# CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE GUARDIAN, THE PUNCH AND VANGUARD NEWSPAPERS

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## Abstract

*This study examined the coverage of human trafficking in Nigeria by three national newspapers (The Guardian, the Punch and Vanguard). The period of study spanned January 1, 2017, to December 31, 2017, with a sample of 180 newspapers selected using a composite week sampling procedure. The study employed a content analysis method with a code sheet as the research instrument. The research objectives are to: find out the frequency of human trafficking stories reported by the three newspapers; the prominence accorded to the reports on human trafficking; the forms of coverage given to human trafficking stories by the newspapers; identify the origins of human trafficking stories reported by the three newspapers. Findings revealed that Nigerian newspapers did not set adequate agenda on the issue of human trafficking due to the frequency of coverage the newspapers accorded to the issue; prominence was given to human trafficking matters on the lead pages of the newspapers; 48% of the format used in the report is straight news and the sources of human trafficking information originated from official sources. The study among others recommends that the print media should devote more space to feature articles that provide in-depth analysis of news stories than straight news. This will be able to provide perspectives on issues that could help in the understanding of the problem.*

**Keywords: Content Analysis, Human Trafficking Stories, Newspaper Coverage, Nigeria.**

## Introduction

The emergence of human trafficking as business in our world today with its attendant consequences has no doubt left a deep sore had to heal. This calls for concerted effort toward eradicating or alleviating this phenomenon by the media, government, non-governmental organizations and individuals. Corroborating, Atkinson, Curnin and Hanson, (2016) observed that human trafficking has become a global problem that constitutes a grave human rights violation, affecting more than 20 million individuals worldwide and often results in both short and long-term physical and psychological harm to its victims. According to Uchem (2008), cited in Adeyeye and Egbulefu (2022, p. 47), "human trafficking is the criminality of trading in human beings, human exploitation, abuse of the soul and body, violation of fundamental human rights, trade of human organs, organized crimes, and the like and presently, it is one of the wildest and most rapidly advancing forms of organized criminality worldwide". In the view of Allais (2006) trafficking in human beings is one of the biggest revenue-making avenues for planned delinquency in Africa and evidence submits that practically no nation-

state of the continent is exempted from this trade in human beings. They are affected as nation-states of origin of human trafficking, transit and or destination. In some scenarios, some states are an aggregation of these three dimensions of involvement. It is noteworthy to mention that this trade in humans has been given a boost by borderless developments like the internet, the globalized economy, and the global systems for mobile communication (GSM), which have internationalized human trafficking through the provision of information about sources and demand for slaves. Olube (2015) in Adeyeye and Egbulefu (2022), asserted that human trafficking-related activities are either directly or indirectly conducted and span from delicate unsuspecting practices, and methods using platforms such as organized brothels, sex tour arrangements, human trading networks and syndication, involuntary marriage arrangements and cases of bonded labour.

The historical antecedent of human trafficking in Nigeria has been examined by scholars and researchers linking the phenomenon of human trafficking to the Structural Adjustment Programme, a prognosis that was conditioned by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (WB, IMF) for debt-ridden countries of Africa to bring economic restoration. However, the policy demanded cutbacks in so many social areas that can benefit the citizens such as Education, Employment, Food, Agriculture, etc (Babawale 2006; Taran and Demaret, 2006; Attoh and Okeke, 2012). But, the hardship experienced during this period as it is believed led many to human trafficking as an escape root out of their economic problems.

In Nigeria, human trafficking is multi-dimensional, which comprises domestic (trafficking within Nigeria from rural to urban communities) and international (trafficking overseas). Iyanda and Nwogwugwu (2016), posited that there are two different kinds of trafficking that Nigeria is notoriously known for: internal and external trafficking. Internal trafficking is in the form of domestic servitude and street begging, while external trafficking is mostly about sex trafficking and domestic labour. It is also important to note that the dynamics of the trade sometimes differ from one zone to another. For instance, Edo/Delta is majorly known for sex trafficking and accounts for 95% of the incidence of trafficking in Nigeria. Lagos and Ogun are known for child labour and domestic servitude while Benue and Sokoto are for street begging and domestic servitude (CNN 2012, Adepoju, 2005, 2010, TIP Reports 2000-2013). According to (Adepoju, 2005) Nigeria is said to be the main supplier of child labour in different parts of West African sub-region or across much of Africa. However, there is also evidence suggesting that human trafficking in Nigeria had taken another dimension, as it has incorporated baby selling known as 'Baby factory' (a system which promotes child trafficking by creating room for exploiting young girls with undesirable conception) and organ harvesting (UNESCO, 2006, Salihu and Chutiyami 2016).

