

# South-East Residents' attitude Towards newspaper Reportage of The Campaign Against Child Abuse In Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*The study evaluated Southeast residents' attitudes towards newspaper reportage in the campaign against child abuse. The objectives of this study, among others, were to; find out the level of awareness created on issues of child abuse through exposure to newspaper reports among Southeast residents; identify the extent to which the exposure to newspaper reportage improve the knowledge of South-East newspaper readers on the fight against child abuse, and determine the influence of newspaper reports on Southeast residents' attitude towards child abuse. The study was anchored on agenda setting and social responsibility theories. The study adopted mixed-method research designs involving survey research and in-depth research methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data. A sample size of 513 respondents was drawn from a population of 21,297,016, using an Australian online calculator. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for this study. The questionnaire and interview schedule were used as instruments for data collection. The researcher purposively selected 20 journalists from the states in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that: Southeast residents level of awareness of child abuse stories reported in Nigerian newspapers is high at 52.8%; the extent to which exposure to newspaper reportage improved the knowledge of Southeast residents on the fight against child abuse is moderate at 38%, and exposure to newspaper reportage has influenced Southeast residents' attitude towards child abuse positively at 60.5%. It was, therefore, concluded that newspapers are vital in the fight against child abuse in Nigeria. It was, therefore, recommended as follows: the need for persistent use of newspapers to report issues of public importance like child abuse; newspapers should carry information pertaining to child abuse in their reportage; in educating, enlightening, and sensitizing the citizenry, newspapers should remain a major source in championing the course against child abuse; and people should be empowered information-wise through this medium by establishing specialized newspapers that have to do with societal crimes like child abuse.*

**Keywords:** Awareness, Child abuse, Newspaper, Knowledge, Reportage, Residents, South-East

## INTRODUCTION

Over the years, society has been grappling with child abuse as no one is immune from abuse, particularly children. Abuse is commonly found in every sector of society. This ugly menace has infiltrated into all socioeconomic levels and within any religious denominations. Numerous cases of child abuse are being reported annually (Larissa & Ryan, 2014). The findings of the 2014 Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey conducted by the National Population Commission with the support of the United States Centre for Disease Control and UNICEF revealed that there is incessant violence against children in all the states in Nigeria (Edeh, 2017). According to Edeh, approximately six out of 10 children experienced violence, and 50 percent of all children in Nigeria experience physical violence. This is because one in four girls and one in 10 boys may have experienced sexual violence.

In comparison, one in six girls and one in five boys may have experienced emotional violence by a parent, a caregiver, or an adult relative. Nwokedi (2016) rightly notes that a child is seen as being meek and innocent; he/she needs the parents' protection and the enactment from policymakers for survival. He/she is regarded as precious gifts from God, leaders of tomorrow, man's ticket of continuity on earth; yet, these same children are subjected to various forms of abuse and neglect. Following this, the United Nations in 1979 set aside that year as the 'International Year of the Child' and further succinctly outlined the child's rights. Some of the rights encapsulated by the United Nations are that every child is entitled to the right to love and understanding; adequate food and good health; free education, play, and identity and special attention of the disabled notwithstanding the disparity in color, sex, religion, and nation or social origin (Nwokedi, 2016).

In recognition of this, African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) was established by some African countries, including Nigeria, in 1984. The organization's main aim is to look into child abuse and neglect as they pertain to Africa. Again, the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) now (African Union) subsequently proclaimed in Abuja 1991, the 1990s as the "Decade of the African Child" and set June 16 of every year as the 'Day of the African Child'. The



documents also report that every child must be protected against all forms of exploitation, indecent or degrading treatments, including child labor, abuse and torture, sexual exploitation, sale, abduction, and drug abuse. Therefore, every nation signatory to the convention is expected to consolidate to protect children against all kinds of abuses, based on the enforcement of relevant instruments. Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria made provisions for every individual's right to dignity of his/her person. This section further prohibits "all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and slavery, forced or compulsory labor." In other words, it accords every Nigerian child the right to dignity of his/her person. Hence, children cannot be subjected to any form of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or forced or compulsory labor (Awosola & Omoera, 2008).

