

Press Coverage of Maternal Health Issues in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

This paper is an assessment of the Nigerian Press coverage of Maternal Health issues as the fifth goal of the Millennium Development of Goals (MDGs). It examined and analysed 282 editions of The Guardian, New Nigerian, ThisDay, and Daily Trust newspapers from 2001-2007 to measure their contributions in terms of coverage towards the achievement of the MGDs. The findings revealed that the selected newspapers reported issues of Maternal Health. However, the coverage was significantly low with 206 reports recorded by the 4 selected publications over a period of 7 years. In addition, prominence was not given to the coverage of Maternal Health issues and most reports carried were negative stories which may explain why the Maternal Health goal was not achieved in 2015 as planned. The MDGs final report (2015) identified gaps in the achievement of the MDGs in general and the Maternal Health goal in particular and has forged to include it in a bold vision of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. This study therefore recommends that the press should partner with national development goals and give consistent coverage of Maternal Health issues in order to facilitate its achievement. Prominence should also be given to its coverage; and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) as a professional body should re-orient and charge its members on the importance of development news reporting and reporting the Maternal Health in order to contribute in curbing the menace of maternal mortality and morbidity in Nigeria.

Keywords: MDG, Press Coverage, Nigeria, Maternal Health

Introduction

One of the major functions of the mass media in all societies is information dissemination. Through gathering, processing, management and dissemination of information and ideas, the media can create awareness, increase knowledge, change attitudes, transform behaviours, foster engagement, and help in formulating sound national policies which are elements that influence and energize a society towards growth and development (McQuail, 2005).

Development issues are societal issues and in all modern societies, the mass media play important roles in providing information on relevant issues in the society. In other words, all modern societies have a government that is made up of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary to carry out definite functions for the good of the society.

Services carried out and exchanged by these structures enable the society to survive and progress, and the media help in the transmission and dissemination of information which without it none of the other structures can function effectively. This explains why it is called “The fourth estate of the realm” following the three structures (Udoakah, 2006).

At the dawn of the 21st century, 189 countries of the United Nations adopted and signed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in an effort to bring development to all nations of the world. Over the years, several efforts and strategies have been tried to enhance the quality of life in developing nations but with varying degrees of success. Therefore, the MDGs brought about a new perspective and determination in the global community through the United Nations with a commitment to address problems of poverty, education, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, gender equality, malaria and other diseases, the environment and develop global partnership for development to be achieved by the year 2015. These global concerns are tagged the “MDGs”.

At the expiration of the 2015 date set for achieving the MDGs, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced in January 2016 as the ‘global goals’ to build on the successes and address the failures of the MDGs while including new areas of global concerns. These new goals are interconnected, with the success of one goal associated with tackling issues related to another. The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and are an all inclusive agenda that provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt according to their own priorities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks to provide support to governments to integrate SDGs into their national development plans and policies. Moreover, just like the MDGs, the issue of Maternal Health is included in the SDGs as the 1st target under its goal 3 titled “Good Health and Wellbeing”. The SDGs seek to by 2030 reduce the maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births. And like the MDGs, achieving the SDGs also requires partnership of governments, the private sector, civil society and citizens (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2017).

The World Health Organisation Report [WHO] (2006) showed that, the world’s maternal mortality ratio is high, with more than half a million women dying of pregnancy related complications every year and Nigeria, which constitutes only 2% of the world’s population accounts for 10% of its maternal deaths. Similarly, several reports (MNPI Report, 2006; MDG Report, 2006; & WHO Report, 2006) indicated that Maternal Health is a cause for serious concern because rates of mortality and morbidity in pregnant women and mothers remain high, particularly among poorer people in Nigeria. The rate of maternal mortality is 800-1100 per 100,000 live births which amounts to 54,000 deaths every year.

Hence, the MDGs sought to improve Maternal Health by reducing three quarters of maternal mortality ratio in the world and achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Improving Maternal Health in Nigeria is primarily the question of government acting upon its promise but even the government realized that achieving Maternal Health is dependent on the degree of mobilization around its targets and in order to mobilize, the media is crucial in spreading the “news” (Herfkens, 2007). Moreover,

all development efforts whether nationally initiated or internationally assisted have information and communication elements to them because of the realization that knowledge and information are crucial to development. Former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan rightly observes that: “if information and knowledge are central to democracy, they are the conditions for development”

He further reiterates the role of the media with regard to the MDGs:

The media are not just indispensable partners in delivering services to the poor at the scope required by the MDGs but they can also catalyse actions within countries on pressing development concerns, mobilizing broad based movements and creating grassroots pressures to hold leaders accountable to their commitments (Kofi Annan, as cited in MDG Report, 2005).

