ORIGINAL ARTICLE

An Appraisal of Media Advocacy against Child Abuse and Neglect by Residents of Port Harcourt Metropolis

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Abstract

This study appraised media advocacy against child abuse and neglect by residents of Port Harcourt metropolis. The study was necessitated by the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the society. The study was anchored in the Social Responsibility media theory. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of residents of Port Harcourt metropolis, put at 1,924,680.The Check Market Online Sample Size calculator was used to get a sample size of 385 while the multi-stage sampling technique was used to group respondents into clusters of uptown and downtown before subjecting the clusters to proportionate sampling. The questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. Findings of the study showed that the level of media advocacy against child abuse and neglect was low; media advocacy has not been sufficient to help check the incidence of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis; the extent media advocacy has promoted respect for the rights of the child in Port Harcourt is low; and economic realities constitute the most prevailing challenge of media advocacy against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis. The study concluded that it is imperative that the media improve their society's watchdog role. It recommended among others that the media go beyond reporting the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the usual straight news format to more interpretative reporting, with much time spent on providing society with relevant information about the trend.

Introduction

Over time, the nagging issue of child abuse has attracted global discourse. The social malady has assumed a pervasive and global status. By implication, the abuse of children has continued to be recorded both in developing and developed countries. Like every other social malady, its effect is as devastating as it is anti-developmental. Incidentally in societies where child abuse has gone on unabated, containing it now seems to be a tall order.

Children constitute a fragile part of society. Protecting them is a crucial responsibility of all. It is, however, disturbing that many allow the abuse of children to fester by looking away and pretending it is normal. It is this seeming nonchalance and indifference of government and relevant stakeholders that have fueled this situation. The abuse of children in whatever form cannot be normal. The unfortunate trend leaves people wondering about the extent to which they have lost their sense of humanity.

Incidentally, the media are a cardinal part of society. Infact, their contents are a reflection of topical issues and happenings in society. Essentially, the media are saddled with the responsibility of creating awareness in society. A maximum numbers of the populace depend on the media to inform them concerning what goes on in the society and if adequate and sufficient information is not provided, a majority of the public will be misinformed and misled (Tsegyu, 2015). Overtime, the media have continued to watch over society, alerting them at any point things are going awry. They will fail in their social responsibility function if they do not bring certain salient issues as child abuse to the front burner. The media can be easily used to create consciousness in the world about the issue of child abuse and protecting the child. The media are the instrument which is used inchanging people's behaviours which can be achieved by the manner in which they tackle the issues concerning child abuse and focus on the consciousness of the people about child

abuse (Pfohl, 1977; Jenkins, 1998, cited in Mulugeta, 2014).

The Problem

The National Assembly in Nigeria has passed into law the Child Rights Acts. Not only have many states failed to domesticate it, the application of its provision has been draggy. However, as critical as the issue of child abuse with its attendant consequences for society is, it rarely hits the headlines. Stories on politics in the media seem to be very attractive to the media themselves and the public in general. It does seem that not much focus and advocacy have been given by the mass media with regard to advocacy against child abuse. This is expected against the backdrop of the fact that the ugly trend of child abuse is topical enough to earn public agenda and debate. Obviously, the media which should drive this debate do not seem to be at it, as they would have on issues of politics.

There are several sides to the problem of child abuse. The extent to which the media have driven these issues ranging from political, economic and even cultural in the debate against child abuse leaves much to be desired. Eventually, a number of stories on child abuse come as straight news. Therefore, the extent to which the media have driven the advocacy on child abuse is the fundamental concern of this study. Considering the agenda setting role of the media, one wonders the extent to which they have pushed towards the end of child abuse in our society.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of media advocacy against child abuse and neglect in the city of Port Harcourt?
2. In which level has media advocacy helped in checking the incidence of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis?
3. At what range has media advocacy promoted respect of the right of children in Port Harcourt?
4. What possible challenges could impede the effectiveness of media advocacy against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The social responsibility theory formed the theoretical grounding for the study.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility theory is a brain child of the Hutchins Commission which is used to often explain or theorize present-day press system which provides the framework that supports the notion that the mass media owe society certain key obligations (Tsegyu, 2015).