In an attempt to remedy the situation, the Nigerian government has not rested on its oars in combating the rising trend of human trafficking. In April 2017, the government appointed a new Director General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to continue with the efforts to prevent trafficking and also drafted a 2018-2023 National Action Plan which was considered by the inter-ministerial committee. The committee developed National Policies on Trafficking, including the first draft of a Protocol for Identification, Safe Return, and Rehabilitation of Trafficked Persons (U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report, 2018). In 2019, a crusade was initiated by the

government of the United Kingdom in collaboration with Nigeria's anti-trafficking agency to discontinue women and young girls from being lured, exploited and traded into this present-day slavery. The campaign entitled "I am not for sale" is the message from victims, telling constructive, self-improving stories that might help disabuse the mind of persons in Nigeria from being allured by traffickers offering untrue promises for an improved life overseas (Adebayo, 2019; Adeyeye & Egbulefu, 2022).

The press which is seen as the watchdog of society is saddled with the responsibility of making sense of what goes on around the society to sensitize the citizenry on the goings on in their immediate environment. Okunna (2002) believes that the press wields a lot of power which when used properly can bring about behavioural and social change.  According to Harry (cited in Santas, 2015), the mass media informs the public or citizenry as they provide information about local, national and international events and conditions. Not only do the mass media explain issues unfolding in society to the populace, but they also interpret, analyze and comment on events to provide perspectives on issues in the news. (Santas, 2015; Oriola, 2017). Therefore, as major stakeholders in Nigeria, the mass media have a crucial role to play in reporting criminal activities and are well handled, and capable of reducing the spate. It is in the light of the above stated issues that this study sought to ascertain the kind of coverage given to human trafficking in Nigeria, using selected newspapers.

**The Problem**

In Nigeria, human trafficking is thriving because of vulnerable individuals who leave the shores of their homes in the illusory search for greener pastures against the backdrop of crushing poverty in the land (Olube 2015). Studies have opined that the more families are aware of human trafficking and its forms of manifestation, the less the likelihood of its occurrence (Okpara, 2020). But the continued involvement of people in this act of human trafficking seems to prove that the media need to do more to fulfill its responsibility in raising awareness that will bring about behavioural change. The media is said to have the potency to influence public discourse by placing the news on human trafficking in a recognizable framework so that the readers can comprehend the story, given the critical importance of news in shaping the public attitude and how journalism can provoke social change (Borer, 2015).

Despite a growing body of research about the media coverage of human trafficking in print media, human trafficking has remained a major challenge in Nigeria. This, therefore, raises the question, how has the media covered issues of human trafficking? Another challenge is that policies cannot be adequately addressed without the input of communication in bringing about expected behavioural change which is the role the media is expected to play. In view of the fore-going this study is aimed at ascertaining how the press covered   human trafficking in 2017.

**Research Questions**

For this study, the following questions were formulated:
1. What was the frequency of human trafficking stories reported by the three newspapers?
2. What was the prominence accorded to the reports on human trafficking?

3.  What were the forms of coverage given to human trafficking stories by the newspapers?
4.  What are the origins of human trafficking stories reported by the three newspapers?

**Conceptual Clarification**

Human trafficking depicts several different things to diverse individuals and groups. Over time this devious trade in human beings has taken varied forms. Historically, (chattel servitude, debt bondage, involuntary marriage, agreement slavery, etc.), trafficking in persons has continually involved the obtaining, keeping and using free labour through the application of threat, force and compulsion (Bales, 1999; Wallinger, 2010). Gimba (2005) in Adeyeye and Egbulefu (2022) aver that trafficking or trade-in human beings entails the act of movement of an individual or persons after having conscripted the person, from one location to a new one using the assurance of offering the individual an employment or a marriage proposal, often through the use of deceit, falsehood, trickery, coercion or force. From whatever angle the phenomenon is considered, the consistent outcome of human trafficking is involuntary labour and/or sexual exploitation of the victim either of which Gimba like several other scholars view considers as a major and significant violation of the person's fundamental human rights.