The Nigerian government realizing the important roles of the media in the information dissemination process established an MDG monitoring mechanism for tracking successes, failures and impacts of the MDGs. It also called on the Nigerian media to monitor the impacts of the different strategies employed in order to achieve the MDGs, how they are faring and what problems they are facing and draw attention to neglected areas (MDG monitor 2009).

This paper therefore seeks to assess how the Nigerian press (a case study of selected newspapers) responded to this call in covering the Maternal Health issues from 2001-2007.

Statement of the Problem

Maternal mortality and morbidity are problems that have serious consequences for families and communities subsequently leading to development delays. Families who lose a mother are likely to suffer declining nutritional status, surviving children have lower rates of school enrolment and low school performance, the community loses a productive member, her country loses its investment in the woman’s health, education and her contribution to the economy; and children born by a woman ridden with pregnancy related complications also suffer alongside the mother, in addition to high chances of associated illness and under five mortality (Making Motherhood Safer, 2004). Therefore reducing maternal mortality rates and achieving universal access to reproductive health require efforts by the government, communities and the nation at large. The media as instruments of mobilization, awareness creation and information exchange have been called by the MDG implementation committee to play important roles in reviewing performance, identifying problems and assessing successes towards achieving the MDGs. All these however are just prescriptions of what the media can do. To measure media performance in this regard requires an empirical study. Thus, this study is aimed at assessing the performance of the press in covering Maternal Health issues from 1st January 2001 to 31st December 2007 by looking at frequency of coverage,

themes or issues of Maternal Health that are covered, the direction of coverage and the level of prominence given to Maternal Health issues in the selected publications.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the press coverage of Maternal Health issues in Nigeria and the specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the frequency of the coverage of issues of Maternal Health in features, editorial and news presentations of the selected publications,
2. Identify themes of Maternal Health that are reported by the selected publications
3. Find out the direction of coverage of Maternal Health issues; and to
4. Examine the level of prominence accorded to the coverage of Maternal Health issues by the selected newspapers.

Literature Review

There is abundant literature on the role of the media in development. These roles, scholars agree stem from the unique position the media occupy in the information dissemination process. Scholars also agree that in all forms of interaction, ideas are usually shared which facilitate understanding and enhance progress. Media of communication are organs tailored to function in the dissemination of information and ideas.

Communication is central to every human endeavour. Access to information is essential to development of nations for it ensures citizens participation in matters that concern them. The media play important roles in the diffusion of ideas which is why there is consensus among scholars that the media have an overwhelming presence and impact in the lives of the people (Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1976; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001)

Gurevitch and Blumer (1990) highlighted the functions the media in every society thus:

Surveillance of socio-political developments, identifying the most relevant issues, providing a platform for debate across a diverse range of views, holding officials to account for the way they exercise power, provide incentives for the citizenry to learn, choose and become involved in the political process and resist efforts of forces outside the media to subvert their independence.

A number of studies have documented the impact of the media in creating awareness and policy formulation and implementation in several countries where the media are accessible and widely consumed. According to USAID ENHANSE project (2005) on using the mass media for AIDS prevention "...the mass media are methods of communication that reach large group of people quickly and effectively and each method... Radio, television and print media can get messages out to thousands or even millions of people"

Arguably, the mass media are suppliers of information that the general public need to make informed decisions since the major function of the media in all societies is that of information dissemination. It is against this responsibility that the role of the media in facilitating development can be understood. Hence there are significant ranges of development activities that fall under “media support” which led to emphasis by many scholars that communication media have a vital role to play in lubricating the wheels of development.

Schramm (1964) for instance postulates that, the mass media in the developing countries have roles to play in carrying messages of development and social change. In his opinion, mass media should perform at least three functions: “watch dog”, “policy makers”, and “teachers” of change and modernization. He further argues that information is essential for development because an uninformed public cannot make the right decision neither can they be mobilized for national development. Such information may take the form of political, economic or social developments, innovations within and outside a society, and information on how to overcome challenges, among others. Moreover, mass media can serve as educational institutions by supporting teachers, extension workers, health workers and can facilitate decision making process by ensuring that people have a say in running their affairs.

