



NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF RAPE CASES IN NIGERIA: STUDY OF FOUR NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

By

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Abstract

Rape is a non-consensual sexual acts, a serious violation of consent and a criminal offense under Nigerian law. This pervasive issue has developed into a national crisis, encompassing not only physical but also sexual assault. Within the realm of crime communication, the media shoulders the responsibility of consistently reporting and depicting instances of moral decadence, rape, with the aim of preventing future occurrences. This study explores the nuances of how selected newspapers in Nigeria cover rape cases, employing the theoretical frameworks of Agenda Setting and Gate-Keeping. A content analysis was conducted on 313 editions of prominent Nigerian newspapers, namely the Punch, the Guardian, The Nation, and the Sun. The data reveal that straight news predominated over other forms of reporting. The majority of stories found placement on inside pages rather than the front pages. In terms of tone, a significant proportion of the stories carried a positive slant, with a substantial number attributing the incidents to the Nigerian Police Force. In light of these findings, this study recommends that newspaper organizations should amplify their coverage of rape cases. The media should ensure the conduct of deeper investigation into each rape case. Also, they should pay more attention to facilitating a better understanding and follow-up the case. Prominence should be given to rape cases to foster awareness and encourage proactive measures against this societal scourge.

Keywords: Coverage, newspaper, rape cases, victims, society

Introduction

Rape remains a deeply rooted problem within African society, particularly in Nigeria. Rape, as described by Onyejekwe (2008), is a type of violent crime against women in which the perpetrator employs sexuality as a tool to either demean the victim or establish a sense of power and supremacy over them. In the context of this crime, the assailant deploys sexual force with the intent of either humiliating the victim or asserting control and influence over them. In the same vein Okoro and Onyebuchi (2020) view rape as a pervasive issue affecting numerous individuals, standing out as one of the most emotionally devastating experiences with severe repercussions for victims and their families. It is widely recognized that this form of trauma is profoundly distressing and often leads to enduring health consequences (Ugwuanyi, Njeze, & Ogbozor, 2021). Rape continues to be a troubling issue in Nigeria and many other parts of Africa (Achunike & Kitause, 2014). Similar to other unreported crimes, instances of rape frequently go unreported to formal social control organizations in Nigeria (Tade & Udechukwu, 2020). This can be attributed in part to a lack of trust, the social stigma that victims do not want to experience, fears of experiencing further victimization, cultural challenges, religious factors, and the limited capacity of victims to pursue legal recourse. Rapes within contemporary Nigeria are undoubtedly distressing for the country, affecting areas such as intellect, law, faith, healthcare, and politics. The prevalence of rape seems to be growing and extending throughout Nigerian society, resembling the spread of a destructive force (Nwammuo, 2015; Ekweonu, 2020; Oluwaleye & Adefisoye, 2021). The traumatic ordeals these victims undergo are frequently documented in national publications, affecting people of various age groups.

Regrettably, incidents of rape in Nigerian society are increasing at an alarming rate. This concerning trend highlights the critical need for comprehensive steps to address and battle this issue, safeguarding the safety and well-being of individuals in wider society. Okafor-Udah (2015) illustrated this disheartening reality, encompassing cases where teachers sexual intercourse with students, religious leaders exploit their followers, and even thieves subject individuals to sexual assault. This extends to scenarios where a man abuses his spouse's sister or daughter, employers assault housekeepers, security personnel target their employer's wife, superiors prey on subordinates, fathers victimize their daughters, young men assault their grandmothers, minors commit such acts against their peers, and traditional rulers exploit their subjects. This portrayed

the harsh and audacious nature of the issue. Chiazor, Ozoya, Udume, and Egharevba (2016) assert that rape is a grave manifestation of violence directed specifically toward women. It involves a violation of their fundamental rights, intrusion into their privacy, disruption of their ability to protect themselves, and a profound assault on their inherent dignity as human beings. In line with Tade and Udechukwu's (2020) view, rape has evolved into a persistent social issue in Nigeria, characterized by unlawful sexual activity targeting girls and women. Scholars have conducted empirical research on this issue of rape, delving into the shortcomings of laws designed to safeguard females from such acts in Nigeria (Onyejwe, 2008; Sam, Abraham & Stella, 2021). Also, incidents of this unlawful act of rape have been documented in several Nigerian Newspapers.