The historic nature of human trafficking in this nation has been studied by academics and there is the belief in some quarters that the issue of human trafficking is significantly connected to the Structural Adjustment Programme. The Structural Adjustment Programme was designed and recommended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to bring economic restoration to the countries of the African continent that were neck-deep in debt. The requirements of the policy, however, necessitated cutbacks in several social areas that were of benefit to the citizenry, especially in areas such as food, agriculture, education, employment etc. (Babawale, 2006; Taran & Demaret, 2006, Attoh & Okeke, 2012). The different types of trading in human beings according to the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report cited in Badejo (2016, p.27) are summarized as "sex trafficking, child sex trafficking, forced labour, forced child labour, bonded labour, domestic servitude, organ trafficking, child soldiers, forced marriage, servile marriage". There exists also some variants of trafficking which may consist of using victims of human trafficking for spiritual rituals (see: Fitzgibbon, 2003; U.S Department of State, 2006; Kamala, Lusinde, Millinga, Mwaitula, Gonza & Juma; 2001) cited in Oppong (2012, p. 40). This form of trafficking for rituals, sometimes involves the religious priests using the trafficked victims for involuntary labour while in some circumstances they may utilize their bodily organs for prescribed religious rituals (Oppong, 2012).

Gleaning from the literatures, factors forcing human trafficking are illiteracy, lack of knowledge, greed, the absence of opportunities, inequity, gender-induced cultural biases, ignorance, growing unemployment and underemployment, poverty (a principal driving force), large family size, absence of government support etc. Other factors include the high demand for cheap labour from overseas, the absence of a political commitment, weak porous and permeable borders, the absence of a strong political will, low access to education, sex-selective/discriminative migration policies, disruption of the supportive system, traditional community attitude, manipulation of religious rituals, HIV and AIDS, insecurity and insurgency, the loss of parents or guardians, ie. orphans, human deprivation, etc. (Moore, 1994; ILO, 2004, Osakwe & Olateru-Olagbegi, 1999a, De Dios,1999; Aghatise, 2002, Adepoju,

2000, 2005, 2010, UNESCO, 2006; UNODC, 2006; Eghafona, 2009; Attoh, 2009). Fundamentally, some identified undeniable causes of human trafficking are: biting poverty, the quest for migration for both study and work in better cities and overseas, battles, defective and weak legal system, absence of sufficient legislative regulations, the lack of a political will on the part of government to tackle it etc. (Adepelumi, 2015; Okeshola & Adenuga, 2018).

**Media Coverage of Human Trafficking**
The media is considered the 'fourth estate of the Realm because it is an authoritative tool in influencing societal opinion and uplifting awareness concerning a matter or an issue (UN.GIFT, 2008). As expected, the general public awaits the media to enlighten and update them to understand the issue of human trafficking. Thus, the media wields the power to influence public learning and to dictate the opinion of the public through the news and language expressed and shared (Borer, 2015; Wallinger, 2010).

Irrespective of the problematic nature of human trafficking, scholars have assessed media coverage of human trafficking in several countries and across different news media. Studies on media coverage of human trafficking have been conducted globally and locally, which include but are not limited to the following researches (Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Nkememena, 2009; Pajnik, 2010; Gulati, 2011; Egbo, 2011; Marchionni, 2012; Johnson, Friedman & Shafer, 2014; Borer, 2015; Stanford, Martinez & Weitzer, 2016).

The researches that explored media coverage of human trafficking, showed that newspapers gave significant attention to issues of human trafficking, even as they failed to offer adequate explanations for trafficking issues in general (Marchionni, 2012; Sobel, 2014; Borer, 2015; Stanford, Martinez & Weitzer, 2016; Gregorious & Ras, 2018). Sobel (2014) studied the English-language news coverage of human trafficking in the USA, India, and Thailand and found out that there was an increase in the volume of coverage of the issue after the treaty, was more localized. Also, Borer (2015) examined media coverage of trafficking in human beings and the study showed a lot of related messages on trafficking inside the print industry. Stanford et. al. (2016) expanded an earlier work of Gulati's 1980-2006 time period which was a "content analysis of news reports on trafficking in persons" published by the New York Times and the Washington Post during the period 2012-2013. Their research established that there was an increase in the number of articles published each year compared to Gulati's study while Gregoriou and Ras (2018) study on call for purge on the people traffickers: an investigation into British newspapers' representation of transnational human trafficking, 2000–2016 found that UK newspapers coverage of human trafficking steadily increased between the years 2000 and 2016. These findings contrasted with that of Nkememena (2009) who studied two Nigerian newspapers (*Daily Sun and Vanguard*) for twelve months. Findings from the study revealed that the select newspapers did not give adequate consideration to the evils of human trafficking. This is due to the low incidence scores ranging between 1-5 times in media reports concerning child trafficking with less magnitude accorded to news stories in the sampled newspapers. Sanders and Godoy (2002) opined that there is a need to increase societal awareness concerning issues that may affect children and that the prevention of child trafficking comprises changing the citizenry's orientation, attitude, beliefs and circumstances both at the individual and community levels as this is aimed to discourage human trafficking to occur.

