

Child Rights and the Media: The Nigerian Experience

Rasaq Kayode Awosola * and Osakue Stevenson Omoera **

**Department of Psychology, **Department of Theatre and Media Arts,
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria
E-mail: *rawosola@yahoo.co.uk **omoera@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT The paper investigates the influence of the media, most especially television medium in creating awareness among the public on child rights as well as child survival using Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria as a case study. The local government was delineated into four zones for the purpose of this research and two hundred (200) participants were randomly selected from these zones. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants and these questionnaires were analysed using simple frequency tables and percentages. It was found that television as a medium of communication has been able to raise awareness regarding child rights through its various programmes aired which are geared towards raising awareness on child rights and other issues relating to child development. However, it was found that this awareness does not reflect in the attitude of the residents towards the children in the locality. Based on the findings, recommendations were made on how to improve public attitude with regard to child right, survival and development issues.

INTRODUCTION

Children are regarded as precious gifts from God. It is rather curious and unfortunate that these same children are subjected to abuses and neglect. Universally, childhood is recognised as a period of sensitivity requiring special care, attention and protection. Perhaps it is in recognition of this fact that Thompson (1992) opined that: Children's rights has been a world focus since 1979, when the United Nations designated that year as the International year of the child and developed a list of children's rights. Among the rights suggested are the rights to love and understanding, adequate food and health, free education, play, an identity and special attention of handicapped regardless of colour, sex, religion and national or social origin.

To further concretize global efforts and attention on child development and protection against any form of abuse or mistreatment, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was passed on November 20th 1989 by the United Nations General Assembly. The instrument which is in three (3) parts with fifty four (54) articles opens with a preamble. The preamble states the aims and objectives which the convention seeks to accomplish for the child. It states: Recognising that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

In Africa, the Organisation of Africa Unity (now African Union) at its Heads of State Summit in Addis Ababa in 1990 adopted a Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. The charter which derives from the United Nations Convention takes cognisance of the socio-cultural peculiarities of the African Child. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) notes: That the situation of most African Children, remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger and on account of the child's physical and mental immaturity, he/she needs special safeguards and care.

To further the mobilization of attention on the African Child, Nigeria and the Rights of the Child (1999) reports that: The Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) subsequently proclaimed in Abuja 1991, the 1990s as the "Decade of the Africa Child" and set June 16 of every year as the "Day of the African Child". The documents also reports that every child must be protected against all forms of exploitation, indecent or degrading treatment including child labour, abuse and torture, sexual exploitation, sale, abduction and drug abuse. It goes without saying that every nation who is a signatory to the convention is expected to make concerted effort at protecting children against all forms of abuses, through the enforcement of relevant instruments. Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution

of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for the right of every individual to dignity of his/her person. This section further prohibits "all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and slavery, forced or compulsory labour". In other words, it ensures the child's right to dignity of his/her person. Accordingly, children should not be subjected to any form of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, forced or compulsory labour.

Despite these provisions in the United Nations Convention and the Nigerian Constitution, children in Nigeria suffer cruelty, abuses, inhuman and degrading treatment, child labour and some are forced into prostitution (Itat 1999). These saddening experiences have strong emotional impact on the victim. Often times, abused and neglected children are overwhelmed and shattered. This usually results in emotional imbalance which eventually manifest in delinquency and deviance.

In Nigeria, for instance, youth crime and breeding of street children are direct consequences of child abuse and neglect. But a situation where the government ratifies international conventions it cannot enforce locally is intolerable. A situation where the Child Rights Bill is passed and mere lip-service is paid to its implementation amounts to hypocrisy and apathy as far as issues of child abuse and neglect is concerned. Ademokun (2002) observed that "It is common knowledge that children in Nigeria are bludgeoned into child labour and prostitution by highly placed persons under the guise of philanthropy."

Given these circumstances, the average Nigerian does not seem to be aware of the provisions of the Child Rights Bill needless to say the instruments before it. It is even more worrisome in the light of the fact that most forms of youth violence, unrest, riots are linked with child abuse and neglect.

The media are undoubtedly persuasive instruments in man's struggle for self liberation and development. In line with this, Steinberg (1972) advanced that the mass media select and bring to waiting multitudes a constant flow of detail related to those fruitful dialogues of differences and concordance upon which free societies thrive.

With respect to child rights issue, the media most especially television medium coverage has

been used as weapon of awareness creation. In this regard, The United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have produced "I Need to Know" a drama serial which is shown weekly on most TV stations in Nigeria. In Oredo local government area of Edo State for example, the programme is a regular feature on Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS), Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Independent Television (ITV). It addresses child rights, abuse, and welfare and issues. Similarly, Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), at the instance of Mrs Titi Abubakar the wife of the then Vice President bankrolled the production of "Izozo" a drama serial on national television. This programme which shows weekly (NTA network service) is mainly on child labour and its evils.