Newspaper coverage of rape in Nigeria plays a crucial role in shaping public awareness, attitudes, and responses to this critical issue. The media maintains a significant role in monitoring rape cases in Nigeria by prominently featuring instances of rape in their news coverage. When they report on rape incidents, they transform the personal ordeal of a victim into a matter of public concern, provoking responses from both official and unofficial entities within society. This means that rape is not merely presented as a criminal act or social issue; it also becomes a subject that prompts discussions about the prevailing state of morality, urging people to become more morally conscious and vigilant.

The way rape cases are reported can impact society in several ways. Responsible and sensitive reporting can help raise awareness about the prevalence of rape, educate the public on consent and legal aspects, and encourage victims to seek justice. However, sensationalism or inappropriate reporting can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, violate victims' privacy, and potentially hinder their willingness to report such incidents. The media's role in accurately portraying facts, respecting victims' dignity, and fostering discussions on preventive measures and support systems is pivotal in addressing and combating rape in Nigeria. The problem under consideration revolves around the newspaper coverage of rape cases in Nigeria and raises the question of whether media professionals are effectively fulfilling their role as advocates for the marginalized and vulnerable by giving voice to the voiceless victims of rape through their coverage and representation of these cases.

Statement of the Problem

Rape is a criminal act involving non-consensual sexual intercourse, violating an individual's autonomy and causing profound physical and emotional harm. Tade and Udechukwu (2020) declared that the prevalence of female rape in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and Nigeria newspaper can significantly contribute to raising awareness about the issue by constantly publishing the stories and giving them prominence. However, Bigman, Umor, Amagala and Soibelemari (2021) stated that many rape cases do not seem to be featured in newspaper headlines. The lack of rape cases stories on Nigeria newspaper as a result of stigmatization many contribute to the reoccurrences of rape in Nigeria. Therefore, this study attempts to evaluate the nature, prominence, space allocated, direction, and importance attached to rape cases in selected newspapers in Nigeria from August 2022 to July 2023.

The Objective of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the reporting of rape cases in Nigeria by selected Newspaper in Nigeria (The Punch, The Guardian, The Nation, and The Sun Newspapers). The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the nature of analysis commonly employed for reporting rape cases in Nigerian newspapers.
2. Evaluate the level of prominence dedicated to rape cases in Nigerian newspapers.
3. Examine the space allocated for rape cases in Nigerian newspapers Nigeria.
4. Identify the direction of rape cases in Nigerian newspapers.
5. To find out the importance attributed to rape cases in Nigerian newspapers.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of analysis commonly used for reporting rape cases in the selected Nigerian newspapers?
2. What is the level of prominence dedicated to rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?
3. What is the space allocated for rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?
4. In what direction are rapes cases tend to be portrayed in Nigerian newspapers?

5. What are the important attached to rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?

Conceptual Review of Rape Cases

Rape remains a pressing concern in Nigeria, with numerous cases reported across the nation. According to Adamu (2020), the Nigeria Police recorded about 717 rape incidents across the country within first 5 months of the year. In Punch 2020, Dame Pauline Tallen, the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, reported that during the lockdown, there were at least 3,600 recorded cases of rape in Nigeria. Amnesty International (2021) declared that there have been numerous cases of sexual violence and 11,200 rape cases were documented in Nigeria between March 2020 and August 2021. They added that the reluctance of Nigerian government to address rape and other sexual assault based on gender aggravate the situation and empower those indirectly empowers rapists. Also, from April to June 2023, Lagos State police documents 111 sexual assault cases (Hundeyin, 2023). Kano state also documented 14 rape incidents and 67 sexual violence in three months (Shuaibu in Daily Trust, February, 2023).

Rape (sexual assault) is a global social, health and human rights crisis and Nigeria is not excluded from it. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, and one potent tool in the fight against rape is the power of media advocacy. Tade and Udechukwu (2015) affirmed that newspapers across Nigeria can start campaigns emphasizing how crucial it is for them to be recognised as tools for raising awareness, fostering a culture of consent, and advocating for changes in laws that will eventually put an end to rape cases. Newspapers can effectively increase public awareness about the severe repercussions of rape due to their huge readership. Newspapers may inform readers on the physical, emotional, and psychological damage faced by victims by publishing well-researched articles, opinion pieces, and feature stories. Newspapers may be used as a channel to encourage people to speak out against rape and seek assistance when necessary by featuring victim accounts and disseminating details about the resources that are available (Akinwole & Omoera, 20130).