The media have been essential to placing the topic of child protection in the minds of the citizenry. Media reportage of child protection issues affects institutions and policy's progress, but rather affects individual behavior. Reporting issues related to child protection provides room for a more protective environment for him/her through public awareness and makes both the public and victims report such cases as child maltreatment to the proper authorities. Therefore, the media have played a significant role in constructing child abuse as a social problem (Babbot, 2018). Powell & Scanlon (2018) observe that reportage of child abuse by mass media has turned the once largely unacknowledged issue into a recognized major social problem hence a topical subject. Child rights' promotion and protection remain an essential and integral component of contemporary society. As such, mainstream media like newspapers persist in being an extremely germane source of information for many people regarding child protection issues, providing news and analyses about child abuse issues to molding public perception on measures taken towards curtailing child abuse.

In corroborating this, Hasan (2014) notes that there are tremendous public interests in crime stories, and no newspaper can afford to ignore them without damage to circulation and credibility. Child abuse as a crime is a part of our daily experience, and the newspapers must inform the readers' on the extent such crimes are going on in the cities, states, or country at large. To this effect, the newspapers are expected to provide accurate and adequate information about child abuse. In Nigeria, in particular, newspapers have continued to play an important role in developing the country. The media provide information geared towards fostering national coexistence by reporting issues that border on children, women, the aged, minors, and the physically challenged. Therefore, this study tries to ascertain how Nigerian newspapers contribute to creating awareness of child abuse through reportage.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are two ways in which the media could affect knowledge, attitudes, and behavior towards child abuse. To Nwodu and Ezeoka (2014); (1) the media could deliberately impact knowledge, attitudes, and behavior through campaigns, specially designed for such impact; and (2) they may do so in an accidental sense when media audiences are exposed to media contents that contain child abuse-related stories which are not, specifically, intended to impact on the child abuse knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the audience. Hence, the news media could contribute to public knowledge on the importance of eradicating child abuse in Nigeria. It implies that how the media choose to emphasize or ignore issues affects how people perceive or understand them. This is in accordance with the agenda-setting function of the media.

Similarly, it seems obvious that the extent to which the mass media cover or fail to cover child abuse in Nigeria will certainly affect the Nigerian public's understanding of the issues. The extent to which Nigerian newspapers actually report the issues relating to child abuse and whether exposure to such reports influence South- East residents' attitude towards child abuse issues in Nigeria is unknown. It is this gap in knowledge that this study set to fill.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. find out Southeast residents level of awareness of child abuse through exposure to newspaper reports;
2. identify the extent to which the exposure to newspaper reportage improve the knowledge of Southeast residents on the fight against child abuse; and
3. determine the influence of newspaper reports on Southeast residents' attitudes towards child abuse.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the Southeast residents' level of awareness about child abuse through exposure to newspaper reports?
2. To what extent do exposure to newspaper reportage improved Southeast residents' knowledge in the fight against child abuse?
3. How has exposure to newspaper reportage influenced South-East residents' attitudes towards child abuse?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Child Abuse: An Overview**

Child abuse is a worldwide problem explained by the WHO as "any physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or other exploitation the child is exposed to by a responsible guardian, causing direct or indirect harm to his life, health, or development" (WHO, 1999). Child abuse

entails the maltreatment of a child by an adult person that harms or endangers that child or young person's physical or emotional health, development, or well being (Queensland Government, 2017). Violence, abuse, and exploitation of children, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children have come to be recognized as crimes against children. Child abuse has devastating consequences on children's development and societies (OAK Foundation, 2014). Child abuse is the physical, sexual, or emotional maltreatment or negligence of a child or children. It could be any form of harm or ill-treatment deliberately inflicted on a child. Child abuse includes: assaulting a child or thrusting any other form of deliberate injury to a child; abuse a child sexually or allowing a child to be sexually abused; bullying by another child; a labor practice that takes advantage of a child; or exposing or subjecting a child to behavior that may harm the child emotionally or psychologically (YEDI, 2015). According to Onyido and Vareba (2019), child labor, physical abuse, child neglect, child marriage, female genital mutilation, molestation, and emotional and psychological abuse as types of abuse and established that poverty, cultural and religious belief, poor implementation of child protective regulations as factors encouraging the propagation of these condemnable acts particularly in developing countries like Nigeria.