These T.V programmes, among many others, combine with a number of print media coverage are geared towards raising awareness on child rights, the evils of child abuse as well as to call on the public to debate these issues. However the degree of this awareness created particularly by the television medium in Oredo local government area is yet to be established. Therefore the study attempts to investigate the extent television has helped in creating awareness on the child rights. It also seeks to find out whether television has helped to improve public attitude as regards child rights, survival and development using Oredo Local government area of Edo state as a case study.

SETTING

The study was carried out in Oredo local government area of Edo state. The local government was divided into four zones; these are Ekenwan/Oliha, Ring road/Government Reserved Area (GRA), Sapele Road/Sakponba Road and New Benin/Urubi all in Benin City. The choice of these zones was based on the fact that they are the most populous area in Oredo local government. The residents of these zones enjoy at least three channels of television station: Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS) and Independent Television (ITV). The residents are sufficiently exposed to programmes that address child rights

and abuse issues such as “IZOZO”, “I Need to Know”, “News line” which are shown weekly on these channels. Besides, the residents of these zones enjoy a relatively regular supply of electricity.

Oredo Local Government is a metropolitan centre that sits the state capital, Benin City. It is the most populous local government in the state with high concentration of educated people. Thus the residents of this local government are sufficiently exposed to these programmes and could give an informed opinion.

Participants: A total number of two hundred (200) respondents participated in the study representing the residents of the four zones of Oredo Local Government. These residents are living in different parts of the local Government with varying demographic variables. One hundred and Eight (108) representing 54% are male; female are ninety two (92) representing 46% of the respondents. 19.5% (39) of respondents fell within the age bracket of 15-20, 12% (24) within 21-25 age bracket, 14% (28) fell into the age bracket of 26-30, 16.5% (33) into 31-35 age bracket, 24.5% (49) into 36-40 age bracket and 13.5% (27) are of 41-above ages. 36% (72) of respondents are married while 64% (128) of respondents are single. 27.5% (55) have senior secondary education, 66.5% (133) have Polytechnic/ University education and 6.0% (12) represents other respondents whose educational qualifications were not indicated. 44 of the respondents which represent 22.0% are civil servants, 13.5% are into business, 54.0% (108) are students, 4.0% (8) are self employed and 6.5% (13) of respondents are unemployed. 179 respondents which represent 89.5% are Christians, 5.5% (11) are Moslems, and 4.5% (9) are traditionalists while 0.5% (1) did not indicate religious affiliation.

Study Design: This paper employed an exploratory survey design to provide research evidence bearing on the role of the media in encouraging the concept of child rights and neglect in Nigeria. This was based on the development and administration of questionnaire to elicit required information from the respondents.

Sample: The sample size used for this study was hundred (200) participants carefully selected

from the four zones using a stratified random sampling method. The researchers randomly selected fifty (50) participants from each of these zones.

Instrument: The instrument used to elicit responses from the subjects was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The instrument had earlier been validated using people living in Esan North East Local Government area where they did not receive the signal of all the three television stations available for viewing in the state. Section “A” sought background information from the respondents on their demographic variables. Section “B” contained open ended questions based on the objective of the study, to which the respondents were asked to express their opinion on a three – point likert scale with the response format ranging from “Yes to Not sure”

Procedure: The researchers split Oredo Local Government into four zones: Ekenwan/Oliha, Ring Road/G.R.A, Sapele Road/Sakponba Road and New Benin/Urubi. All the streets in the zones were carefully written out and number was assigned to them. The essence of this was to give the entire streets in each zone the equal opportunity of being selected for the research. Then five streets were randomly selected using ballot system thereby having a total number of twenty streets to work with, that is, five streets from the four zones. The researchers administered a total number of ten (10) questionnaires to the residents of the streets selected from each of the zones. In order to make the process of the listing of the street as well as administration of questionnaire easier, the researchers employed the services of enumerators who are familiar with the areas. The researchers assigned code number to the zone, the street as well as the building to each of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents. This method made the process of administration and retrieval of questionnaire easy as well as precise as all the questionnaires administered were retrieved.

RESULTS

The data were collated and analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency tables and percentages to interpret results.