Nigerian media should be involved in campaigns that against bad attitudes and behaviours of having sexual intercourse with another person without his/her consent. Articles and editorials that discuss mutual respect, boundaries, and affirmative permission might help change the way society

views relationships and interactions. Newspapers also have the power to change public perception and exert pressure on decision-makers to enact reforms. Iyengar and Kinder (1987: 114) cited by Nwabueze and Oduah's (2015) affirmed that newspapers can actively promote reforms to the relevant laws to ensure that victims of rape receive the justice they are entitled to by drawing attention to legislative flaws, injustices, and loopholes, newspapers can help establish more effective and victim-friendly legal systems.

Causes of Rape in Nigeria Society

Various factors influencing occurrences of rape occurs in Nigeria have been identified in the literature. Some of these factors have a lot to do with the social, cultural, and economic factors. Highlighted below are some factors that can reinforce negative gender stereotypes.

- I. **Gender Inequality and Power Imbalance:** Deep-seated gender inequalities and power imbalances contribute to the prevalence of rape. In a society where women's rights and autonomy are not fully recognized, perpetrators may exploit their position of power to commit sexual violence, (Uwazurike & Emenyonu, 2019).
- II. **Lack of Comprehensive Sex Education:** Insufficient sex education can lead to misunderstandings about consent, boundaries, and respectful relationships, contributing to the perpetration of sexual violence, (Olalekan & Sule, 2019).
- III. **Cultural Norms and Attitudes:** Some cultural beliefs and norms may contribute to the normalization of rape or victim-blaming. Traditional attitudes that prioritize men's dominance and objectify women can create an environment conducive to sexual violence. (Iliyasu et al., 2013).
- IV. **Poverty and Economic Factors:** Socioeconomic disparities can create conditions where individuals resort to crime, including rape, as a means of exerting control or seeking power.
- V. **Weak Law Enforcement and Justice System:** Inadequate law enforcement and a slow judicial process can discourage survivors from reporting rape or pursuing justice, enabling perpetrators to evade punishment (Uwazurike & Emenyonu, 2019).

- VI. **Social Stigma and Fear of Reporting:** Survivors often face social stigma and fear retaliation if they report rape. This fear of consequences may deter individuals from seeking help or justice.
- VII. **Conflict and Instability:** In regions affected by conflict and instability, rape may be used as a weapon of war or a means of asserting power over vulnerable populations (Uwazurike & Emenyonu, 2019).
- VIII. **Alcohol and Substance Abuse:** The misuse of alcohol and drugs can impair judgment and increase the likelihood of perpetrating sexual violence.

The Effect of Rape on Victims

Globally and in Nigeria even worldwide, rape victims experience a wide range of physical, psychological, and social stigma that are extremely upsetting (Oluwaleye & Adefisoye, 2021: p. 12). Victims frequently struggle with severe psychological trauma, leading to disorders including anxiety, depression, and post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that may have a substantial negative impact on their mental health (Olley et al., 2006). The psychological fallout from rape can be severe, disrupting everyday operation and causing distracting ideas, recurrent nightmares, and elevated hyperarousal. The effect on society is also quite alarming. Cultural beliefs and stigmatisation of rape increase social isolation, which exacerbates the pain of victims and keeps them from getting assistance or reporting the crime (Resick, 1987; Campbell, 2008). The sentimental attachment and shame associated with this stigma often result in even greater mental anguish. Also, while survivors battle feelings of trauma and trusting concerns, their capacity to connect with relatives and close friends may be compromised, thus impacting interpersonal connections. Also, survivors may have gynecological issues, persistent discomfort, and sexual dysfunction, (Jibrin and Mohammed 2016). These physical repercussions might complicate matters for victims by interfering with their attempts to pursue careers and further their education.

