

## Child Abuse and Media: An Assessment of Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study seeks to find the impact of the media most especially television medium in creating awareness among the public on negative impact of child abuse and whether the television has been able to put child abuse on the political agenda of government using Oredo Local government area as a case study. The local government was delineated into four zones for the purpose of the research and 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 able to raise awareness regarding child abuse through their various programmes aired which are towards eradicating child abuse and other vices. But this awareness does not reflect in the way and manner a number of children are treated in the locality. Based on the findings recommendations were made on how best to tackle the issue of child abuse in our society.

**Key words:** Media, Child abuse, television, Oredo local government, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the progress of any nation depends largely on the might and vibrancy of its youths. The youth is the resource pool from which the future generations are built. The human resources and leadership of any society is inextricably linked to the manner and ways which its children are nurtured and developed.

The point being made here is that the youth or children populace of any nation is a critical factor in the development of such a nation. This perhaps explains why the well being of children has been the inspiration and driving purpose of the United Nation Children Fund (UNICEF) for over 50 years. Fadayomi (1990) assessed the 1989 UNICEF report on the state of the World children observed that Africans much as Latin Americans are experiencing a retreat in almost all the relevant socio-economic indicators of human progress arising the burden of debt and economic recession. This retreat exerts a heavy toll on the well being of the child when vital indicators of his survival and development are taken into account. The implication of this when compare against the Nigerian society is that the average Nigerian Children are living in a pitiable condition.

In many cities, towns and other semi-urban and rural centres in Nigeria it is not uncommon to see children on the streets begging for money. Some hawk wares on the highway and busy roads. Some engage in laborious jobs

in homesteads and farmsteads. Some other are mercilessly tortured for minor offences.

Child abuse is controversial and emotional issue. It is also a complex and challenging social problem that defies simple solution. The new Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 3 (1998) viewed child abuse as the crime harming a child in a physical, sexual or emotional way". If this viewpoint is anything to go by then child abuse incidences seem right in Nigeria. Maduwesi (1990) contends that there are no statistics to back up the increasing wave, newspaper, magazines and the electronic media on daily basis churn out news on child abuse and other vices relating to children. Lutz (2000) who affirmed that house helps in different places were largely young, single women of age 14 years and above. It also consistent with the findings of Godoy (2002) who reported a study of the 110 children sampled in El Salvador working in domestic service most of who were underage between 12 and 17 years of age.

Evidence has shown that nowadays trafficking of children specifically for house helps services is a global problem. In Africa for example, children are trafficked both internally and between the countries of West Africa such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d' Ivore, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo (Libreville 2002). What makes the issue more worrisome is that the government and the societal agent of socialization-families, churches, mosque, school etc seem to have failed or seem to be failing in handling this problem of child abuse.

To curtail the incidence child abuse, there is the need to increase societal awareness of issues that may affect children and young people. Sanders and Godoy (2002) opined that prevention of child abuse involves changing those individual and community attitude, belief and circumstances which allows abuse to occur.

A well focused mass media campaign or educational programme has the potential to contribute to successfully to community education and prevention of child abuse and neglect. This is in realisation of the fact that media play significant role in informing people's attitude and behaviour.

Lindsay (1994) argued that media has a central role in mediating information and forming public opinion. The media casts an eye on events that feel of us directly experience and render remote happenings observable and meaningful.

Understanding media influences and how to use mass media channels constructively may be an essential tool for fighting social problems like child abuse. Wellings and Macdowell (2000) affirmed the strength of mass media lies in helping to put issues on the public agenda in reinforcing local efforts, in raising consciousness about issues and in conveying simple information.

This is sequel to Adeseye and Ibagere (1999) position that agenda setting implies that the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. The point here is that the media help to priorities societal issue particularly the television medium is outstanding in this regard. The television medium has the powerful influence on people perception this is as a result of its audio visual quality. The television medium is one most important means of communication on earth. It bring pictures and sound from around the world into millions of home daily interestingly, it does not function in isolation rather it draws materials from the society, package them in the form of programmes and give them back to the same society.

Televisions like other media of mass communication such as radio, newspapers are a veritable means to inform, educate, entertain project culture and perhaps break down barriers. However television surpasses radio and newspaper because is a combination of visual, kinetic and auditory modes of perception.