Nwosu (1990) also notes on the need to apply communication in the process of national development thus: ...studies in development communication have strong faith in the role of communication in development or as an intervening variable in the development process. Lerner (1958) added that “a communication system is both an index and an agent of social change in a total social system”. Similarly, Rogers (1969) also pointed out evidence on the use of the media for national development that a small but growing body of research in less developing nations indicates integral role of mass media in national development....

Habte (1983) talked about the role of the mass media in the development process thus: news and information media are viewed as essential intermediaries between policy decision makers and the public by mobilizing masses to accept new ideas and modern techniques without creating cultural and ethnic tensions and psychological frustrations and anxieties. In a similar view, Schramm (1964) further expressed optimism on the role of the mass media in national development:

The media can contribute substantially to the amount and kind of information available to the people of the developing country. They can widen horizon and thus help build empathy. They can focus attention on problems and goals of development; they can raise personal and national aspirations. All these they can do largely and by themselves.

He added that adequate flow of information is required for knowledge to be shared by those who have more of it and those who have less of it on any given subject. Rogers (1976) echoed that there are many pathways to development; the role of the mass

media is often indirect and contributory rather than direct and powerful. The mass media are only elements that contribute to the achievement of development.

Several empirical researches revealed the integral role of the media in the process of development. Vilanilam (1979) as cited in Kunczik (1988) found out the importance of the media in a content analysis of Indian newspapers on family planning issues. Hegazi and Khalifa (2000) in a study conducted on Egyptian press coverage of reproductive health issues concluded that, the press coverage of reproductive health have effects on maximizing the impact of research findings on informed policy and programme management.

Naisbitt (1982) as cited in Health Care Trends (1990) also reveals that newspaper contents accurately reflect the underlying trends in America and precede actions articulated by health care policy makers and politicians. He further states that newspaper contents reflect the changing pattern of competing societal concerns.

A study conducted by Aids Control and Prevention Project (AIDSCAP, 2005) reveals that, the media (television, radio, bill boards, and print) are found to build awareness, increase knowledge, promote role models and influence societal norms... Similarly, the National HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health Survey reports (NARHS, 2003, 2005 & 2008) variously revealed an integral role of the media and stated that television, radio, and the print media are used for the transmission of information on family planning, HIV/AIDS and other STIs ... These three sources of information are perhaps the most effective means of reaching the public.

However, Kayode & Adeniran (2012) who investigated Newspaper coverage of the Millennium Development Goals: the Role of the Media revealed that newspapers do not make deliberate effort to report the MDGs, and where reports are carried, they do not give equal attention to MDGs, and that issues of Maternal Health, child mortality and universal basic education are largely neglected in their reports. Binta & Onyeizu (2014) also in a study on Newspaper Coverage of Health Issues in Nigeria over a 24 months period found out the single health issue that garnered most media attention is HIV/AIDS. Similarly, Kayode, Thanny & Abisiga (n.d) examined Newspaper Coverage of Heath Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria and found out that health stories mostly reported are HIV/AIDS and malaria and less of Maternal Health and child mortality.

The literature reviewed on the functions of the media, media and development, issues relating to media and health promotion, media and the MDGs is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. However, there is a general acceptability on the importance of information and media's role in the dissemination of information and ideas in achieving development. I concur that information is essential in the process of any development effort, and without doubt, radio, television, newspapers and magazines are organs tailored to function in that capacity.

From the works of scholars cited however, there appears to be limited amount of research on the contributions of the press in the Maternal Health goal as literature on the press coverage of Maternal Health issues is largely neglected and overlooked by researchers. Scholars also tend to concentrate more on the expected role of the media

other than its actual contributions and where researches are undertaken; emphasis is mostly towards other health issues such as HIV/AIDS. And although, the MDGs target date has elapsed and the MDGs have been overtaken by the SDGs, this study was undertaken to assess the contributions of the Nigerian newspapers towards achieving the Maternal Health goal of the MDGs and make valid recommendations in the light of the SDGs. This study therefore seeks to make an assessment on how the Nigerian media cover Maternal Health issues from 2001-2007.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchors its theoretical framework on the Development Media theory. The theory justifies the use of the mass media for national development because it presupposes the important roles of the mass media in the process of development.