Empirical Review

In 2020, Okoro and Onyebuchi (2020) conducted a study titled "Giving Insufficient Priority to Violation: Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Rape Cases in Nigeria (July 2018 to July 2020)." The study aimed to assess the frequency, prominence, and depth of coverage of rape cases. They

analyzed 42 news stories from four national newspapers: Daily Sun, The Punch, The Guardian, and The Blue Print. The findings indicated that 80% of the articles displayed a favorable tone when reporting on rape cases, yet these cases were given limited importance by being placed exclusively within the newspaper pages. The study concluded that media coverage of rape cases is generally negative, with 80% of such stories relegated to inside pages. Furthermore, over 85% of these stories occupied a scant 1 to 5 inches of space, indicating a lack of depth.

Another study was conducted by Sam, Abraham, and Stella (2021) on "Newspaper reportage of rape cases in Nigeria: Influence of Covid-19 associated lockdown." This research focused on how rape is portrayed in Nigerian print media, analyzing The Nation, The Guardian, and Daily Trust newspapers. Their comprehensive analysis covered January to September 2020, revealing a total of 478 reported rape cases across these newspapers. Notably, June 2020 had a significant surge with 130 reported cases. The study also highlighted teenage rape cases, showing The Nation reporting 41%, Daily Trust 34%, and The Guardian 25% of the cases. Additionally, these newspapers collectively documented 23 fatalities resulting from rape incidents.

Tade and Udechukwu (2018) researched the issue of a 65-year-old man who sexually assaulted and impregnated her daughter. Two Nigerian newspapers named: The Punch and the Sun were analyzed. The researchers were motivated by the substantial attention given to rape cases during the study, as instances of media reporting were rare. They explained that rape continues to be vastly underreported, with the two selected newspapers collectively recording only 331 cases between 2012 and 2016. It was uncovered that factors such as social stigma, fear of perpetrators, religious convictions, family ties, and limited access to law enforcement, and media representatives contributed to the scarcity of reported cases and media attention surrounding rape incidents. Among the regions studied, the southwestern part of the country exhibited the most comprehensive coverage compared to the remaining six regions.

Nwammuo (2015) carried out a study on "The Views of Women on Press Coverage of Rape Cases in Nigeria: A Misrepresentation or an Under-representation?" The qualitative research explores Nigerian elite women's perception of press coverage of rape cases, using focus group discussions. Participants found that the coverage is "under-representation" rather than

"misrepresentation," as newspapers often minimally feature rape cases and place them inconspicuously within the publication.

Ekweonu (2020) carried out research on "Newspaper coverage of domestic violence against women during COVID-19 Lockdown." The researcher examined Nigerian newspapers' coverage of domestic violence against women from March 23rd to June 2020. Content analysis was deployed and the research revealed that newspapers did not adequately highlight or cover domestic violence against women during the lockdown, and they rarely followed up on their stories within the same period. Primary sources of interventions for victims were identified, and the paper's coverage of rising cases was assessed.

Also, Awobamise, Jarrar, and Nnauufe (2019) conducted a mixed-method study titled "Social Media, sexual harassment, and rape discourse in Nigeria: An exploratory study." The research delves into social media content concerning rape and the subsequent reactions within the online community. Employing Twitter data mapping, content analysis, and in-depth interviews, the study investigates how individuals respond to instances of rape. Notably, findings reveal that Instagram users tend to exhibit sympathy for rape victims, with an inclination towards victim-blaming when the victim surpasses 18 years of age and the alleged perpetrator possesses celebrity status. Furthermore, the research underscores the pivotal role of social media platforms in nurturing discussions surrounding rape in Nigeria. Survivors utilize these platforms as a medium to share their personal stories, raise awareness about sexual abuse, and cultivate a meaningful discourse concerning this critical societal concern.

Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori (2016) carried out another "Newspaper framing of gender-based (domestic) violence of women on men". The researchers examined 22 articles sourced from the Daily Nation and the Nairobi weekly, addressing gender-based domestic violence in Nyeri County. The Nairobi adopted a sensationalistic approach characterized by vivid language and visuals, while the Daily Nation adopted a more conservative reporting style. The study unveiled a prevailing negative tone across the majority of articles, frequently portraying Nyeri women as angry, violent, and menacing, while depicting men as alcohol-dependent and vulnerable victims. Employing critical discourse analysis, the study delved into emerging themes within the content.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning for this was based on the basic assumptions of ASgenda-Setting and Gate-Keeping

Agenda-Setting

Agenda Setting Theory, formulated between 1972 and 1973 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw was adopted for this study. The theory posits that although the media might not successfully dictate to their readers, they do shape their audience thinking in specific ways as suggested by McQuail (2008) cited by Pate (2012). Newspapers' coverage of rape cases influences people's perceptions and thoughts. The media's choice of language, framing, emphasis on certain aspects and portrayal of the people involved can shape Nigerian's understanding and opinions about rape cases. This can impact attitudes of Nigerians toward the victims, the perpetrators, and the overall issue of sexual assault.

Nwabueze (2014: p.44) established that “The media determine what the public discuss and think about”. This aligns with previous claims from numerous communication scholars, contending that the essence of agenda-setting theory lies in the media's ability to shape not what their audience thinks, but what topics occupy their thoughts. The media's responsibility extends to influencing much of the imagery readers and listeners possess. Gever (2013: 2) citing Folarin (1998: 68) added that the theory of agenda-setting proposes that the media plays a role in shaping what topics deserve attention, and readers become aware of specific matters through the details presented in news articles and how their placement on the newspapers. Newspapers can influence the importance of issues through different methods, such as the frequency of coverage, how prominently they are featured, the way headlines are presented, the use of images, the overall layout, and the timing of publication. They also take into account the urgency conveyed in the reports and the cumulative impact of media coverage over time. In their role as agenda setters, newspapers regularly expose their audience to events deemed significant by the media (Odunlami, 2019: 8 who cited Fourie, 2007: 244).

In the same vein, Karin and Thomas (2009) citing Lippmann (1922) underscores the idea that media messages play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and understanding of rape cases. Lippmann's quote, "Media messages influence the pictures in our heads," suggests that

the way rape cases are portrayed in newspapers can influence how readers perceive and interpret such incidents. This could impact public opinion, attitudes, and even policies related to addressing and preventing sexual assault. How newspapers showcase rape cases and where they choose to feature them has a significant impact on the intended perception of the readers. By strategically bringing out these cases and giving them specific prominence, media professionals shape the way their audience perceives the importance of these issues. Through consistent and frequent coverage of rape incidents in Nigeria, media personnel construct a mental image of the most significant concerns within the minds of their readers.

Gate Keeping Theory

This theory was propounded by Kurt Lewin in 1947. The notion of gate-keeping theory in the context of media involves the idea that media men often referred to as "gatekeepers," play a significant role in determining what messages, news, or information get published and where they are placed within the media landscape. Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, and Wrightley (2001:233) described gatekeeping as the process by which the extensive range of potential news are shifted, shaped, and prodded into the those few that are actually transmitted by the news media. Anaeto, Onabanjo, and Osifeso (2012:91) media houses and media expects act as gatekeepers to the influx of information from the broader society. They further explain that media professional can open or close to allow some kinds of information for processing and publication, or closed to prevent other kinds of information the chance for processing and publication. These gatekeepers, including editors, journalists, and media organizations, play a crucial role in shaping the narrative, influencing public opinion, and impacting societal perceptions of rape cases. Media professionals also play a pivotal role in determining how stories about rape incidents are presented to the public, making critical decisions about where they appear within the newspaper or media platform. These decisions collectively shape the level of attention, impact, and visibility of these stories in the media landscape.

Methods

The research study adopted a descriptive as research design and content analysis was employed to analysis data gathered. Content analysis according to Kerlinger (2000) cited by Wimmer and

Dominick (2013: p.156) entails a systematic, objective, and quantitative approach to examine and analyze communication contents, and to measure variables. Content analysis stands as a highly effective approach for elucidating and carrying out communication research studies. It is employed to analyze media content, aiming to determine the status and attributes of specific phenomena.

The study's population includes all editions of four newspapers (The Punch, The Guardian, The Nation, and the Sun) from August 2022 to July 2023. To determine the population, the days of each month were multiplied by four newspapers, resulting in 1460 editions (365 days x 4 newspapers). Therefore, 1460 editions were considered as the population for the study.