It is this context that this study attempt to investigate the extent television has helped in creating awareness on the evils of child abuse in the society. It also want to find out whether television has helped to place child abuse on the political agenda of government using Oredo Local government area of Edo state as a case study.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**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 programme that address child abuse issues such as "IZOZO", "I Need to Know", News line which on are show weekly on these channels. Beside the residents of these zones enjoy relative supply of electricity.

Oredo Local Government is a metropolitan centre that sits the state capital, Benin City. It is 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 200 respondents participated in the study representing the residents the 4 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 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 religion.

**Design:** This study employed an exploratory survey design to provide research evidence bearing on the role

of the media in the prevention child abuse and neglect in Nigeria. This was based on the development and administration of questionnaire to elicit required information from the respondents.

**Sample size:** The sample size used for this study was 200 participants carefully selected from the 4 zones using a stratified random sampling method. The researcher randomly selected 50 participants from each of these zones.

**Instrument:** The instrument used to elicit responses from the subjects was a structured questionnaire, designed by the researcher. The instrument, which 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. The study represents sought background information from the respondents on their demographic variables. In this study 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 ranges from “Yes to Not sure”

**Procedure:** The researcher 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 5 streets were randomly selected using ballot system thereby having a total number of 20 streets to work with that is 5 streets from the four zones. The researcher administered a total number of 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 researcher employed the services of enumerators who are familiar with these areas. The researcher 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 retrieve of questionnaire easy as well as precise as all the questionnaires administered were retrieved.

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

## RESULTS

The result shows that majority of the respondents have access to television set. Of particular interest is the fact that many of the respondents watch television programmes on EBS, ITV and NTA Benin. The study was able to establish that majority of the respondents are familiar with various programmes that address child abuse and neglect.

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 to 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 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 is that 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 done so on religious or personal ground. 50 respondents (25%) watch programme 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.

Table 1: Respondents which represents 82 % own television set

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

**Table 2: Television programs that address the issue of child abuse**

Item	Statement that talk about ills of Child Abuse	Response	Frequency	%
5.	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%
6.	Would you say TV has been able to sensitize the public on child abuse	Yes	143	71.5%
		No	31	15.5%
7.	Do you agree that television has been able draw attention of the public to the evils of child labour and trafficking	Not Sure	26	13%
		Yes	169	84%
		No	20	10%
8.	In your opinion, has television been able to draw attention of the public to the dangers of child beggars and hawkers	Not sure	11	5.5%
		Yes	133	66.5%
		No	42	21%
9.	Do you think TV has helped to place the problem of child prostitution and sexual exploitation in the mind of the public	Not sure	25	12.5%
		Yes	143	71.5%
		No	30	15%
		Not sure	27	13.5%

**Table 3: Television helped to place the problem of child prostitution in the mind of public**

Item	Statements that talked about contribution of Television towards child abuse	Response	Frequency	%
10.	Would you say television has helped to draw the attention of the public welfare needs	Yes	148	74%
		No	18	9%
		Not sure	34	17%
11.	In your opinion, has television helped to raise public awareness on child education	Yes	170	85%
		No	10	5%
		Not sure	20	10%
12.	Do you agree that television has been able to educate the public to avoid physical, emotional and psychological maltreatment of children	Yes	138	69%
		No	31	15.5%
		Not sure	31	15.5%
13.	Do you think TV has been able to rally relevant governmental and non governmental agencies to fight the evils of child maltreatment and abuse	Yes	140	70.5%
		No	32	16%
		Not sure	28	14%