#### **Newspaper as Tool for Public Awareness in Campaign against Child Abuse**

Saint-Jacques, Villeneuve, Turcotte, Drapeau, & Ivers (2011) opine that the coverage of child abuse by the news media increases public awareness about this issue and helps the individuals realized the report such situations. Print and electronic media are considered the most powerful social change agents and effective medium that can revolutionize the deter society into a civilized, responsible, composed society. Besides all the main roles, the media's pertinent role is to highlight the human rights violation issues to provide awareness and prevent society from social evils and injustice. So, by pointing out the odds, media can lessen the magnitude of happenings within the society (Qayyum, 2018). Mass media's role is essential in disseminating information, increasing awareness, and changing society's perception. Mass media communicate with a larger number of people and, to a group, discerned the significant difference between mass communication and other communication forms. They observe that mass communication can reach a larger audience through a technical device to disseminate the message to the heterogeneous audience swiftly. Media mediate information and shape public opinion. Media focuses on the event that we usually do not consider and make those apparent and significant (Linda, 1994 cited in Qayyum, 2018). McDevitt (1996) cites O'Keefe and Reed (1990, p. 250) note that: "At best, the media are 'effective at building citizen awareness of an issue' but more complex attitudinal or behavioral change requires 'more direct forms of citizen contact and intervention.' Media campaigns and

media coverage of children's abuse and neglect perform an important and significant role in placing issues such as child abuse on the public and political agendas.

#### **Empirical Review**

Babbot (2018) observed that the media are sometimes found wanting regarding children's issues by failing to report responsibly and sensitively. It also encourages media professionals to re-examine and improve the way children's issues are covered in print and broadcast media. In relation to this, Kayode and Adeniran (2016) investigated newspaper coverage of children as victims and crimes perpetrators. Findings showed that cases of sexual offenses were dominant during the study period and that the children's identities were not adequately protected. Most of the stories were reported as isolated straight news with few follow-ups on later developments on individual cases reported.

Similarly, Welson and Mohamed (2019) concluded that a significant proportion of the students experienced physical child abuse, which left no injuries in most cases; males and first academic year students show more exposure to abuse. Moreover, most students think that child corporal punishment can be allowed, although about half of them think that the most dangerous aftereffect of child abuse is psychological problems. The largest percentage of students explain the lack of reporting of child abuse exposure due to a lack of awareness. Rural resident males show more approval of female genital mutilation. A significant lack of awareness about FGM complications is observed in both groups (the health science and non-health science college groups). The opinions of both groups are very close.

Again, Okoye (2011) examined knowledge and awareness of the child's rights act among residents of a University town in Enugu State, Nigeria. Findings showed that only about 32% of respondents are aware of the Child's Rights Act, while 19% know the act's contents. Also, there appears to be a relationship between marital status and knowledge of the act, level of education, and awareness. One major implication of the findings is the need for more public enlightenment about the act since findings indicate that residents of Nsukka town are neither aware of the existence nor the act's contents.

In a study, Nwokedi (2016) showed that broadcast media have created awareness of child abuse; that the program's quality frequency and timing are all good; the broadcast media were also found to be effective in their effort at combating child abuse. The level of public compliance was, however, low. The major challenges the broadcast media face in combating child abuse are lack of funds, sponsorship, government subvention, and public apathy.