One of the tenets of development media theory as posited by McQuail (2005) is that, media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy. This is relevant in achieving the Maternal Health issue in particular and the MDGs in general. The MDGs upon adoption became a national policy and several Maternal Health policies were initiated such as the Safe Motherhood Initiative and National Reproductive Health Policy.

Similarly, Moemeka (1991) expounds that Development Media Theory accepts development and nation building as its overriding objectives. The media here are deployed as agents of social change and partners in progress. The import of this suggests that the media should use their skills, structures and resources to support development processes.

The theory stresses on development communication which is the systematic use of communication to support development, and the major channels of communication to a large audience are the mass media. Moemeka (1991) further pointed out that, hence, the use of the media in developmental efforts is to reach the population with development messages so as to get their support, encourage change and embrace developmental plans. Development media theory is a concept that has brought about a new perception of what constitute development news. However, a newer version of it as expressed by African free thinkers is focused not only on issues of development but the exposure of maladministration. The belief is that, it will help in shaping better the destiny of plundered Africa. Moreover, the partner in progress diction will not mean supporting irresponsible government but helping to destroy such irresponsibility which will put developing nations on a better wheel of progress (Uwakwe, 2003).

In all, the Development Media Theory has been able to provide a bearing for the use of the mass media in the process of development. The achievement of maternal health and reducing maternal mortality is predicated on the premise of development as enshrined in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Methodology

The method adopted for this study is content analysis. This is informed by its relevance to this study in analyzing newspaper contents on Maternal Health issues and

describes how much the press contents contributed to achieving the goal of Maternal Health.

Kerlinger (2000) defines content analysis as “a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner to measure variables”. Content analysis is a method of observation where a researcher/investigator takes the content of communication that people have produced and ask of questions of it instead of observing people’s behaviour directly or asking them to respond to interviews. One of the most outstanding characteristics of content analysis is its general applicability to available materials such as letters, diaries, ethnographic materials, newspaper articles and editorials, minutes of meetings, pages of newspaper and so on (Kerlinger, 2000).

This study therefore used content analysis to observe the coverage of maternal health issues in *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *ThisDay* and *New Nigerian* newspapers based on the framework of categories and definitions provided. The work is not intended to make assertions about media effects on an audience but how much information contents of selected newspapers may have contributed to achieving the Maternal Health goal within the larger framework of the MDGs.

Universe of the Study

The universe of this study is defined as all Nigerian newspapers totalling 362 newspaper titles (Worldcat, 2017) and the study population is 7304 (weekly editions across 4 newspapers in 7 years) newspaper editions. Contents include news, editorials and features on Maternal Health issues published by *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *ThisDay* and *New Nigerian* newspapers from 1st January 2001 to 31st December 2007. These newspapers were purposively selected to reflect geographical spread, popularity, availability and accessibility in all states of the federation with correspondents and bureau offices in almost all the states. The publications have wide a variety of readership and are nationally circulated, with one of the highest circulation figures, and have contributed to vibrant journalism in Nigeria. The daily editions of the publications were used (weekly editions: Monday – Friday). Weekend publications were eliminated as they are special publications with separate editorial staff.

Sampling Technique

This study used a purposive sampling technique to select 4 widely read, popular national daily circulating newspapers and a systematic sampling technique to select editions of newspapers for analysis. While purposive sampling technique is a non probability method where a sample is chosen on purpose to meet certain characteristics, systematic sampling technique is a probability sampling technique where every n th of the population is included in the selection process. In other words, the population size is divided by the desired sample size to determine the appropriate interval level for selecting newspaper editions. In determining the appropriate sample size from the population of 7304, this study identified the confidence level of 95%. Confidence level simply means the sample result should predict the population characteristics with 95% accuracy. The confidence interval or margin of error for this study is identified as plus or minus 5% (Wench, 2008).

An online sample size calculator programme by Macorr (retrieved from <http://statpages.org/javastat.html>) was used in calculating the sample size based on the population of 7304, a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5% which produced a sample size of 365. The researcher realizing that missed editions of newspapers may have implication for sample size and may lead to sampling error over sampled to minimize the incidence of sampling error either as a result of missed editions or in the selection of samples. The sample size was increased to 400 editions of the selected publications to draw conclusions on how much the press covered the Maternal Health issue.