Table 1: Ownership and viewership of television

<i>S. No</i>	<i>Sentences relating to access to Television set and TV programmes</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
1.	Do you own a television set	Yes	165	82.5
		No	35	17.5
2.	If not, do you have access to a television set	Yes	34	97.1
		No	1	2.9
3.	Do you watch TV programmes on E.B.S, ITV and NTA	Yes	193	96.5
		No	4	2.0
		Not sure	3	1.5
4.	How frequently	Very frequently	50	25.0
		Frequently	70	35.0
		Not too frequent	75	37.5
		Not at all	5	2.5

Table 1 shows that 165 respondents which represent 82.5% own television set while 35 (17.5%) do not own a television set. To further ascertain the respondents' awareness of television programmes, respondents who do not own television set were asked if they have access to television. The result reveals that 34 respondents which represent 97.1% have access to television as against just 1 respondent (1.2%) who does not have access to television. From the foregoing it is clear that a majority of the residents who reside in Oredo own and have access to television set. 193 respondents (96.5%) watch programmes on EBS, ITV and NTA Benin while 4 (2.0%) of respondents do not and 3 (1.5%) are not sure. The inferences drawn from these responses are that a majority of the residents of Oredo watch television programmes beamed from the three main channels whose signal are clearly received within the locality. The respondents who do not watch TV along with the respondents that indicated "not sure" perhaps do so because

of religious or personal reasons. 50 respondents (25%) watch programmes very frequently, 70 (35%) watch programmes frequently and 75 (37.5%) watch programme but not too frequently. Only 5 (2.5%) respondents do not watch T.V. programmes at all. These responses go to show that the residents of the area do not only own T.V set but dedicate time to watching TV programmes. This is a strong indication that television viewing is an important item in the schedule of their activities.

Table 2 reveals that 193 (86.5%) are familiar with some of the TV programmes that address child rights, abuse and allied issues, 5 (2.5%) of the respondents are not while 2 (1%) are not. The implication of these responses is that a majority of the respondents are regular viewers of programmes like "IZOZO", "I Need to know" and "News line". It also implies that most of the residents of Oredo are in better stead to give an informed opinion as regards the issues under survey. This perhaps is as a result of the regular

Table 2: Television programmes that address child rights and abuse issues

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Statements that talk about child abuse and child rights</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
1.	Are you familiar with TV programmes such as "IZOZO", "I Need to Know" that talk about Child abuse	Yes	193	96.5
		No	5	2.5
		Not Sure	2	1.0
2.	Would you say TV has been able to sensitize the public on child abuse	Yes	143	71.5
		No	31	15.5
		Not Sure	26	13.0
3.	Do you agree that television has been able draw attention of the public to the evils of child labour and trafficking	Yes	169	84.0
		No	20	10.0
		Not Sure	11	5.5
4.	In your opinion, has television been able to draw attention of the public to the dangers of child beggars and hawkers	Yes	133	66.5
		No	42	21
		Not Sure	25	12.5
5.	Do you think TV has helped to place the problem of child prostitution and sexual exploitation in the mind of the public	Yes	143	71.5
		No	30	15.0
		Not Sure	27	13.5

electricity and clarity of signals from TV stations in the locality as against some other areas in the state. 143 (71.5%) of the respondents agreed that television has helped to conscientize the public about the evils of child abuse, 31 (15.5%) do not agree while 26(13%) are not sure. 169 (84.5%) subscribe to the view that television has been able to draw the attention of the public to the evils of child labour and trafficking, 20(10%) do not agree while 11(5.5%) of them are not sure. 66.5% of the respondents (133) accept that television has been able to draw the attention of the public to the danger of child beggars and child hawkers while 21.5% (42) do not accept and 12.5% are not sure. 71.5% (143) respondents believe that television has helped to place the problem of child prostitution and sexual abuse in the mind of the public, 15.5% (30) do not believe so and 13.5% (27) of respondents are not sure. Table 3 shows that 62.5% (125) of the respondents agree that television has been able to mount pressure on the government to make child welfare policies while 21.5% (43) did not agree with the above statement and 16% (32) were unsure whether television has mounted pressure on government to make policies on child welfare. 113 respondents which represent 56.5% subscribe to the view that television has helped to compel government to implement child welfare policies, 41 (20.5%) do not subscribe while 46 (23%) of respondents are not sure. 148 (74%) respondents believe that television has helped

to improve family planning consciousness of the public, 28 (14%) respondents do not believe in this assertion while 24 (12%) respondents are not sure. 155 (77.5%) respondents accept the fact that at television has helped to improve public awareness on primary health care services such as National Programme on Immunization, NPI , Expanded Programme on Immunization, EPI, 23 (11.5%) do not believe while 22 (11%) of the respondents are not sure. 138 (69%) respondents agree that television has been able to educate the public to avoid physical, emotional and psychological maltreatment of children, 31(15.5%) of respondents do not agree while 31 (15.5%) are not sure. 131 (65.5%) believe that television has been able to improve children's enrolment in primary schools, 34 (17%) do not believe while 35 (17.5%) of respondents are not sure.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that television has helped to raise public awareness with regard to child rights, survival and development. However, the most puzzling aspect of this finding is that respondents' responses do not match with what is happening in the locality. Although the results attest to the fact that television programmes under reference have been able to galvanize the public to support child rights and other issues relating to children survival and development,

