

## Coverage of reproductive health issues in Nigerian newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

Newspaper as one of the channels of media is useful in passing information to the public and various stakeholders on several issues due to its wide coverage. This study was carried out to investigate the coverage of reproductive health issues in selected newspapers in Nigeria. Three Nigerian newspapers were selected for the study namely: Punch, Vanguard and The Nation. Two days of the week and a weekend were purposively selected for this study and a total of 149 news articles were used for the study. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage) and inferential (Analysis of Variance) statistics at  $p < 0.05$ . Results revealed that sex education (38.9%) and maternal health (42.3%) were mostly reported. Reproductive health experts (50.3%) were the highest source quoted across the newspapers followed by news reporters (26.2%). The highest space allotted to reproductive health issues was 68-746sq.cm with 40.3%. The bulk of reproductive health issues were placed on other pages (80.5%) of the newspapers which are of less prominence to the audience. There was a significant difference in the spaces allotted to reproductive health issues ( $F = 3.041$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) across newspapers. It is pertinent for Nigerian newspaper industry to improve the coverage of reproductive health issues and increase the space allotted to the issue to enhance visibility and effective communication to the audience.

**Keywords:** Content categories, Maternal health, Nigerian newspapers, Reproductive health issues.

### INTRODUCTION

Reproductive health refers to the health and well-being of women and men in terms of sexuality, fertility regulation, pregnancy and birth, including maternal health and the health of the newborn (Zheng, Lu and Lu, 2013). Reproductive health is a critical component of women's general health. It has been established that when women lack access to safe and comprehensive reproductive health care, the consequences can be damaging (Adeleke, 2018). However, men also demand specific reproductive health needs and have responsibilities in terms of women's reproductive health because of their decision-making power in the home (WHO, 2015). Poor reproductive health reduces women's ability to work and also means that other family members may need to give up income-generating work in order to do the work that a woman might do in caring and providing for the family. The overall effects of good sexual and reproductive health influence the success and sustainability of social development and economic growth (IPPF, 2015).

Odeleye (2015) averred that one of the basic social needs is health, which is significant in agricultural production and quality of life of rural household dwellers, especially women. However, it has been established that women's death caused by childbirth, unsafe abortion process and pregnancy complications are threat to agricultural development as it reduces labour in the agricultural sector. It also affects development of the economy, food and nutrition security, as well as child and elderly care in the household (Adeleke, 2018).

When individuals can control their choices about reproduction health, they will be able to participate in education, labour force, care for their families and have more capacity to contribute to community and social life. Meanwhile, many socio-cultural barriers contribute to the imbalance in the availability of reproductive health services among families such as inadequate health services, insufficient health personnel, poverty, male partner opposition, lack of awareness and proper information (Abdulraheem, Oladipupo and Amodu, 2012). Access to information is germane to the use of reproductive health services. A better informed woman is likely to make appropriate decisions about place of delivery, pregnancy emergencies and so on but many developing countries have women with poor education which is more prevalent in rural communities (Adeleke, 2018).

One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to achieve reduction in maternal and infant mortality by the year 2030 which can only be possible when women and couples are well informed about measures to be taken in ensuring healthy living in every facet of their lives like family planning, information and education. This can be achieved through the use of mass media.

Mass media has been found useful in discharging useful information in diverse areas of human's life. It creates awareness and diffusion of information to the society. One of the examples of mass media is the print media in which newspapers has played a crucial role over the past decades. This is because newspapers can be read at one's convenience and more than once which is key in acquiring better

understanding of the contents being read thereby achieving behavioural change (Omitoyin, Adegoke, Olajide and Badiru, 2018).

Bales (2013) opined that government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other agencies have overtime used media as its mouthpiece for persuading the citizenry, health reformer that has power of bringing buried topics to the spotlight and bring public health to the policy agenda. Mass media is a very important communication outlet and has been found to play a greater role in the process of positive change. This assertion was supported by Van den Ban and Hawkins (2011) that mass media does this in variety of ways including setting agenda for important discussion, topics, transferring knowledge, changing opinions and behaviour. Newspaper also helps the process of information exchange for those searching for information and also supports new behaviours (Fawole and Olajide, 2012).