Meanwhile, McQuail (2005) as cited in Nwabueze (2012) provides some basic principles of this social responsibility theory:

i) The mass media owes a duty to the society, and media owners in form of public trust.
ii) The News media should convey truth, accuracy, fairness and be objective as well as relevant.
iii) The mass media should have freedom; however it needs to be self-regulated.
iv) Media should judiciously adhere to the available ethical codes that relate to the profession.
v) There are occasions when Government intervention is of utmost importance in order to promote public interest.

Like a number of theories, the social responsibility theory is not without some frailties. Nwabueze (2012) argues that it is unrealistic for the media in Nigeria to be responsible, considering how poorly managed the media have been. This theory promotes self-regulation, government regulation with adequate professional ethical standards. Such practices flourish realistically in an atmosphere where certain conditions normally exist (Nwabueze, 2012).

This theory is appropriate for this study in the light of the fact that the toga "watchdog of the society", given to the media is not for nothing. The media need to be answerable enough to watch for societal ills that impedenational development like the issue of child abuse.

Conceptual Review

Media Advocacy against Child Abuse and Neglect: An Appraisal

The media whether print, electronic and the web have been known to have the ability to bring to the consideration of general society and specialists certain social issues. This is on the grounds that the portrayal of child security issues in the (Print) media mirror the truth from one perspective, and on the other, may influence view of also arrangement and practice reactions to these issues (Ayre, 2001; Goddard & Saunders, 2001, cited in Yabeen, 2014).

In upholding the control of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, it is basic that the media are viably utilized. It is likewise not in conflict that the media have a focal job in sedating data and framing popular assessment. The quality of the media in battling social ills like child abuse and neglect in not lost in the way that they help in placing issues on the open motivation in strengthening neighbourhood endeavours, in raising cognizance about issues and in passing on basic data (Welling & Macdowell, 2008).

Moreover, the ability to make mindfulness among social orders on the threat of child abuse and neglect for the most part lies with the media. The media whether print, electronic and the Internet have been known to have the capacity to bring to the attention of the public and authorities certain social issues. This is because the representation of child protection issues in the (Print) media reflect the reality on the one hand, and on the other, may affect perception of as well as policy and practice responses to these issues (Ayre, 2001; Goddard &Saunders, 2001, cited in Yabeen, 2014).

In advocating for the containment of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, it is imperative that the media are effectively used. It is also not in contention that the media have a central role in medicating information and forming public opinion. The strength of the media in fighting social ills like child abuse and neglect in not lost in the fact that they help in putting issues on the public agenda in reinforcing local efforts, in raising consciousness about issues and in conveying simple information (Welling& Macdowell, 2008).

Furthermore, the power to create awareness among societies on the menace of child abuse and neglect mainly resides with the media. Researches have shown that the public are informed about child abuse through media reporting (Goddard & Saunders, 2001).Notwithstanding the recurrence of events, the dramatic idea of child abuse and neglect has made them mainstream subjects of the news and excitement media (Miller-Perin & Perin, 2007). Miller-Perinand Perin (2007) noticed that "the media have a job in raising the consciousness of general society on the commonness of child abuse and its specialist ramifications for society, through media campaign" (p.26). In like manner, Pfow (1977) and Jenkins (1998) referred to in Mulugeta (2014) do not concur less as they see the media as the instrument of progress of open conduct by the manner in which they address the issues of child abuse and focus on the open familiarity with kid abuse (p.58).

In uncovering and featuring abuse, the media can likewise investigate how abuse of youngsters can be halted. This again brings to the fore the agenda setting function of the media. The prominence placed on any issue by the media especially on child abuse and neglect will ordinarily attract public attention and debate. However, what we see and hear on television and radio, even on the Internet, are mundane issues that relate to politics, sports, entertainment and business. When they eventually report issues of child abuse and neglect, such reports appear to be done on the periphery.