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 T.V. 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 the issue of child abuse, 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 “Newline”. 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 electricity and clarity of signals from TV stations in the locality as against other area 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 agreed 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 reveals that 143 (71.5%) believe that television has helped to place the problem of child prostitution and sexual abuse in the mind of the public, 30 (15%) do not believe so while 27 (13.5%) are not sure. Seventy four present (148) subscribe to the view that television has helped to draw the attention of the public to child welfare needs, 9% do not subscribe and 17% (34) are not sure. Eighty five present (170) of the respondents agreed that television has helped to raise public awareness on child education, 5% (10) do not agree while 10% (20) are not sure. Sixty nine present (138) agreed that television has been able to educate the public to avoid physical, emotional and psychological maltreatment of children, 15.5% (31) do not agree and 15.5% (31) are not sure. Majority of the respondents 140 (70%) believe that television has been to rally relevant government and non governmental agencies to fight the evils of child maltreatment and abuse, 32 (16%) do not believe while 28 (14%) are indifferent.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained from this study revealed that television with the reference to the programmes that address child abuse has been able to place the problem of child abuse in the minds of the public. The fall out of

this result is that the programmes under reference have indeed helped and are still helping to conscientize the Oredo populace about the dangers of child abuse; be it child labour, child battering, child prostitution or sexual exploitation. However, it is curious to note that this relatively high awareness does not reflect in the way and manner a number of children are treated in the locality. A pointer to this is the widespread incidence of child battering and child trafficking in the locality. This corroborates the study of Lutz (2002) who affirmed that house helps in different places were largely young, single women of age 14 years and above. It also consistent with the finding of Godoy (2002) who reported that of the 110 children sampled in El Salvador working in domestic service most of were underage between 12 and 17 years of age. The local media reported cases of battered children and others saved from the clutches of child and women traffickers.

A great number of children within the locality still engage in street hawking and begging which lends its support from Hodges (2001) who opined that street hawkers children who worked throughout the day or late in the evening or who traded on major highways were found to be more likely than others to experience serious falls or assault from adult. Perhaps the reason for this is that the residents do not take the T.V. programmes under reference seriously. In other words, it could be that they watch these programmes solely for entertainment purpose. It might also be that the residents do allow other considerations such as economic, cultural or traditional exigencies to becloud their sense of awareness about the evils of exposing their wards and children to all sorts of abuse.

The result showed that television has been able to place the problem of child abuse on the political agenda. This seems to reflect what is on ground in the locality, as there are number of governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Oredo local council that are engaged in various activities aimed at reducing this problem to its barest minimum. These agencies rehabilitate, train, empower and prevent specialized form of abuses against children. The Edo state government has also giving the fight against child abuse a political muscle by passing into law a bill on human trafficking as well as child prostitution and sexual exploitation. However, it must be said that in spite of these efforts child abuses incidences within the locality seem not to be abating. The likely reason for this may be as a result of improper implementation of these programmes by these agencies of course the biting level of poverty in the land.

From the foregoing discussion, it could be deduced that the media particularly the television has to a very large extent created awareness on the evils of child abuse in Oredo local government. However, there seems to be a friction between the residents' sense of

awareness child abuse and the reality of how they treat and handle children. This is so as most of the residents confirmed that media especially television has sensitized them on the ills of child abuse but what obtains on the ground in the locality point to the contrary. In other words, it is strange and revealing that the residents who seem to be very much aware of the danger of child abuse, do not replicate the same high sense of consciousness in the treatment and handling of children in the locality.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has been argued that "media representation is the primary source of information on social problems for many people". This study established that the television and indeed the mass media as a whole has to a large extent helped creating awareness on child abuse within the Oredo locality. It is against this backdrop that the following conclusions have been drawn:

Television with reference to programmes such as "IZOZO", "I Need to Know" "Newline" has been able to create awareness on the evils of child abuse within the Oredo community. It has been able to place the problem of child abuse on the political agenda. However it appears that most of the populace have seen the need to translate what they know into practice as per handling of children. Perhaps this might due to economic as well as traditional consideration which people may have allowed to override their sense of judgement. Based on the above, the following recommendations are offer for active consideration by concerned stakeholders in the area of child welfare and survival

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), relevant government agencies and other Community Based Organisations (CBOs) concerned with child protection and abuse should design empowerment programmes that will enable people living in Oredo locality to put into practice what they learned regarding child welfare. They should also employ television as a weapon in their advocacy.

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

Well intentioned and well focused mass media (television) campaigns aimed at raising awareness and prevention of child abuse should be made to include skill acquisition techniques and backed by community education and direct support programmes.

Lastly, television managers should endeavour to rally corporate organisations within their locality to take up specific forms of child abuses as part of their social responsibility to their host community.

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