For the sample size: Taro Yamane formula was used to reduce the number of editions sampled for this study. Taro Yamane Formula: $n = \text{Sample size}$, $N = \text{Population size}$, $I = \text{Constant}$, $e = \text{sampling error (level of tolerate error)}$.

$$n = \frac{N}{I+N \times (e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N \times (e)^2}, = \frac{1460}{1+1460(0.05)^2}, n = \frac{1460}{1+1460(0.0025)}, n = \frac{1460}{1+3.65}, n = \frac{1460}{4.65}, n = 313. \text{ Therefore, Sample Size} = 313$$

Through the application of a purposive sampling technique, 313 editions were purposively selected for this study because is it impossible to study all the 1460 editions. This method provides the researcher with excellent opportunities to derive reliable findings, facilitating the drawing of useful generation.

Units of Analysis

Nature of the stories: This refers to various forms in which rape stories are presented, including straight news, editorials, features, opinion/commentary pieces, cartoons/pictures, and letters to the editor.

Placement: This category encompasses rape-related stories featured across various sections, such as: the front, back, inside, and center spread pages of the newspapers being analyzed.

Space Allocated: This measure the space allocated for each rape cases stories on newspaper such as full page, half a page, and quarter page.

Direction: This is to determining whether the tone of rape cases content is negative, positive, or neutral.

Attributes (Important attached): This parameter assesses the sources attached to each stories (police, courts, parent of the victim, victims, eyewitnesses, and journalists).

Data Presentation and Interpretation

Therefore, the results were presented base on the research questions.

Question One: What is the nature of analysis commonly used for reporting rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?

Table 1
Nature of Stories

Newspapers	News	Editorial	Opinions/ commentary	Interview	Pictorial	Total	%
The Punch	69	0	2	4	14	89	47.6
The Guardian	34	1	4	30	8	47	25.1
The Nation	19	1	2	1	0	23	12.5
The Sun	22	2	1	0	3	28	15.0
Total	144	4	9	5	25	187	
Percentage	77.0	2.1	4.8	2.7	13.4		100

The table (Table 1) illustrates that a total of 187 different types of analyses were employed to report rape cases across The Punch, The Guardian, The Nation, and The Sun newspapers during the study period. The Punch newspaper published 89 analyses accounting for 47.6%; while The Guardian Newspaper used 47 constituting 25.1%. The Nation Newspaper did 23 analyses which represent 12.3%, and The Sun Newspaper used 25 analyses representing 15.0%.

In total, there were 144 news stories which represent 77.0%; 4 editorials which constituted 2.1%, 9 opinions/commentaries accounting for 4.8%; 5 interviews which represent 2.7%; and 25 pictures

representing 13.4%. This study reveals that the content lacked editorials, interviews, and featured only a few pictures of the criminals. The majority of the content consisted of news stories.

Question Two: What is the level of prominence dedicated to rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?

Table 2
Prominence of Stories

Newspaper	Front Page	Inside Page	Centre Page	Back Page	TOTAL
The Punch	3	86	0	0	87
The Guardian	4	43	0	0	43
The Nation	0	23	0	0	23
The Sun	0	27	1	0	28
Total	7	179	1	0	187
Percentage	3.7	95.7	0.6	0	100

The data in Table 2 above illustrates the prominence given to stories about rape cases in Nigerian national newspapers. The highest coverage, with 179 stories (representing 95.7%), was on inside pages. Front-page placement was limited to 7 stories (3.7%), and only 1 story (0.6%) was featured in the center, with none appearing on the back pages. Consequently, it can be concluded that the four newspapers do not provide adequate prominence to rape cases, as the majority of these stories are relegated to inside pages and lack front-page exposure.

Question Three: What is the space allocated for rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?

Table 3

Space Allocated of Stories

Newspaper	Quarter page	Half page	Full page	Total
The Punch	71	15	3	89
The Guardian	25	22	0	47
The Nation	17	4	2	23
The Sun	23	3	2	28
Total	136	44	7	187
Percentage	72.7	23.5	3.8	100

Based on the data above, the results indicate that out of 187 stories, 136 stories, accounting for 72.7%, were published on quarter pages, 44 stories, representing 23.5%, were published on half pages, and 7 stories, making up 3.8%, were published on full pages. Consequently, the highest amount of space allocated to rape cases in the selected newspapers was on quarter pages, followed by half pages, with full pages having the lowest representation.