Table 3: Level of public awareness on child rights

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Sentences relating to whether television has been able raise public awareness on child rights</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
1.	Would you say television has been able to mount pressure on the government to make child welfare policies	Yes	125	62.5
		No	43	21.5
		Not sure	32	16.0
2.	In your own opinion, has television helped to compel government to implement child welfare policies	Yes	113	56.5
		No	41	20.5
		Not sure	46	23.0
3.	Would you say television has helped to improve family planning consciousness of the public	Yes	148	74.0
		No	28	14.0
		Not sure	24	12.0
4.	Do you think television has helped to improve public awareness on primary health care services such as National Programme on Immunization, NPI, Expanded Programme on Immunization, EPI,	Yes	155	77.5
		No	23	11.5
		Not sure	22	11.0
5.	Do you agree that television has been able to educate the public to avoid physical, emotional and psychological maltreatment of children	Yes	138	69.0
		No	31	15.5
		Not sure	31	15.5
6.	In your opinion, has television been able to improve children enrolment in primary schools	Yes	131	65.5
		No	34	17.0
		Not sure	35	17.5

incidences of abandoned babies, sexually abused or raped as well as maltreated children are common occurrences in the community under examination. In many more ways than one, this finding agrees with Ademokun (2002) who observed that "it is a common knowledge that children in Nigeria are bludgeoned into child labour and prostitution by highly placed persons under the guise of philanthropy". This, perhaps, is so because the people who the television programmes under reference are beamed at almost never take the messages as seriously as they ought to. It may be that they see these programmes as mere pieces of entertainment and relaxation. In other words, it is strange and revealing that the residents who seem to be very much aware of child rights, do not replicate the same high sense of consciousness in the treatment and handling of children in the locality. On the part of the government, it suffices to note that the passage of the Child Rights Bill by the National Assembly in 2003 as well as its subsequent passage into law by some states' Houses of Assembly in Nigeria is regarded as a mere academic exercise by many a Nigerian. For instance, in Edo State where Oredo local government area, which this paper uses as a case study, is located, the Child Rights Bill was passed into law in 2003, amended in 2007 and yet there are no concrete pieces of evidence to show its much touted positive effects on the average Edo child. The presupposition here is that some factors may have been responsible for this apathetic attitude of the public with regard to child rights issues. In the course of this survey, for instance, it was discovered that factors such as the need to meet up with the ever rising cost of living, grinding poverty, prohibitive cost of schooling, indiscriminate child bearing, among others, have made parents as well as guardians within the Oredo locality to sometimes subject their wards to different forms of abuses. These compelling demands may have blurred the residents' consciousness about child rights. However, this negative development does not obviate the fact that some level of responsibility devolves on the government, the parents and the children themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to establish that the media, particularly the television have to a large extent helped in creating awareness on child rights, abuse and development in Oredo local

government area of Edo state, Nigeria. This is in realisation of the fact that media coverage and reporting on both physical discipline of children and child rights matters is significant in reflecting and defining society's perception of children and young people. It is against this backdrop that the following conclusions have been drawn:

Television with reference to programmes such as "Izozo", "I Need to know", and "News line" has been able to conscientize the populace on the rights of the child.

Television through the programmes under reference has been able to improve public attitude to child survival and development.

However, it appears that television through its programmes has not been able to convince people to change their ways of handling children despite the fact that they are aware of child rights.

Television programmes such as the ones under reference are sometimes seen as pieces of entertainment because they lack the crucial economic empowerment bite.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has been able to demonstrate that the media, particularly television have helped a great deal in creating awareness on the rights of the child and dangers of child abuse in the society. It has also been advanced that what remains is the translation of this sense of awareness into favourable ways and manner of handling and treating children. On the strength of the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

Non Government Organisations (NGOs) relevant governmental agencies and other Community Based Organisations (CBOs) concerned with child protection, child rights and child abuse eradication should design empowerment programmes with specific targets groups in Oredo local government area.

Television programmes should explore avenues of rallying stakeholders in child welfare and child abuse eradication crusade as well as the various tiers of government to address critical issues of poverty, unemployment, gender based abuses, among others, in the locality which tend to aggravate the malaise.

Government should introduce empowerment and skill acquisition programmes that would be backed by local community in order to ensure a sense of belonging.

Television stations in collaboration with relevant government agencies as well as non governmental organisations should set up and fund child rights associations in primary, post primary and other schools in the locality as a way of training and inculcating the right values in children.

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