In relation to this, Ojiakor, Iheanacho, Nkwam-Uwaoma, and Dibia, (2019) found that the select newspapers did not give adequate coverage of reports on child rights abuse issues in Nigeria. Both newspapers did not give

prominence to the stories reported as almost all were buried in the inside pages. In corroborating this, Ejiakor, Ojiakor, and Nwaozor (2017) concluded that even though the rate of child sexual abuse in Nigeria is increasing tremendously, the Nigerian film industry in conjunction with the law enforcement agencies is competent enough to fight the ugly situation; bridge the increase or eradicate it from Nigeria.

In relation to this, Usadolo et al. (2011) revealed that there is increasing awareness through the mass media on women's sensitization to claim their rightful position in all ramifications. In corroborating this finding, Nwaolikpe (2015) found that media use to create awareness and educate the public on societal issues is effective because the public interests are captured. The print media in Nigeria have not done so well in creating and educating the masses on child trafficking, which has a devastating effect on the victims, the family members, the community, and the nation. Nlewem & Amodu (2016) revealed that most of the respondents were knowledgeable about sexual abuse, and teachers were the highest source of information. The fact that school played a significant role in the knowledge of sexual abuse in this study poses a need to focus attention on increasing students' awareness by integrating sexual abuse topics in the primary and secondary school curriculum.

Nwaolikpe (2015) concluded that newspapers studied to provide information regarding child trafficking, but adequate information on child trafficking was not given. The newspapers did not give enough space and did not report the issues of child trafficking frequently. Child trafficking issues appeared more on pages of less important in the newspapers. The prominence given to the stories was not much. The source of the news stories came from the journalists and not from the specialist – medical practitioners, National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), law enforcement agencies and NGO's, etc., who will provide editors and journalists' factual information and background materials needed. The news stories in the newspapers focused more on sexual exploitation. Higher priority was given to it, while no story on child soldering. Domestic servitude and street begging/hawking were covered but not so much like sexual exploitation. The findings show that print media coverage of child trafficking in Nigeria is weak; there are not enough articles on child trafficking in the newspapers. The use of media to create awareness and educate the public on societal issues is effective because the public interests are captured. The print media in Nigeria have not done so well in creating and educating the masses on child trafficking, which has a devastating effect on the victims, the family members, the community, and the nation. Setting the agenda on child trafficking in the print media and covering the news frequently and prominently is necessary to sensitize and mobilize the public to act positively on the issue.

### **Theoretical framework**

The study was anchored on the agenda-setting theory. Agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McComb and Donald L. Shaw, the two North Carolina University Professors. In 1972, the first systematic study of the agenda-setting process (Ngoa, 2012, p. 4). Walter Lippman's above ideas are believed to have inspired several communication scholars about the media's agenda-setting function, and one of such scholars was Cohen. Baran and Davis (2003, p. 311), as cited by Ekeanyanwu (2015, p. 115), in his view, contends that agenda-setting is where the mass media is accredited with the power to set the list of the topic for discussion". This means that it is what the media want us to think about that they project to the public as an important issue, and at the end of the day, it appears important in the eyes of the public (Ozuru & Ekeanyanwu 2013, p. 109).

The agenda-setting theory is relevant in this research because the degree of prominence or importance attached to a story or event such as child abuse by the media (whether print or electronic) would greatly determine how the public would see or value. Such events story or situation, thus, where the media, particularly the print media, give prominence and attention on child abuse issues as well as going further through their editorial comments and other columns on the social religious and cultural implications of child abuse that the public would better appreciate the concept and abstain from same.