Policy makers and other stakeholders need to obtain considerable amount of information on reproductive health to make informed decisions which the media can provide. The media as instruments of mobilization, awareness creation and information exchange play important roles in reviewing performance, identifying problems and assessing successes towards achieving holistic coverage of rural reproductive health issues. To measure media performance in this regard requires an empirical study. Naturally, most newspaper organizations tend to favour articles of stories that will definitely increase the profit and readability; issues such as entertainment news, politics tend to attract more audience or readership because publishing organizations are profit oriented, which could lead to the relegation of reproductive health news to the background (Ogundola, 2016). Maternal mortality rates could be reduced if proper information is channelled through several mass media outlets in which newspaper is one. This is why this study is designed to analyse in-depth coverage of reproductive health issues in the selected Nigerian newspapers.

The general objective of this study was to investigate the coverage of reproductive health issues in Nigerian newspaper. The specific objectives were to:

1. determine the reproductive health issues content categories that were reported;
2. identify the sources quoted in the reported reproductive health issues;

3. ascertain the space allotted to reproductive health issues and
4. ascertain the placement given to reproductive health issues in the Nigerian newspaper.

## METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was adopted for this study. All the newspaper in circulation were the population for this study. However, three national daily newspapers namely the Punch, Vanguard and The Nation were purposively selected due to their rating based on readership and influence attributed to national newspaper (Media Reach OMD Nigeria, 2014).

The coverage of reproductive health information by the media is not certain though there are indications that such news is routinely reported in the newspapers. Therefore, the time frame for this study was from January 1st, 2017 to December 31st, 2018.

For the purpose of this study, three widely read newspaper were selected for the purpose of data collection and analysis in this study. Newspapers articles for this study were gathered from Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan (research library data base) using key words “reproductive health issues”. Articles that were selected for the research include; news articles, feature article and culled article.

Purposive sampling was used to pick one weekend (Saturday and Sunday) and one weekday for each newspaper depending on when they report reproductive health issues within the selected time frame. This is justifiable due to scantiness in reporting reproductive health issues.

A total of 149 articles drawn from 260 editions of the three papers constituted the population of this study. Thirty-six articles and stories on reproductive issues were obtained from The Nation, while 55 and 58 articles were obtained from Vanguard and Punch, respectively.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and mean) and inferential statistics; ANOVA were used to describe and test the hypothesis of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Reproductive health issues reported in the newspapers

Results in Table 1 shows the content categories that were reported by the three newspapers within the study time frame and they were maternal health news (42.3%), sex education (38.9%), issues on ovarian cancer (10.1%), and sexually transmitted diseases (8.71%). Content category with the highest frequency is maternal health news (42.3%) followed by sex education (38.9%). This implies that the enlightenment on maternal health will

reduce maternal and child mortality which is one of the goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also, sex education especially for children and teenagers is gradually gaining ground which is expected to increase parents' awareness on the essence of educating children about sex at an early age. This will in turn reduce sexual abuse and violence that is rampant in our society. This corroborates the report of Ram, Andajani and Mohammadnezhad (2020) that exposure of parents to proper information on sex education and reproductive health is central to curbing sexual violence.

**Table 1: Distribution of reproductive health issues reported in the Dailies**

Type of news	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Maternal health	63	42.3
Sex education	58	38.9
Issues on ovarian cancer	15	10.1
Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)	13	8.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Newspaper Content Analysis, 2019

### Sources of information quoted in the reported stories

Table 2 reveals that 50.3%, 26.2% and 10.1% of reproductive health experts, news reporters and residents or victims of a reported situation gave information to the media on reproductive health issues, respectively. Religious leaders (6.7%), government officials (2.7%) and Non-

Governmental Organisation (NGOs) (4.0%) gave least information on reproductive health news. This implies that most sources of information on reproductive health news were from health source which is more suitable, reliable and authoritative than non-health source. This is in consonance with Orhewere, 2010 and Alade, 2012 that information from health expert and personnel tends to be more reliable and accurate.