Consequently, a study by Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) has revealed that there are not very many reports which investigated elective hypotheses about how to secure the sexual exploitation of kids. The study noted that

> techniques, for example, preparing for parenthood, giving more noteworthy consideration to children's rights or the arrangement of better assets for children's homes were the fundamental point of just a

few things, each and these were especially liable to show up in alternative organizations, as opposed to being direct reports of a question and answer session (p.3).

Yet the study has shown that there were just a bunch in the press which endeavoured to investigate expansive social, and explicitly political, speculations about the fundamental reasons for sexual maltreatment or how to prevent it. There were only a handful in the press which attempted to explore broad social, and explicitly political, theories about the underlying causes of sexual abuse or how to prevent it(Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995). Explaining the reason for media's seeming reluctance to continually bring to the fore issues of child abuse and neglect, Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) citing Gung (1976), Hollingsworth (1986) and Walbyi (1991) hinted that media's news selection routines "don't as a rule incorporate looking at the basic reasons for any social issues whether that be war, modern contest, wrongdoing or sexual savagery" (p.4).

Again, child abuse and neglect does not fall in the rating of hard news imperatives of news reporting. This trend appears disturbing considering the salient role the media play in stemming the tide of several anti-social practices. Expectedly the media have been at the fore front of engineering development. At the centre of development driven form of formalism is the advocacy for promotion of certain values and discouraging the negative ones. The core of development formalism is media backing.

Again Oyero (2009) believe that media support can help in advancing and empowering the regard for the privileges of kids or some other improvement issues. Along these lines the cardinal duties of improvement columnist are featured beneath:

i. Journalists must educate the masses so that discussions can be encouraged so as to tackle issues and help Nigerians to comprehend and convey hidden undetectable framework behind child right issue.
ii. Journalists should straightforwardly seek after kid rights issues by giving more data and embracing various kinds of inclusion.
iii. Journalists must delve further into issues influencing the welfare and improvement of the Nigerian child. The perspectives on youngsters ought to be looked for, heard and given due inclusion in the Nigerian broad communications.
iv. Journalists must screen misuses and progress as far as revealing infringement of children's rights in the media, the measuring stick against which reality could be estimated.
v. Journalists must screen the real usage of the privileges of the youngster in the various conditions of the country.

In the interim, UNICEF (2011) likewise recognizes certain obligations of the media which incorporate to:

i. Encourage the spread of data and materials that are of social advantages in the child;
ii. Encourage universal co-activity in the creation, trade and spread of such data and material from an assorted variety of social, national and worldwide sources;
iii. Encourage the creation and scattering of children's books;
iv. Encourage the broad communications to have a specific respect to the phonetic needs of the youngster who has a place with an observing gathering or who is indigenous;
v. Encourage the advancement of proper rules for the security of the kid from data and material harmful to his her prosperity.

This illuminates why the attention must be on enabling kids to response to sexual risk. To focus on insurance systems without counteractive action procedures should be joined with longer term essential aversion activities and a dream of a general public in which kid sexual maltreatment never again exists (Gilbert, 1990; Calvert, 1990; Kitzinger, 1990, cited in Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995).

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study was comprised of the residents of Port Harcourt put at 1,924,680. The Check Market Online Sample Size Calculator was used to get a sample size of 385 from the population. The multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. Data from the field were presented and analysed using frequency distribution tables, percentages and Weighted Mean Scores.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Description of Sample

A total of 385 copies of the questionnaire were administered; respondents properly filled and returned 372. This puts the rate of retrieval at 97%.

Presentation of Psychographic Data

Table 1: Media and Agenda Setting against Child Abuse in Port Harcourt

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agreed	39	10.5
Agree	148	39.8
Disagree	162	43.5
Strongly Disagree	23	6.2

Most of the respondents (162) as seen in table disagree that the media have been effective in setting the agenda against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis. Child abuse and neglect are sensitive social issues that should ordinarily attract media attention. This result reveals the contrary.