Therefore, the population size of 7304 was divided by the sample size of 400 to get 18 days interval between editions of newspapers. Individually, each publication's population is 1826 divided by its sample size of 100 editions to get 18 days interval. Simple random selection was used to select the first issue each for the four publications studied.

Probability sampling method is used in this study because random selection procedures are considered to have a higher degree of accuracy than non probability methods. Moreover, in conducting content analysis, in order to make results generalizable, random sampling methods should be used in order that all elements in a population should have an equal chance of inclusion in a sample (Wrench, 2008). Sample size here is taken to be the representative of the target population thereby allowing one to make generalization about the population based on the data collected from the sample and draw conclusion.

Mode of Measurement and Analysis

In this study, descriptive statistics was used to simply count the frequency of occurrences of units in each category for analysis. To deepen the description, the space occupied by each units of analysis was recorded in square column centimetres. Findings were presented on tables using simple percentages. Data measured includes news, editorials, and features on Maternal Health issues. Pictures and headlines in a story were considered as one story. In discussing the findings, newspaper texts were used to augment points and explain findings.

Units of Analyses: The units of analyses are news, editorials and features as contents that could discuss Maternal Health issues.

Content Categories and Operational Definitions

Categories of content analyzed are operationalised thus:

- **Maternal Mortality** – The death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy irrespective of the duration and site of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its managements but not from accidental or incidental causes. The death of a woman must be the dominant theme in the text.
- **Maternal Morbidity**- disabilities and complications women suffer as a result of pregnancy and childbirth. They are: unsafe abortion, fistula, bleeding, obstructed

labour, hypertensive disorders, infections, ectopic pregnancy, and malaria. Issues on any of these morbidities should be the dominant theme.

- **Obstetric Care Facilities**– availability of health care facilities, access or lack of access to health care facilities, limited health care facilities, access or lack of access to private health care facilities, and availability, utilization or lack of family planning facilities. Any of the above mentioned issues must be dominant in the text.
- **Skilled Personnel**- availability of skilled personnel, shortage of skilled care attendants during delivery, and availability or shortage skilled traditional birth attendants.
- **Others**- this include other stories of Maternal Health that are not the dominant themes or stories that cut across two or more categories

Co-efficient of Reliability

In this study, a pilot study with the ten percent of the total population was conducted by independent coders in order to test the reliability of the coding sheet and content categories. Coders were trained on the use of the coding sheet and a review of the content categories was made to include the others category. Results later yielded 95% co- efficient of reliability using Holsti’s formula ($CE = 3M/N1+N2+N3$)

Findings and Discussions

The first objective of this study is to examine the frequency (and by extension support) of coverage of Maternal Health issues in news, editorial and feature article presentations by the selected publications. Table 1 below presents data on issues reported by the selected publications, frequency of coverage and percentages.

Table 1: Frequency of Coverage of Maternal Health.

Medium	News (%)	Editorial (%)	Features (%)	Total (%)	Maternal Mortality	Maternal Morbidity	Obstetric Care	Skilled Personnel	Others (%)	Total (%)
The Guardian	38(18.45)	1(0.49)	9(4.37)	48(23.30)	3(1.46)	22(10.68)	21(10.19)	2(0.97)	-	48(23.30)
New Nigeria	42(20.39)	-	17(8.25)	59(28.64)	3(1.46)	23(11.17)	31(15.04)	2(0.97)	-	59(28.64)
This Day	15(7.28)	-	8(3.88)	23(11.17)	3(1.46)	6(2.91)	13(6.31)	-	1(0.49)	23(11.17)
Daily Trust	41(19.90)	-	35(16.99)	76(36.89)	8(3.88)	57(24.76)	8(3.88)	2(0.97)	1(1.49)	76(36.89)
Total/ %	136(66.02)	1(0.49)	69(33.49)	206(100)	17(8.25)	108(54.43)	73(35.43)	6(2.91)	2(0.97)	206(100)

The above table shows that selected publications reported a total of 206 stories combined for the period under study. *The Guardian* reported 48 stories which represents 23.30% of reports, *New Nigeria* had 59 reports corresponding to 28.64%, *This Day* recorded 23 (11.17%) and *Daily Trust* had 76 stories which constitutes 36.89% of all reports recorded.