**Table 2: Distribution of sources of information on reproductive health in Nigeria's dailies**

Sources of information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
News reporters	39	26.2
Reproductive health experts	75	50.3
Residents/victims	15	10.1
Religious leaders	10	6.7
Government officials	4	2.7
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	6	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Newspaper Content Analysis, 2019

### Space allotted to the Stories

Table 3 shows the frequency of space allotted to reproductive health issues in the three newspapers. The result shows that 40.3% was within 68 – 746sq.cm and 36.9% of the spaces allotted to reproductive health issues was within 747 – 1425sq.cm. It was observed that as the spaces of reproductive health news was increasing, the frequency was reducing which suggest that a small

amount of space was frequently allotted for reproductive health news which may be due to more spaces occupied by other news like politics and entertainment. This is in consonance with Adesoye (2015) who identified space constraints as one of the reasons for poor reportage of crucial issues that is of health benefits to the populace. Omitoyin, *et al*, (2018) affirmed that if more space is allotted to issues, more information will be revealed to the public.

**Table 3: Distribution of reproductive health issues based on space allotted in the dailies**

Space allotted (sq.cm)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
68-746	60	40.3
747-1425	55	36.9
1426-2104	23	15.4
2105-2783	6	4.0
2784-3462	3	2.0
3463-4141	2	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Newspaper Content Analysis, 2019

**Placement of reproductive health issues in the newspapers**

Table 4 presents the placement of reproductive health issues in Nigerian newspapers. Majority of the articles were not given adequate prominence required. The largest proportion (80.5%) of the news was on other pages, 16.8% were on the middle page, 1.3% at both the back page and front page. Ofuoku and Agumagu (2013) reported that

the front page is used to present readers with important, attractive, eye catching and major headlines of news. It is established that Nigeria’s newspapers normally report around issues like sports, entertainment and politics which will generate more revenue for the newspaper industry (Olajide and Fawole, 2014). Emphasis should also be placed on reproductive health issues so as to birth a healthy nation.

**Table 4: Distribution of reproductive health issues based on placement of articles in the newspapers**

Placement	Frequency	Percentage
Front page	2	1.3
Back page	2	1.3
Middle page	25	16.8
Other pages	120	80.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Newspaper Content Analysis, 2019

**Test of difference in the spaces allotted to reproductive health issues across newspapers.**

Result on Table 5 reveals that there was significant difference in the spaces allotted to reproductive health issues across newspapers (F= 3.041, p= 0.001). This implies that editors of newspapers did not allot the same space for reproductive health news. This may suggest that the allotment of spaces for report is determined by the editor of each

newspaper and not just on the availability of information. The Post hoc analysis shows that the Vanguard newspaper has mean score of 1095.24 which is statistically greater than the mean scores of Punch and Vanguard which are 1067.31 and 766.08, respectively. This result indicates that the Vanguard newspaper allotted more space to articles on reproductive health news than the Nation and Punch.

**Table 5: Test of difference in the spaces allotted to reproductive health issues across newspapers**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	2727951.04	2	1363975.52	3.041	0.05	Significant
Within Groups	65495045.72	146	448596.20			
Total	68222996.76	148				

Source: Newspaper Content Analysis, 2019

**Table 6: Post hoc of space allotted to reproductive health issues across newspapers**

Newspaper	df	Subset for alpha = 0.05
Nation	36	766.08
Punch	58	1067.31
Vanguard	55	1095.24

Source: Newspaper Content Analysis, 2019

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that sex education and maternal health news were more covered among other reproductive health news, although with low prominence given to them by the media in the Nigeria dailies. This is establishing the fact that information on reproductive health in Nigerian newspapers is not sufficient to keep readers informed of important health issues that is germane to their wellbeing. Also, reproductive health issues may gain low public awareness and policy formulation due to low reportage by Nigerian newspaper.

The Nigerian newspaper editors should improve the coverage of reporting sensitive issues like reproductive health issues in strategic pages such as the front page to attract the attention of the public. The total space allotted to reproductive health issues need to be increased especially by editors of the Nation and the Punch newspapers so as to enhance visibility and effective communication with the public and various stakeholders.

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