspaper and The Guardian newspaper.

According to Azizi and Shahhosseini (2017), newspapers are miscellanies that get content from a wide range of different sources – from official institutions such as Parliament and the law courts to pressure groups, voluntary organizations, businesses, and private individuals. These newspapers were shaped by the specific and changing editorial policies and practices of each newspaper organization, which determined how different stories would be prioritized and framed. Nonetheless, a subjective statement cannot be made about newspapers' commitment to stories on child abuse. Still, comparison can be made on the level of commitment of the print media and broadcast media in reporting child abuse stories.

It can be said that broadcast media show more commitment to reporting child abuse stories, which could be due to their ability to catch and retain viewers' attention. Kellogg et al., (2020) contradicts this by stating that in carrying out advocacy programs and enlightenment campaigns on issues dealing with freedom, health and security of children, the mass media, both electronic and print, have also been influential. Behavioural shifts, initiatives, legislative measures, in child labor and child rights have been affected by

numerous publications. Table 4.9 also indicates that the Lagos State had the most recorded cases of child abuse in both The Nations newspaper and The Guardian newspaper followed by Jigawa state, then Benue state.

Miley et al., (2021) state that it is important to delineate the tone of media coverage and its relationship to other aspects of recorded coverage. Since the mass media can influence the attitudes and behaviours of citizens and the actions and policies followed by the government by exposure to specific subjects and how they are portrayed, in determining the slant in the reporting of child abuse stories in The Nations and The Guardian newspapers. Slant was categorized into three; favourable, unfavourable and neutral. The information in table 4.10 shows that most reports were unfavourable, the favourable reports had a total of 10.9%, while the unfavourable reports had a total 89.1% and the neutral stories had a total of 0%. A study done by Manyike et al., (2015), showed that The Nations newspaper reported more stories on children abuses and all stories were coded as negative in the study.

## V. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher hereby conclude that The Nations and The Guardian newspapers did not give sufficient treatment to stories on child abuse. Only 55 issues out of 146 issues were analysed has reports on child abuse, this means only 38% of news stories for the year 2022 from January to December 2022 had reports on child abuse while 62% had none. The placement of stories in The Nations and The Guardian newspapers for the given period of study, 92.7% of the stories were in inside pages while 7.3% of the stories were on front pages with 0% of the stories on center spread and back pages. This shows that little prominence was given to child abuse stories and this would not help in educating and informing the masses about the ills of child abuse in the society.

The Nations and The Guardian newspapers used mainly the news story and feature articles in portraying the child abuse issues, these issues were showed in straight news format which did not give in-depth analysis. This shows that the press is more concerned about delivering first-hand news to their audience, without thorough research and in-depth treatment of the issue. It was established that there is under-reportage of child abuse issues in the selected newspaper. This follows the first objective that aims at finding out the frequency of the coverage of child abuse in The Nations and The Guardian newspaper; the level of importance ascribed to child abuse issues in The Nations and The Guardian newspapers is very low compared to other issues like Boko Haram insurgency, economical issues which are considered more news worthy. It is important the media gives the stories of child abuse more significance as it is given to other national stories.

## References

- Abba, A. A., Abbas, A. A., & Msughter, A. E. (2021). Comparative content analysis of press coverage of kidnapping cases in Nigeria. *Comunicación & Métodos*, 3(1), 84-99.
- Adeniran R., Hassan S., Mikaila A., Kayode J. (2015). Representation of children in the Nigerian News Media. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*.
- Akin-Odanye, E. O. (2018). Prevalence and management of child abuse cases presented at Nigerian hospitals: A systematic review. *Journal of Health and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.19204/2018/prv12>
- Akinsulire, O. O. (2017). A comparative study on prevalence, pattern and determinants of child abuse amongst adolescents in selected slum and non-slum communities in