### **Research Method**

The sequential explanatory mixed research approach was adopted for this study. This approach offered the researcher opportunity to use both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey research method was used for quantitative, while the in-depth interview was analyzed qualitatively for this study. The survey research method is suitable for this study, considering that the researcher sampled Southeast residents' opinions, views, and thoughts on newspaper reportage of child abuse. It gives the researcher opportunity to select a sample from the entire population. This method helped the researcher obtain opinions and views of Southeast residents patterning newspaper reports on child abuse. Also, an in-depth interview research method was used to generate qualitative data. The essence of this was that it encouraged Southeast residents to express their opinions and feelings about newspaper reports on child abuse. The data generated from the quantitative and qualitative methods complemented each other in providing better results for solving the research problem. The actual or given population to give 21,297,016, which is an estimated population as of 2019. This study's sample size is 385 using an Australian online calculator, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error was used. By this calculation, 385 became the basic sample size. To calculate for the oversampling procedure resulting from the large population, a response rate estimate of 75% was adopted.

$n_2 = \frac{\text{Minimum sample size}}{\text{Anticipated response rate}} = \frac{385}{0.75}$   
 Where anticipated return rate= 75% (0.75)

$n_2 = 385/0.75 = 513$ . Thus the sample size for the study was 513. For the in-depth interview research design, the researcher purposively selected 20 practicing journalists in the selected newspapers from the selected state capitals for interviews. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for this study. The researcher purposively selected the states' capitals, namely; Umuahia in **Abia State**, Akwa in **Anambra State**; Abakiliki in **Ebonyi State**; Enugu Municipal in **Enugu State**; and Owerri municipal in **Imo State**. The reason is that newspapers are largely centralized and circulate in these state capitals, and most people who reside there have access to newspapers. From these state capitals, the researcher purposively selected four major newspapers in the strategic corners of the town. From each of the selected newspaper stands, 25 and 38 persons who come to read newspapers in the selected stands were purposively selected to form the study's respondents. A purposive sampling technique was used to interview 20 journalists, 4 from the select state capitals, and newspapers used for this study. The questionnaire was used as an instrument to elicit information or data from various respondents for the survey study. Also, an interview schedule was used to generate qualitative data for an in-depth interview. This helped the researcher elicit a response from the interviewees. The data collected through the questionnaire's use were presented and analyzed using simple percentages and frequency tables.

**Results**

**Research Question One: What is the Southeast residents' level of awareness about child abuse through exposure to newspaper reports?**

In responding to the research question above, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were analyzed for this purpose.

**Table 1: Respondent view on whether they have access to newspapers through purchasing, subscribing pass-along or free readership**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	99	20.2
DA	51	10.4
SDA	31	6.3
A	209	42.7
SA	99	20.2
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 2: Respondent view on whether they do read newspapers**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	93	19.0
DA	64	13.1
SDA	29	5.9
A	194	39.7
SA	109	22.3
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 3: Response view on whether newspapers are meant to cover all issues of public importance**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	105	19.0
DA	41	10.8
SDA	37	7.6
A	185	37.8
SA	121	24.7
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 4: Respondents view on whether newspapers covered child abuse stories**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	125	25.6
DA	67	13.7
SDA	39	8.0
A	175	35.8
SA	83	17.0
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 5: Respondents view on whether they are aware of child abuse related issue through their exposure to newspapers**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	94	19.2
DA	53	10.8
SDA	35	7.2
A	179	36.6
SA	128	26.2
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 6: Respondents' view on whether the level of awareness about child abuse based on newspaper stories is high**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	104	21.3
DA	63	12.9
SDA	25	5.1
A	187	38.2
SA	110	22.5
Total	489	100.0

Survey: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 7: Respondents' view on whether the level of awareness about child abuse is less among those that do not read newspapers**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	118	24.1
DA	31	6.3
SDA	25	5.1
A	191	39.1
SA	124	25.4
Total	489	100.0

Survey: Field survey, 2019.

**Research Question Two: To what extent do exposure to newspaper reportage improved Southeast residents' knowledge of the fight against child abuse?**

To answer the research question above, items 8, 9, and 10 were used.