Several studies that analyzed newspaper articles on human trafficking found straight news stories as the most used genre in reporting human trafficking issues (Nkememena, 2009; Gulati, 2011; Stanford, Martizez & Weitzer, 2016; Reichert, Houston-Kolnik, Vasquez, & Peterson, 2018). Stanford et. al. (2016) study showed that most of the 464 articles referencing human trafficking in their study appeared as news stories (63%), followed by editorials and commentary (18%), mentions of trafficking in a list or transcript (9%), news summaries (6%), and letters to the editor (5%). These results are similar to those found by Gulati (2011) in that news stories and editorials/commentary remained the two largest categories. Also, Nkememena (2009) and Reichert, Houston-Kolnik, Vasquez, & Peterson (2018) found out that most of the stories were straight news.

Information on the issue of "focus of an article" refers to the form/type of human trafficking referenced and/or the context in which trafficking was discussed. Stanford et. al. (2016) study found that the greatest percentage of articles referred to sex trafficking was (64%), followed by articles discussing both sex and labour (13%), and labour only (11%). The remaining articles discussed trafficking in the context of immigration/human smuggling, illegal adoptions, and historical slavery (9%), or did not reference a specific trafficking issue (3%). The prominence of sex trafficking in this article is consistent with other studies, such as those by (Marchionni; 2012; Gulati, 2011; Johnston, Friedman and Shafer, 2014; Muraszkiewicz, Georgious & Constantinou, 2014; Borer, 2015; Smith, 2019). These researchers interpreted these findings as confirmation that media coverage helped legitimize the dominant view of trafficking, which at that point was characterized mostly as sex trafficking and prostitution by both the U.S. government and the UN.

While the review of the current literature suggests that much scholarly work has been conducted regarding media coverage of human trafficking, there is room for additional research. Consequently, this research addresses the prominence given to human trafficking in Nigeria using quantitative method and hence contributes new insight to the growing field of research in human trafficking.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Agenda-Setting theory was used to anchor this study. The agenda-setting theory was first developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972/1973. The theory describes the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda (Okoro, Ukonu, Odoemelam and Eze, 2015). Wimmer and Dominick (2005) argue that agenda setting examines the relationship between media priorities and audience priorities in the relative importance of news topics. This implies that what news is given priorities to with large prominence and frequency becomes the most important news topic on the public agenda. Folarin, in Adeyeye and Egbulefu (2022), states that agenda setting implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. Succinctly put in the words of McComb and Shaw, as cited by Mohammed (2015):

> In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue but, how much importance to attach to the issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position (p. 147).

Through the agenda-setting role of the media, readers learn not only about public issues and other matters but also learn how important the issue is by the emphasis placed on it by the media. The media are successful in achieving this through the frequency of the reports, prominence attached to reports and elaborate headline displays.

This study is anchored on this theory because it provides additional perspective on how the media report of human trafficking issues could affect how people process the mediated crime messages; based on the fact that human trafficking has been universally condemned as a crime against humanity and it's what the society frown at. Okoro, Ukonu, Odoemelam and Eze (2015) affirm the relevance of the theory by stating that it is quite appropriate to help us understand the pervasive role of the media.