On journalistic genre used in reporting Maternal Health issues, it was found out that issues were mostly covered in news which recorded 136 items (66.02%), 69 reports in feature articles (33.49%), and only 1 (0.49%) editorial was carried by *The Guardian* Newspapers.

The findings of this study indicated low coverage of Maternal Health issues when compared to the volume of reports covered by these Newspapers, 206 amounts to under reportage. Improving Maternal Health by 2015 is the responsibility of all stakeholders to contribute to its realization. The press as purveyors of information have roles to play in this crusade. Schramm (1964) was right when he observes that the media can "...Focus attention on problems and goals of development". Achieving Maternal Health is both a goal and a problem of development and represents a major challenge in achieving the MDGs with 50,000 women dying annually and 600,000 more ridden with pregnancy related complications every year (WHO, 2007; MDG Report, 2008).

Maternal Health as a goal and a problem requires extra effort by all to contribute to its achievement. This may explain why a headline in *New Nigerian*, Monday, December 20, 2004 read: *Orji Tasks Journalists on Maternal Morbidity Rate*.

With regard to journalistic genre, news reports recorded the highest coverage. This indicated that the press in their reportorial responsibilities covered issues of Maternal Health mostly in news reports. However, from the manifest contents of newspaper texts, most Maternal Health stories originated from workshops, conferences and other such activities. To exemplify this statement: *This Day* newspapers of Friday September 15, 2006 covered a round table forum on Human Resource options for Safe Motherhood in Nigeria and reported that: *Experts Links Poverty to High Maternal Mortality*.

This showed that no deliberate effort was made on reporting the Maternal Health goal by the press except when invited to workshops, seminars, conferences, etc. There was also limited use of the press either by government or policy makers or even the journalists in disseminating information relevant to the achievement of Maternal Health goal. This is evident in the fact that only one editorial was recorded in the four selected publications during the seven year study period. Features, which present comprehensive account of issues and events, recorded 82 (43.5%) issues. And most feature articles are presented in health columns. This may be attributed to the nature of the column, which is strictly dedicated to health issues of which Maternal Health is a major one. Even then, reports are low when compared to other health issues reported. One would have expected consistent coverage on Maternal Health issues considering the magnitude of the problem and being a development centred goal which may explain why it wasn't achieved as planned by 2015.

The second objective of this study is to identify themes of Maternal Health that are carried by the press. Table 2 below presents detailed analyses of issues reported.

Table 2: Themes of Reports

Theme/Issue	News	Features	Editorials	Total
<u>1. Maternal mortality</u>				
Death of women caused by pregnancy or 42 days after delivery	14(6.79%)	3(1.45%)	-	17 (8.25%)
<u>2. obstetric care facilities</u>				
Inadequate obstetric Care facilities	45(21.84%)	20(9.7%)	-	65(31.55%)
Free ante-natal care facilities	3(1.45%)	2(0.97%)	1(0.49%)	6(2.91%)
Family planning	1(0.49%)	1(0.49%)	-	2(0.97%)
<u>3. Maternal morbidity</u>				
Abortion	65(31.55%)	43(20.87%)		108(52.42%)
<u>4. Skilled personnel</u>				
Training of traditional birth attendants	1(0.49%)			1(0.49%)
Limited health personnel	5(2.42%)	-	-	5(2.42%)
<u>5. others</u>				
	2(0.97%)	-	-	2(0.97%)
Total/percentage	136(6.02%)	69(3.49%)	1(0.49%)	206(100%)

The data from the table above shows that abortion is the most frequently reported issue by the Nigerian press which recorded 108 items (52.42%), inadequate obstetric care facilities recorded 65 stories (31.55%). Maternal mortality featured 17 reports (8.25%), free ante-natal care 6 stories (2.91%), family planning, 2 items (0.97%), limited health personnel, 5 stories (2.42%), training of traditional births attendants, 1 report (0.49%) and others category whose themes cut across several categories recorded 2 stories (0.97%).

Abortion, for instance is seen as a leading contributor of maternal mortality as can be exemplified from the text of *The Guardian*, Monday 14th May 2007 *Amnesty International Wants Safe Abortion Law*.

Another report titled *National Policy on Women* by *New Nigerian*, Wed, 23rd May, 2001 on abortion states that “Women’s major health problems are high maternal mortality rates associated with pregnancy, childbirth and unsafe abortions...”

This Day of Friday, September 3, 2004 also carried a similar report: *Adolescents in Unsafe Abortion on the Increase*.