**Table 8: Respondents' view on the forms of child abuse stories reported in newspapers**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Child labor	75	15.3
Child Trafficking	136	27.8
Molestation	61	12.5
Sex labour	123	25.2
Others	94	19.2
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019

**Table 9: Respondents' view on whether they are knowledgeable about child abuse through newspaper reports**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
UN	98	20.0
DA	49	10.0
SDA	39	8.0
A	198	40.5
SA	105	21.5
Total	489	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2019.

**Table 10: Respondents' view on the extent to which newspaper reportage on child abuse improve their knowledge about child abuse issues**

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No Idea	120	24.5
Low extent	40	8.2
Very low extent	48	9.8
Moderate Extent	186	38.0
Large Extent	95	19.4
Total	489	100.0

Survey: Field survey, 2019.

**Research Question Three: How has exposure to newspaper reportage influenced South-East residents' attitudes towards child abuse?**

To answer this research question, items 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 were analyzed for this question.

**Table: Respondents' view on whether they are reluctant about giving out their children to relatives, friends, or outsiders or any form of assistance based on the abuses reported in newspapers?**

	Frequency	Percent
UN	112	22.9
DA	42	8.6
SDA	13	2.7
A	183	37.4
SA	139	28.4
Total	489	100.0
Missing System	15	
Total	504	

Survey: Field survey, 2018.

**Table: Respondents' view on whether exposure to newspaper stories on the child's right has made most people who are fond of such wicked act desist from them.**

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	UN	106	21.7
	DA	49	10.0
	SDA	28	5.7
	A	179	36.6
	SA	127	26.0
	Total	489	100.0
Missing	System	15	
Total		504	

Survey: Field survey, 2018.

**Table: Respondents' view on whether newspaper stories on child abuse may have raised the security consciousness level of parents, especially mothers, to make sure nobody is sexually molesting their daughters**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	UN	101	20.0
	DA	51	10.1
	SDA	23	4.6
	A	188	37.3
	SA	126	25.0
	Total	489	97.0
Missing	System	15	3.0
Total		504	100.0

Survey: Field survey, 2018.

**Table: Respondents' view on whether exposure to newspaper stories on the fight against child abuse has given them the boldness to seek redress in court when their children's rights are being violated.**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	UN	117	23.2
	DA	144	28.6
	SDA	92	18.3
	A	80	15.9
	SA	56	11.1
	Total	489	97.0
Missing	System	15	3.0
Total		504	100.0

Survey: Field survey, 2018.

**Table: Respondents' view on whether the level of child abuse related issue has being reduced because the people are well informed through the message from newspapers**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	UN	85	16.9
	DA	47	9.3
	SDA	29	5.8
	A	195	38.7
	SA	133	26.4
	Total	489	97.0
Missing	System	15	3.0
Total		504	100.0

Survey: Field survey, 2018.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Southeast residents level of awareness of child abuse through exposure to newspaper stories**

From the findings above, it is clear that most or 52.8% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the level of awareness about child abuse based on newspaper stories is high. Again, 64.5% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that Southeast residents' awareness level is less among those that do not read newspapers. It means that Southeast residents exposed to newspaper reports on child abuse are aware of child abuse related issues than those who do not read newspapers. The further finding indicated that 60.7% agreed and strongly agreed that they were aware of child abuse related issues through their newspaper readership. This was confirmed as 62% agreed and strongly agreed that they do read newspapers. This is because 62% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they have access to newspapers through purchasing, subscription, pass-along, or free readership. It was also justified as 62.5% of the respondents in the further analysis showed that a good number of them agreed and strongly agreed that newspapers were meant to cover all public importance issues, and 63.2% strongly agreed and agreed that newspapers report about child abuse-related stories. Further analysis from the qualitative data indicated that out of 20 respondents, 16 of the respondents believed that they were aware of child abuse related issues through their exposure to newspaper reportage. It means that many respondents believed that newspaper is a major source of information in the fight against child abuse. The implication is that many educated ones in South-East are highly aware of child abuse. In relation to this finding, Okoye (2011), in a study, found that only about 32% of respondents are aware of the existence of the Child's Rights Act, while 19% know the contents of the act. Also, there appears to be a relationship between marital status and knowledge of the act, level of education, and awareness. One major implication of the findings is the need for more public enlightenment about the act since findings indicate that residents of Nsukka town are neither aware of the existence nor the act's contents.