Question Four: In what direction do rape cases tend to be portrayed in Nigerian newspapers?

Table 4

Direction of Stories

Newspaper	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
The Punch	81	5	3	89
The Guardian	43	1	3	47
The Nation	20	1	2	23
The Sun	28	0	0	28
Total	172	7	8	187
Percentage	92.0	3.7	4.3	100

Table 4 presents the direction of newspaper reportage on rape cases in Nigeria. It is evident that out of 187 stories, 172 stories which represent 92.0% were presented in a positive light, 7 stories which represent 3.7% were negative, and 8 stories which represent 4.3% were neutrally reported. The findings indicate that positive stories received the highest rating, followed by neutral stories, with negative stories being the lowest. Consequently, the majority of the stories were reported positively.

Question Five: What are the important attached to rape cases in Nigerian newspapers?

Table 5

Importance Attached to the Stories.

Newspapers	Police	Court	Parent of the victims	Victims	Eyewitness	Journalists	Total
The Punch	34	36	4	7	1	6	86
The Guardian	20	15	2	0	2	8	47
The Nation	17	2	1	1	0	2	23
The Sun	21	5	0	0	0	2	28
Total	92	58	7	8	3	19	187
Percentage	49.2	31.0	3.7	4.3	1.6	10.2	100

Table 5 sheds light on the significance attributed to rape cases as reported by The Punch, The Guardian, The Nation, and the Sun newspapers. A total of 187 stories were utilized across the four selected newspapers with 92 stories constituting 49.2% were from the Nigeria police. Additionally, 58 stories representing 31.0% were attributed to Nigeria court, while 7 stories which represent 3.7% were provided by parents of the victims, only 8 victims of rape which represent 4.3% were interview, 3 stories which represent 1.6% were from eyewitnesses, while 19 stories which

represent 10.2% was attributed to journalists. The findings of this study demonstrate that the majority of the stories were attributed to Nigerian Police.

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of the first research question was to determine the most common form of analysis used in reporting rape cases in Nigerian newspapers. Table 1 presents the results, revealing that 144 news stories constituting 77.0% were the dominant content type. There were also 4 editorials comprising 2.1%, 9 opinions/commentaries rated at 4.8%, 5 interviews rated at 2.7%, and 25 pictures rated at 13.4%. This study concludes that the content was primarily composed of news stories, with a noticeable absence of editorials, interviews, and only a few pictures were used. According to Nwabueze and Oduah's (2015) research, the majority of Nigerian newspapers cover rape cases as straight news. Consequently, there is a lack of investigative and in-depth stories such as feature story, follow-up stories, comments and interviews. Similar trends were noted by Adaja, Talabi, and Ogundeji (2017), they stated that the majority of rape incidents in Nigerian publications were reported as straight news. This emphasis on straight news stories highlights the harm caused by such behaviors to society.

Research question two aimed to assess the prominence given to rape case reports. The findings indicate that the majority of the coverage, with 179 stories which represent 95.7%, was featured on inside pages. Only 7 stories which represent 3.7% made it to the front page, and 1 story which represents 0.6% was positioned in the center, while none story appeared on the back pages. Consequently, it is evident that the four newspapers do not give prominence to rape cases, as most of these stories are relegated to inside pages and lack front-page exposure. This discovery aligns with the conclusions drawn by other researchers. In 2017, Adaja, Talabi, and Ogundeji (2017) stated that the Nigerian national newspapers analysed did not provide sufficient coverage or prominence to rape cases.

Moreover, Nwabueze and Oduah's (2015) findings also highlighted the lack of prominence given to rape case stories in newspapers. It suggests that the newspapers studied in this research failed to effectively set an agenda for addressing the increasing cases of rape in Nigeria. Setting an agenda in the media requires giving greater prominence to stories related to the issue at hand,

which, as indicated by this study, was notably absent, with most rape case stories confined to the inside pages.