These findings agree with the literature which made a number of references regarding the role of the press in surveillance of socio-political and economic developments “The world over, health care issues occupy the thinking of people and people are confident that newspaper content is an effective way to monitor social change”

(WHO, 2007). In other words, newspapers contents are a reflection of social reality. Issues selected and presented by the press are issues people see as important.

Inadequate obstetric care facilities which is the second highest issue reported by the press and constituted 65 items, equivalent to 31.55% of all reports is another factor that was reported to have hindered the achievement of Maternal Health goal. The Millennium Development Goals Report (2005) states that: “quality of health care delivery is a factor that hinders the achievement of Maternal Health”. Other stakeholders agree that availability of quality health care services including skilled care attendants during delivery will go a long way in reducing the incidence of maternal mortality and morbidity in Nigeria (WHO, 2007; FOS & UNICEF, 2006; FMOH, 2007; MDG Report, 2006; & Mid Point Assessment Report on the MDGs, 2007).

Newspaper reports also showed that inadequate obstetric care facilities constituted a major hindrance to achieving Maternal Health. For example *New Nigerian* of Thursday, September 23, 2003 reported that ...Unless Government and those who ran hospitals in the country employ skilled personnel to manage pregnant women, maternal mortality would continue to increase in the country in a story titled *How to Reduce Maternal Mortality by NANNM*.

The third objective of this study is to find out the direction of coverage of Maternal Health issues. Direction of coverage in this instance looked at the tone of stories, whether reports indicate the possibility of achieving the Maternal Health goal by 2015 or not. Stories that indicated that Maternal Health is achievable are put under positive reports, while stories that present problems that will hinder the achievement of the goal were considered negative and stories that do not fall into any of the above categories are put under neutral.

Table 3: Direction of Reports on Maternal Health

Medium	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total/Percentage
The Guardian	11(5.33%)	36(17.47%)	1(0.48%)	48(23.30%)
New Nigeria	17(8.25%)	39(18.93%)	3(1.45%)	59(28.64%)
This Day	03(1.45%)	20(9.71%)	-	3(11.16%)
Daily Trust	19(9.22%)	52(25.42%)	5(2.42%)	76(36.89%)
Total/percentage	50(24.27%)	147(71.35%)	09(4.36%)	206(100%)

The data on table 3 above shows that negative reports constitute 147 items (71.35%), positive reports 50 (24.27%) and neutral stories recorded 9 (4.36%) reports. The implication may mean that, Nigeria could not have achieved the Maternal Health

goal by 2015. For instance, one of the reports read: *Maternal Death Rate Threatens MDGs Says Govt.* (The *Guardian*, Tuesday August 28, 2007).

Another report in *New Nigeria* of Monday, August 21, 2006, reads: *Lambo Identifies Hindrance in MDGs*. There is another example in *Daily Trust* of Wednesday, 26, June 2006: *Nigeria Top World's Maternal Mortality Says NGO*. Similarly, a report by *This Day* of November 3, 2005 reads: *Bauchi Leads in Maternal, Infant Mortality*.

In this study, these findings agree with a statement made by WHO (2006) that “Making information available about maternal deaths has been shown to fuel high commitment from policy makers” perhaps if unfavourable stories on Maternal Health are prominently and repeatedly featured, government and policy makers may refocus attention on making facilities available and accessible and thus, the desired result may have been achieved.

The fourth objective of the study is to examine the level of prominence given to the coverage of Maternal Health by the press. Below represents the findings of this study in relation to level of prominence of reports.

Table 4: Level of Prominence of Maternal Health Issues

Medium	Front page	Inside pages	Back page	Total
The Guardian	3(1.45%)	43(20.87%)	2(0.97%)	48(23.30%)
New Nigerian	2(0.97%)	56(27.18%)	1(0.48%)	59(28.64%)
This Day	-	23(11.16%)	-	23(11.16%)
Daily Trust	1(0.48%)	75(36.40%)	-	76(36.89%)
Total/%	6(2.91%)	197(95.63%)	3(1.45%)	206(100%)

The findings of this study shows that the bulk of stories reported on Maternal Health by the selected publications were placed in the inside pages which recorded 197 (95.63%) reports. Front and back pages have 6 and 3 reports constituting 2.91% and 1.45% respectively. This indicates that low level of prominence was accorded to the coverage of Maternal Health by the selected publications since most reports appear in their inside pages.