Table 2: Frequency of Campaign against Child Abuse and Neglect

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very frequently	40	10.8
Frequently	150	45.4
Seldom	169	45.4
Not at all	13	3.5

Table 2 above shows that most respondents (169) seldom hear or see media campaign against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt. The implication of this is that it appears that the media are not giving much priority to such sensitive issues as child abuse and neglect in our society.

Table 3: Responses on Level of Media Advocacy against Child Abuse and Neglect in Port Harcourt

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	38	10.2
High	129	34.7
Low	176	44.3
Very low	29	7.8
Total	372	100

Table 3 above shows that most of the respondents (176) indicated that media advocacy against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis is low. This result reinforces the assertion that media are not prioritizing such sensitive issue as child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Table 4: Media Advocacy and checking the incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect in Port Harcourt

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	39	10.4
High	134	36.0
Low	180	48.4
Very low	19	5.1
Total	372	100

Table 4 above shows that most respondents (180) accounting for 48.4% of the respondents think the extent media advocacy is helping to check the incidence of child abuse in Port Harcourt metropolis is low. It reaffirms the point that media have not sustained the campaign against child abuse and neglect to the point that it will increase public awareness on the trend and check its prevalence in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Table 5: Extent of Media Advocacy Promotion of Child Right in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	39	10.5
High	148	39.8
Low	155	41.7
Very low	30	8.1
Total	372	100

Table 5 above shows that most respondents (155) submit that the extent of media advocacy promotion of child right in Port Harcourt metropolis is low. The implications of the result is that although the media are promoting the right of the child, its advocacy has been low.

Table 6: Possible Challenges of Media Advocacy against Child Abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Decision
Lack of awareness on child right act	54	168	132	18		2.7	Agreed
Government inaction	27	170	155	20		2.5	Agreed
Socio Cultural realities	37	169	158	28		2.8	Agreed
Economic Realities	36	175	130	31	372	2.6	Agreed
Years of abuse and neglect	30	129	181	32		2.4	Disagreed
Others	22	139	170	41		2.4	Disagreed

Table 6 above indicates that economic realities (175) is topmost among the possible challenges of media advocacy against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis. The implication of this is that child abuse and neglect appear to be fueled by economic realities despite media advocacy against it.

Discussion of Findings

Discoveries in research question one has demonstrated that the level of media advocacy against child abuse is low 180. This finding confirms the problem of the study. We recall that the study in concerned about the fact that as critical as the issue of abusing a child and neglecting them with its attendant effects on society, it rarely hits the headlines (Malugeta, 2014). Malugeta contends that "mass media is saddled with the responsibility of bringing a platform or avenue for a wider analysis on public programmes." (p.86) In a society like others, where there seems to be dearth of knowledge on what constitutes neglect and abusing a child, it is expected of the media to live up to their billing of continually sensitizing the public on all the issues surrounding the trend.

In the same vein, the finding confirms Walsh and Jones (2015) who contend that the mass media are under-detailing occurrence of child abuse and neglect. Walsh and Jones (2015) contend that a key concern is that abusing kids are under-revealed, and research recommends that "experts don't generally report doubts of maltreatment and neglect" (p.2). For example, the Child Abuse Recognition and Evaluation Study (CARES) in its investigation of essential human services suppliers uncovered that 27% of the social insurance suppliers didn't report wounds to Child Protective Services (CPS) regardless of accepting they were "likely" or "very likely" brought about by child abuse (Flayety, Sege, Griffith, Price, Wasserman,& Spora, 2008).

Findings in research question 2 indicate that media advocacy has not particularly helped in checking the incidence of child abuse in Port Harcourt. While this confirms research question 1, it further reaffirms the fact that the media have not sustained the activities against abusing a child and neglect to the point that it will increase public awareness on the trend, thereby effecting the needed attitudinal change. This findings corroborates Omoera and Awosola (2008) who contend that media focus on abusing a child and neglecting them is essential in the fight against the trend. Understanding media influence and ways of using the media in a constructive way might be very vital instrument for tackling societal issues of child abuse.