The third research question aimed to determine the depth of coverage of rape cases in the selected newspapers. The results showed that 136 stories accounting for 72.7% were graced quarter pages, while 44 stories representing 23.5% were on half pages. Only 7 stories which represent 3.8% graced the full pages. As a result, the highest space allocation for rape cases in the selected newspapers was on quarter pages, followed by half pages, while full pages had the least representation. The study conducted by Nwala, Daniel, Oyinalayefa, and Oruwari (2021) aligns with the findings of this study. The authors stated that a significant portion of the reported rape stories was confined to quarter pages, containing little or no details. As a result, there was a dearth of in-depth coverage for rape stories throughout the study period.

Research question four sought to uncover the direction of newspaper coverage of rape cases in Nigeria. The findings reveal that 172 stories which represent 92.0% were presented in a positive light, while 7 stories which represent 3.7% were negative, and 8 stories representing 4.3% were reported neutrally. This suggests that the majority of the stories were reported positively, followed by neutral stories, with negative stories being the least prevalent. Onyebuchi and Okoro's (2020) research corroborated with this study, as it uncovers that 80% of the news stories published by the selected Nigerian newspapers offered favorable depictions in the reporting of rape cases. This implies that these news stories actively showcased proactive measures taken to apprehend and prosecute perpetrators. In contrast, Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori (2016) found a contrasting trend, revealing that a prevailing negative tone was evident across the majority of editions they analysed.

The fifth research question aimed to identify the importance (sources) attached to rape case stories in the selected newspapers. The findings indicate that 92 stories which represent 49.2% were from the Nigeria police, while 58 stories which represent 31.0% were attributed to Nigeria court/judge. Parents of the victims reported 7 stories which represent 5.7%, only 8 victims of rape which represent 4.3% were interview, 3 stories which represent 1.6% were from eyewitnesses, while 19 stories which represent 10.2% was attributed to journalists. In summary, the study demonstrates that the police were the primary source for the majority of these stories. Nwala, Daniel, Oyinalayefa, and Oruwari (2021) stated that stories on rape cases predominantly originated from

non-governmental organizations, such as the victims, parents of the victims, eyewitnesses, and journalists. Only 15 cases were reported directly by victims or their parents as sources of the stories. In contrast to this finding, Suntai Dan-Azumi, and Kaigama (2023) finding revealed that the majority of reported rape cases in Nigerian newspapers originated from the victims' family.

Consequently, many victims of rape choose not to report or disclose these incidents. This undoubtedly supports the findings of Okafo (2013), who emphasized that victims of rape often prefer to cope with their trauma privately instead of reporting their ordeals and facing potential stigmatization from the society that should be their support. As a result, many cases of rape and gang rape remain unreported.

Conclusion

The data of this study shows that the incidence of rape in Nigeria is pressing for national concern. The pervasive nature of this issue underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address and combat sexual assault, safeguarding the well-being of individuals within the nation. The surge in rape cases in Nigeria demands urgent attention. Among 313 sampled editions, 187 cases were reported in a year, yet numerous cases went unreported. The media as agenda setter and the Fourth Estate hold pivotal roles in shaping public discourse. The findings reveal a clear trend in how the stories were reported in Nigerian newspapers. Straight news were dominant, overshadowing editorials, interviews, and comment, indicating a limited variety in reporting styles. Additionally, the lack of prominence for the stories is apparent, as most stories are confined to inside pages, while lacking front-page lead and failing to set a media agenda for this critical issue. The space allocated for the stories mainly favored quarter pages, followed by half pages, with full pages receiving the least representation. Despite the generally positive tone in term of arrest and persecution, negative stories were scarce, implying a focus on highlighting proactive measures against perpetrators. The police served as the primary source for the stories. This suggests that the majority of victims and their families are unwilling to speak with the media. Overall, there is need for diverse and prominent coverage because most rape cases were mere straight news. The media should report and investigate rape or gang rape cases in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Journalists should go beyond straight news stories when reporting rape cases. Editorials, interviews, and follow-up stories can offer a more comprehensive understanding of these cases, enriching public awareness.

Newspaper houses should improve on the prominence giving to stories rape cases, particularly on the front page. This can elevate the importance of the issue, fostering public discourse and societal awareness.

Media houses should allocate more space for in-depth coverage of rape cases. This would enable a comprehensive presentation of the stories in details.

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