**Research Method**

The research design for this study is content analysis. It was used to analyze hard copies of newspaper articles from *The Guardian*, *The Punch* and *Vanguard*, newspapers. The study population comprised published articles from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017 which is 180 editions of the newspapers These newspapers were purposively selected based on their national outlook and circulation, besides the fact that there were not enough resources and time to include other national papers. The study period was chosen due to its significance in the area of human trafficking because it was the year the Federal Government designed a five-year nationwide action strategic plan document including the first draft of a Protocol for Identification, Safe Return and Rehabilitation of Trafficked Persons (U.S. State Department's TIRs, 2018). The content analysis involved a systematic procedure. Samples were selected using a composite week sampling procedure that yields constructed weeks for each month (Riffe, Aust & Lacy, 1993). A sample of one Monday (drawn at random from the four or five possible Mondays in the month), one Tuesday (drawn from the available Tuesdays), and so on, until all weekdays are included (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). To arrive at the editions studied within one year, the edition of the newspaper for the month under investigation were drawn at random- for example, using the month of January 2017 by picking day 9th as one Monday from the possible four or five Mondays in a month, day 17th, as one Tuesday from the available Tuesdays and on until all weekdays were included. A total of 180 newspaper editions were selected for the content analysis. This involved observation of seven content elements in the papers: *news stories, features, editorials, opinion articles, letters to the editor, cartoons and photographs that focus on human trafficking.* These elements constitute the primary journalistic output of news media in Nigeria. They were measured for frequency, prominence, form of coverage and origin of human trafficking story. Also, the categorization scheme was carefully formulated, which includes categories and subcategories under four mutually exclusive dimensions which are: *frequency, prominence, form of coverage and origin* of news stories.

The frequency of human trafficking coverage was determined by looking at the number of times human trafficking issues were reported in the sample within the period under study. Prominence was determined by the placement of each item about human trafficking on the pages of the newspapers. The front and back pages were considered important while those that appeared at the inside page were considered less important. Form of coverage was determined by the type of news report; whether the stories were news stories, features,

editorials, opinion articles, letters to the editor etc. while the origin of human trafficking was classified into official sources (security agencies, the law court and the Government), NGOs/Human trafficking advocates, eyewitnesses, News agencies/Reporters and victims.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1: Total Number of Stories Published by the Newspapers**

| Newspapers | Frequency | Percentages |
|---|---|---|
| The Guardian | 15 | 33% |
| The Punch | 12 | 26% |
| Vanguard | 19 | 41% |
| **Total** | **46** | **100%** |

Source: Content Analysis 2022

The data presented in table 1 show that a total number of 46 stories were published on human trafficking. Out of this number, *The Guardian* published 15 (33%) stories; *The Punch* Newspaper published 12 (26%) while *Vanguard* published 19 (41%) stories. Therefore, *Vanguard* Newspaper published more stories than *The Guardian* and *The Punch* during the period reviewed.

**Table 2: Prominence Given to Human Trafficking Reports as Covered by the Newspaper**

| Newspapers | Prominence | | | | | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Front Page | | Inside Page | | Back Page | | | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| The Guardian | 3 | 6.5 | 12 | 26 | - | - | 15 | 33 |
| The Punch | 2 | 4.3 | 10 | 22 | - | - | 12 | 26 |
| Vanguard | 4 | 8.7 | 15 | 33 | - | - | 19 | 41 |
| **Total** | **9** | **20%** | **37** | **80%** | **-** | **-** | **46** | **100%** |

Source: Content Analysis 2022

The data in table 2 show, that most of the stories on human trafficking appeared on the inside pages of the select papers. This accounts for 80%; 20% of the stories appeared on the front pages while no news story appeared on the back pages of the newspapers.

**Table 3: Forms of Coverage Given by the Newspapers**

| Newspapers | Story Type | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | News stories | | Features | | Editorial | | Opinion Articles | | Letter to the Editor | | Cartoon | | Photo | | | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| The Guardian | 7 | 15 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 15 | 33 |
| The Punch | 4 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 12 | 26 |
| Vanguard | 11 | 24 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 00 | | 0 | 0 | 19 | 41 |
| **Total** | **22** | **48%** | **7** | **15%** | **2** | **4%** | **7** | **15%** | **5** | **11%** | **0** | **0** | **3** | **7%** | **46** | **100%** |

Source: Content Analysis 2022

The table above reveals the analysis of the type of stories covered by the Newspapers on human trafficking. The sampled newspapers reported their publication mostly in the form of news stories (48%), followed by features with seven stories (15%) and opinion articles seven stories (15%) respectively. Letter to the editor had eleven stories (11%), the photo had three (7%) while editorial had just two (4%). Meanwhile, none of the papers discussed the issue of human trafficking using cartoons. However, Vanguard newspaper had the highest form of coverage on human trafficking with 24% followed by The Guardian newspaper with 15% respectively.