The findings also confirm Ekenyanwu (2014) who citing a survey coordinated by the Child Protection Hub (CPHuB) revealed that "the rate of child abuse in Nigeria has suffered a considerable neglect. The survey report revealed a sum up of low

insight on the consequences of overall child abuse to the people at large occasioned by a weak attitude in decimating child abuse in their climes. The survey, Ekanyanwu (2014) reports, showed that "there are not enough children's rights organizations providing support to children who are abused and defend children's right" (p.1).

Meanwhile, the findings in research question 3 shows that the extent media advocacy has promoted the respect for the rights of children in Port Harcourt metropolis is low (155). While it will be out of place to argue that the media are not advocating for safeguarding of the children's right, one will not be missing the point to say that the inadequacy of such advocacy is not in contention. This is disturbing in view of the latent potential of the media in engendering social change. They do this by helping to put pictures in our heads (Leppean, 1992 cited in Mba-Nwigoh, 2017).

Likewise, Angle et al. (2014) note that they believe that "high quality media substance and open discussion that is comprehensive of kid voices, aside from supporters, and that clarifies arrangement issues can add to more extensive endeavors to improve the earth to securing and advancing the privilege of children" (p.7).

On Research Question 4, findings have shown that "economic realities" (175) poses the greatest challenge to media advocacy against child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis. This is a stark reality, considering the fact that poverty is a stark socio-economic reality confronting many Nigerians. This finding confirms the BBC News (February, 2012) that puts the population of Nigerians that are poor at nearly 61%. Obviously, this figure has increased over the years. According to the report the National Bureau of statistics said 60.9% of Nigerians in 2010 were living in abject poverty. This figure had risen from 54.7% in 2004 (BBC News, 2012).

Once more, the investigation affirms National Research Council (1993), Fras-Armenta and Atccloskey (1998), Klevens, Bayorin and Soerra (2004) and Lendell and Suedin (2001) to the degree that reviews have demonstrated a solid relationship between destitution and youngster abuse. Paces of maltreatment are higher in networks with abnormal state of joblessness and concentrated neediness.

Conclusion

Children constitute the most vulnerable part of the society. A strong society is not measured by the number of infrastructure and quality of government but in how much it protects the vulnerable in the society. The protection of the child is a direct move to protecting property. No society, therefore claims of a secured future when many of her children are prone to all kinds of abuses and neglect. Infact society gets right back what it invests in its children. We do not need to reiterate the fact that children who are abused and neglected turn out to exhibit deviant dispositions that could eventually threaten the peace of any society.

As sensitive as the issue of child abuse and neglect as well as its prevalence in our society is, it is worrisome that it has not adequately caught the attention of the media. The noble responsibility of the media places them in position where they do not only beam their search light on issues of prominence like child abuse and neglect but how to think about it. Issues of child abuse and neglect might not make much news in the face of other contending issues as polities and sports but then it makes much sense to bring it to the front burner if the scourge must be contained. That it poses much threat to the society and a sharp shift from what any decent society represents makes the issue of child abuse and neglect one that cannot afford not to be given the needed media attention.

So much is expected of the media yet they seen to be delivering much less; there is no doubt that it has became imperative that the media up their ante as society's watchdog to frontally tackle head on the unsavoury scourge of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Recommendations

Drawing from the above conclusion, the following

recommendations are hereby put forward:

1. Media should go beyond reporting of child abuse and neglect in the usual straight news format to more interpretative reporting, where much time is spent providing society with relevant information about the trend.
2. Media will be succeeding more in their advocacy against child abuse and neglect if they do not report incidences (of child abuse and neglect) in isolation of other prevailing socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political realities. This way they would have tackled the cause of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt metropolis.
3. Media reports should be geared towards galvanizing collective commitments from relevant stakeholders. The media should be able to keep government and relevant stakeholders and NGOs on their toes on the protection of child right.
4. The need for community reporting cannot be over-emphasized. Media should take their video cameras, photo cameras and midgets right into communities to get a first-hand feeling of the state of children and decently report same to the public.

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