


Chapter 40

Public and Stakeholders' Perceptions of Newspaper Coverage of Child Labour in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explored public and stakeholder perceptions of media coverage of child labour in Nigeria. It has been observed that most studies are deficient in information on the interplay between media coverage of children issues and public perception of such coverage. This study therefore adopted the convergent mixed method design to elicit responses from audiences. Respondents were drawn from Babcock University on the assumption that individuals are literate enough to understand newspaper reports. Civil society organizations across Nigeria that deal specifically with children issues and some State Ministries of Women Affairs were sampled. The survey showed that people have knowledge of child labour issues from newspapers which in turn affect their attitude; however, their reactions to the reports are moderately favourable to the cause of abused children. It was recommended that newspapers give more coverage to child labour issues so that the public will have more knowledge and in turn make informed decisions.

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INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

The chapter explored public and stakeholders' perception of media coverage of child labour in Nigeria. Children occupy an important position in the continuity of human existence as such their survival and development must be protected. It has been observed that most media coverage on different children issues are deficient in information on the interplay between media coverage of children issues and public perception of such coverage (Nwodu & Ezeoke, 2013).

It is the assumption of this chapter that child labour still thrives despite different advocacy efforts because the public do not fully understand the implications of the problem and the media as information sources to majority of people are also falling short in keeping people adequately informed, thus the adverse effects on the Nigerian child. Weatherred (2015) citing previous studies explained that most Americans get information on child sexual abuse through the media. Pickering (2016) added that the mass media are the vehicle through which social issues especially those of child welfare are relayed to the general public and thus, this makes them powerful in the society. Awosola and Omoera (2008 p.126) assert that "the media are persuasive instruments in man's struggle for liberation and development". Severin and Tankard (1979) explain that through the agenda-setting function, the mass media are to select and emphasize certain issues so that the public can perceive such issues as important.

Internews Europe (2014 p.8) in its study highlighted some reasons for the inadequate reporting of child labour issues; one of such is the lack of media-Civil Society Organizations cooperation. It explains that there is a high level of mistrust between both parties and this leads to failure to understand each other's needs and expectations. It should be stressed that both parties need to work in tandem to restore the dignity of the Nigerian child; the CSOs are to keep the media aware of their efforts at alleviating the situation of children not just for publicity purposes. The media are also to work with the CSOs as they could be viable information sources in exposing some ills that children go through. The media, the CSOs as well as the ministries of women affairs and social development are to work as partners in progress and harness strengths to handle the concerns of children.

This is especially mandatory in view of the fact that Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has also ratified some other laws for the protection of children. It should be noted that any nation that is a signatory to such laws is expected to ensure a high level of protection for the children against abuse and other forms of exploitation. It is possible that lack of media education or the portrayal of child labour issues as a mere offense rather than putting it into context as a broader issue of concern, may have increased its prevalence. This means that the extent to which the mass media covers or fails to cover issues of child labour will affect the public's understanding and attitude to the issues. Pickering (2016) explains that media representation of child welfare positively and negatively impacts child welfare and indirectly affects how the public and policy makers perceive the issue. Nwodu and Ezeoke (2013), in their study examined the coverage of children and women's rights by the Nigerian press, recommended that there should be a more elaborate research to find out the correlation between press coverage of the issues and the audience perception and attitude to the issues. Weatherred (2015) implies that news media influences public perception of child sexual abuse which in turn impacts public policy. This shows that framing media reports on child labour as a problem requiring urgent attention and solution can lead to an improved public attitude to the issue.

The study takes into cognisance the fact that the concerted efforts of all stakeholders involved is equally important. Therefore, it seeks to examine public and stakeholders' perception of media coverage of child labour in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

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