- Lagos state [fellowship dissertation, national postgraduate medical college of Nigeria]. National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria Dissertations Archive. <https://www.dissertation.npmcn.edu.ng>
- Aondover, E. M. (2024). Media Outlook of Hate Speech in the 2015 and 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. *Rotura–Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Artes*, 4(1), 50-63.
- Aondover, E. M., Daushe, A. U., Ogunbola, O., & Aondover, P. O. (2025). Media Coverage of Internally Displaced Persons in two Selected Newspapers in Nigeria. *Journal of Migration and Health*, 100301.
- Ashimi, A. O., Amole, T. G., & Ugwa, E. A. (2015). Reported sexual violence among women and children seen at the gynecological emergency unit of a rural tertiary health facility, northwest Nigeria. *Annals of Medical and Health Sciences Research*, 5(1), 26–29. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2141-9248.149780>
- Azizi, M., & Shahhosseini, Z. (2017). Challenges of reporting child abuse by healthcare professionals: A narrative review. *Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Sciences*, 4(3), 110–116. [https://doi.org/10.4103/JNMS.JNMS\\_3\\_17](https://doi.org/10.4103/JNMS.JNMS_3_17)
- Batra, L., Mishra, K. K., Sharma, S., Paul, N., & Marwale, A. (2022). Psychiatric evaluation of victims and offenders of sexual assault in view of current laws. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 64(1), 130–133. [https://doi.org/10.4103/indianjpsychiatry.indianjpsychiatry\\_746\\_21](https://doi.org/10.4103/indianjpsychiatry.indianjpsychiatry_746_21)
- Chime, O. H., Orji, C. J., Aneke, T. J., & Nwoke, I. N. (2021). Prevalence, pattern and predictors of child abuse among senior secondary school students in Enugu metropolis. *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 28(4), 123–137. <https://doi.org/10.21315/mjms2021.28.4.13>
- David, N., Ezechi, O., Wapmuk, A., Gbajabiamila, T., Ohihoin, A., Herbertson, E., & Odeyemi, K. (2018). Child abuse and disclosure in south western Nigeria: A community based study. *African Health Sciences*, 18(2), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v18i2.2>
- Garba, S., & Msaughter, A. E. (2023a). Newspaper Content Analysis of 2012-2015 Ombaste Ethnic Conflict in Nasarawa State: A Framing Theory Perspective. *Konfrontasi: Jurnal Kultural, Ekonomi dan Perubahan Sosial*, 10 (2), 69-77.
- Garba, S., & Msughter, A. E. (2023b). Beyond the framing process: An X-ray of newspaper reportage of conflicts in Northern Nigeria. *Unisia*, 41(2).
- Kayode, J., Adeniran R. (2016). Nigerian press coverage of children as victims and perpetrators of crimes. Available:[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289238266\\_Nigerian\\_Press\\_Coverage\\_of\\_Children\\_as\\_Victims\\_and\\_Perpetrators\\_of\\_Crimes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289238266_Nigerian_Press_Coverage_of_Children_as_Victims_and_Perpetrators_of_Crimes)
- Kwagyang, G. U., Saulawa, M.A., and Daud, K.A. (2016). Child trafficking in Nigeria: Causes, consequences and the way forward. *International Journal of Law*, 2, 17-26.
- Maikaba, B., & Msughter, A. E. (2019). Digital Media and Cultural Globalisation: The Fate of African Value System. *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(1), 214-220.
- Manyike, P. C., Chinawa, J. M., Aniwada, E., Udechukwu, N. P., Odetunde, O. I., & Chinawa, A. T. (2015). Child abuse among adolescents in southeast Nigeria: A concealed public health behavioral issue. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 31(4), 827–832. <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.314.7115>
- Maradun, L. U., Yar’Adua, S. M., & Msughter, A. E. (2021). Perceived value of social media in the# EndSARS’ protest in Nigeria. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 9(3), 1.

- Marie-Christine, S. J., Villeneuve, P., & Turcotte, D., and Drapeau, S. (2012). The Role of Media in Reporting Child Abuse. *Journal of Social Service Research - J SOC SERV RES*, 38. 10.1080/01488376.2011.627232.
- McElvaney, R., Moore, K., Reilly, K. O., Turner, R., Walsh, B., & Guerin, S. (2020). Child abuse disclosures: Does age make a difference? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 99, 104121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104121>
- Miley, A., Moussa, W., Ndamobissi, R., & Menkiti, A. (2021). The negative impact of violence on children's education and well-being: Evidence from northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 81, 102327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102327>
- Mojaye, E. M., & Aondover, E. M. (2022). Theoretical perspectives in world information systems: A propositional appraisal of new media-communication imperatives. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 14(1), 100-106.
- Nathalie, P. (2021). Representations of Child Abuse in Quebec Print Media and the Integration of Child Psychological Ill-Treatment into the Youth Protection Act: When Distancing Abusive Families Matters More. *Sociology Study*, Sept.-Oct. 2021, Vol. 11, No. 5, 165-188 doi: 10.17265/2159-5526/2021.05.001
- Obasi, M. C., & Msughter, A. E. (2023). Assessment of media coverage of environmental hazards in mining communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. *Environmental Challenges*, 13, 100758.
- Onyejelem, T. E., & Aondover, E. M. (2024). Digital Generative Multimedia Tool Theory (DGMTT): A Theoretical Postulation. *Journalism*, 14(3), 189-204.
- Onyejelem, T. E., Aondover, E. M., Adewale, O. C., Akin-Odukoya, O. O., & Chime-Nganya, C. R. (2025). Global Terrorism and Media Reportage of Boko Haram Cases in the 21st Century. *SIASAT*, 10(1), 71-83.
- Oreoluwa, P. A., Vitalis, P. O., Nneka, A. Q., Collins-Dike, J., & Ridwan, M. (2024). Online Harassment of Female Journalist in Lagos State. *Polit Journal Scientific Journal of Politics*, 4(3), 162-174.
- Saint, EJ, Aondover, EM, Ebele, UC, & Onyejelem, TE (2024). Influence of Social Media on Newspaper Patronage among Lecturers in University Of Nigeria, Nsukka. *LingLit Journal Scientific Journal for Linguistics and Literature*, 5 (3), 142-157.
- Vitalis, P. O., Aondover, E. M., Ogunbola, O., Onyejelem, T. E., & Ridwan, M. (2025). Accessing Digital Divide and Implications in Nigeria: The Media Dimension. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 8(1), 1-12.
- Vitalis, P. O., Aondover, E. M., Ogunbola, O., Onyejelem, T. E., & Ridwan, M. (2025). Accessing Digital Divide and Implications in Nigeria: The Media Dimension. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 8(1), 1-12.