Even those that are placed in the front and back pages, prominence was not given to their placement as they were placed in mostly 1 column, 1 row situation (5 stories). Only one was given full back page coverage.

Story placement tells the reader the level of importance accords an issue. This is in line with views of McCombs and Shaw (1972:176):

...in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learnt not only about a given issue but how much importance to attach to the issues from the amount of information in a news story and its position.

This statement is so true in this study. Perhaps that explains why the Maternal Health goal received little success, since they are not prominently featured on the pages of newspapers.

Space Occupied by Stories in the Selected Publications

To further reveal the amount of coverage the newspapers accorded the Maternal Health goal, this study calculated the space occupied by stories in the selected publications in column inches (column x inches)

Table 5: Space occupied by story type, placement and direction

Medium	News	Editorial	Features	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Front page	Inside page	Back page
The Guardian	187.6	84.6	165.8	154.8	226.4	56.8	76.9	296.8	64.3
New Nigerian	351.2	0	287.1	221.6	284	132.7	112.5	272	253.8
This Day	98.5	0	109.8	42	166.3	0	0	208.3	0
Daily Trust	397.7	0	256.8	186.9	366.2	101.4	88.7	565.8	0
Total	1035	84.6	819.5	605.3	1042.9	290.9	278.1	1342.9	318.1

This table presents statistics for space occupied by selected publications in their news, editorial and feature presentations. Space occupied by story type, story placement and direction of reports is presented. In story type, news occupied 1035 column inches, editorial 84.6 and features 819.5. With regard to the direction of coverage, positive reports occupied a total space measuring 605.3 column inches. Negative reports constitute 1042.9 while neutral reports occupied a total space of 290.9. In story placement, front page occupied space measuring 278.1 column inches, inside pages 1342.9 and back page 318.1.

These findings indicated that the selected Nigeria newspapers did not give much attention and prominence to Maternal Health issues as they are mostly placed in the inside pages where they are not easily seen. Moreover, the spaces occupied by Maternal Health stories were not much when compared to other reports.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the objectives of this study and the findings of this research, this study concludes that Maternal Health issues are reported by the Nigerian press. However, the frequency was significantly low, few and in between. Moreover, frequency of 206 stories when compared to the enormity of the problem “800 women dying out of every 100,000 giving birth resulting to a colossal loss of 39 billion” (*Daily Trust*, Wed, June 26, 2006) showed gross under reportage. This study recommends that Nigerian newspapers should give consistent coverage of Maternal Health issues in order to facilitate its achievement

in the light of the SDGs and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) as a professional body should re-orient and charge its members on the importance of development news reporting and reporting the Maternal Health in order to contribute in curbing the menace of maternal mortality and morbidity in Nigeria.

Data obtained from the study also showed that issues/ themes mostly reported are abortion and inadequate obstetric care facilities. This is quite revealing! If the media can give consistent and prominent coverage of issues that affected the achievement of Maternal Health under the MDGs, it may draw the attention of government and policy makers to provide these services that can facilitate and lead to achieving the Maternal Health under the SDGs.

The study also concludes that the direction of coverage of Maternal Health is mostly negative. In other words, reports are mostly on problems that may hinder the achievement of Maternal Health rather than its successes. This agrees with the submission of final document of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) report (2015) which reveals that:

...though, there are successes, such as maternal survival has significantly improved since the adoption of the MDGs and maternal mortality rate has cut nearly by half. However, the poorest and the most vulnerable people of sub Saharan Africa are left behind. In rural areas for instance, only 56 percent of births are attended by skilled health personnel compared with 87 percent in the urban areas. Moreover, the maternal mortality ratio in the developing region is 14 times higher than in the developed regions and just half of pregnant women in the developing region receive the recommended minimum of 4 antenatal care visits...

In Nigeria, this could be said to be due to low level of commitment on the part of the government who failed in providing adequate health care facilities. Such media reports can direct government and policy maker's attention to problem areas and refuel their commitments to achieving the Maternal Health.

This research strongly concludes that Maternal Health issues are not prominently reported. Most stories appear in the inside pages instead of the front or back pages and this may invariably mean the selected publications did not give much importance and prominence to Maternal Health goal. It is therefore recommended that prominence should be given to the maternal health issues under the SDGs.

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