### **The extent to which exposure to newspaper reportage improved the knowledge of Southeast residents on the fight against child abuse**

Findings from the research questions above indicated that the majority of 38% of the respondents agreed that the extent to which newspaper reportage on child abuse issues improved their knowledge is moderate. Because 62% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that Southeast residents are knowledgeable about child abuse through newspaper reports, they became informed about child abuse related issues like child trafficking, sex labour, child labor, and molestation. The qualitative data indicated that 18 of the interviewees agreed that newspapers, to a moderate extent, improve their knowledge about child abuse related issues. This means that what we know and understand about child abuse is dependent on their exposure to newspaper reportage to a moderate extent. In this finding, Nwokedi (2016) found that broadcast media had created awareness of child abuse through proper timing and quality frequency of the programs.

### **Exposure to newspaper reportage influenced South-East residents' attitude towards child abuse**

Results from the analysis revealed as follows: (i) 65.8% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they are reluctant about given out their children to relative, friends or outsiders or any form of assistance based on the abuses reported in newspapers; (ii) 62.6% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that exposure to newspaper stories on the right of the child has made most people who are fond of such wicked act desist from them; (iii) newspaper stories on child abuse may have raised the security consciousness level of parents, especially mothers to make sure their daughters are not being sexually molested by anybody at 62.2%; (iv) 47% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that exposure to newspaper stories on the fight against child abuse has given them the boldness to seek for redress in court when their children right are being violated; and (v) 65.1% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the level of child abuse related issue have being reduced because the people are well informed through message from newspapers. The table above showed that 19 interviewees believed that the newspaper has positively influenced Southeast residents' attitudes towards child abuse. To them, newspaper stories encouraged most people in South-East to decide on the efforts to curtail child abuse. This finding is in line with Okugo et al. (2014). This earlier finding showed that despite enough media framing influencing child trafficking policies, the trends were on the increase.

Similarly, Nlewen (2015), the fact that school played a significant role in the knowledge of sexual abuse in this study poses a need to focus attention on increasing students' awareness by integrating sexual abuse topics in the

primary and secondary school curriculum. In corroboration to this, Okafor et al. (2013) concluded that the mass media's influence is a contentious issue in childhood socialization. The nature and degree of media influence on children's behavior have been extensively addressed at some time or other, with the bulk of decades of research focusing on the relationship between exposure to media programs and children's social behavior.

### **Conclusion**

Newspapers are vital in the fight against child abuse in Nigeria. The media's role in informing, educating, persuading, and mobilizing the citizenry into rising against the menace of child abuse is commendable. Like their counterparts in developed countries, the newspapers in Nigeria have continuously conveyed messages and information on child abuse-related issues and other public importance issues. They have remained a key source for disseminating information about child rights and violations, which is in accordance with the press's social responsibility. Child abuse related issues are being covered on pages of newspapers, as straight news, editorials, cartoons, and columns. This improved people's knowledge and re-awakened their mindset to ensure that children are no longer molested. All forms of child abuse are reported in newspapers, especially child molestation and rape, by the adults meant to guide and protect them. The level of awareness created about child abuse has unequivocally spurred media messages to rise against such crime.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a need for the persistent use of newspapers to report public importance issues like child abuse. This is because a good number of people read the newspaper daily. It means that newspapers should continue to give adequate reportage of child abuse for the public to know about them as a matter of necessity.
2. In other to improve people's knowledge of child abuse-related issues, newspapers should carry information pertaining to child abuse in their states. This is in line with the social responsibility philosophy of the press.
3. In educating, enlightening, and sensitizing the citizenry, newspapers should remain a major source in championing the course against child abuse. This is because people tend to act when they are properly informed of the dangers posed to them.



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