**Table 4: Origin of Human Trafficking Stories**

| Newspapers | Sources of Stories | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Official Sources | | NGOs/ Human Trafficking advocates | | Eye Witnesses | | Victims | | News Agency/ Reporters | | | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| The Guardian | 7 | 15 | 5 | 11 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 14 | 30.4 |
| The Punch | 4 | 9 | 6 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 24. 0 |
| Vanguard | 9 | 20 | 7 | 15 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 21 | 45.6 |
| **Total** | **20** | **44%** | **18** | **39%** | **2** | **4%** | **2** | **4%** | **4** | **9 %** | **46** | **100%** |

Source: Content Analysis 2022

Table 4, indicates the origins of human trafficking stories. From the sampled newspapers, the majority of their sources of information emanates from Official sources – Government, security agencies and courts, followed by NGOs/Human trafficking advocate with 39%; News agency/reporters accounts for 9% while Eyewitness and Victims account for 4% each respectively.

**Discussion of Findings**

*Research Question One: What was the frequency of human trafficking stories reported by the three newspapers?*

The analysis of data with regards to this research question showed that the select newspapers reported only forty-six stories that had a direct connection with human trafficking in all the stories reported. The newspapers gave 26% of their coverage to human trafficking from the total number of 180 newspapers studied. With this result, therefore, the researchers argue that the three newspapers have not properly set the agenda on human trafficking discourse. This corroborates with the result of Nkememena (2009) work on press coverage of child trafficking and Egbo (2012) study of newspaper coverage of sexual violence against women and children, which found from their research that most of their stories did not get adequate consideration due to the low incidence scores in media reports. This situation is worrying because frequency is one of the important indicators of agenda setting (Folarin 1998 cited in Ikechukwu 2015). Also, a study conducted by Gever (2014) in Ikechukwu (2015, p. 182) on press coverage of low

back pain indicates that frequency is an important indicator which influences audience understanding. Furthermore, the result of this study is however not contrary to the result of Adeyeye and Egbulefu (2022) that found out that the newspapers studied did not attached significance to stories relating to human trafficking which is evident in their infrequent reporting of the discourse.

*Research Question Two: What was the prominence accorded to the reports on human trafficking?*
The presentation and analysis in table 2, revealed that 37 (80%) of the stories were placed on the inside pages, 9(20%) were on the front page while no stories were at the back pages of the newspapers studied. The findings show that the three newspapers did not give adequate importance to the issue of human trafficking. The result of this study corroborates with that of Egbo (2012) evaluation study of newspaper coverage of sexual violence against women and children, who reported that the three dallies studied, did not attach importance to sexual violence issue based on the premise on their placement of sexual violence reports. He further states that placement of story is not only an indication of adjudged importance of the story by newspapers which invariably influence people's perception of such issue being important but also, it makes the story strategic for audience attention. The findings of this study, is also in line with result of Adeyeye and Egbulefu (2022), which reported that the prominence accorded to the stories on human trafficking were extremely low when compared to the value given to other issues reported within the same period.

With reference to the age-long practice in the print media, stories considered of utmost importance are given prominence through lavish display on both front and back pages where readers could easily notice them while those of less importance are situated in the inside pages of the papers (Adeyeye & Egbulefu, 2022).

*Research Question Three: What were the forms of coverage given to human trafficking stories by the newspapers?*
Data analysis in table 3, showed a differential pattern in the distribution of entries. Findings revealed that most of the stories were news stories which had forty-eight percent (48%). This collaborates with the results of findings by Nkememena, 2009; Gulati, 2011; Egbo, 2012; Santas, 2015; Stanford et. al, 2016; Reichert, Houston-Kolnik, Vasquez, & Peterson, 2018; Adeyeye & Egbulefu, 2022), that the format in reporting stories were mainly straight news. Looking at the three papers critically, it is evident that *Vanguard* Newspaper had more news stories with 11 news items compared to *The Guardian* (7 news items) and *The Punch* (4 news items). This is followed by features with 15% and opinion articles with 15% respectively. What could be inferred from this analysis is that some human trafficking stories were given an in-depth interpretation for readers' understanding and also that some readers were able to send their views and opinions to the papers following the activities of the menace as they unfold during the period understudy. The findings further showed that out of the three dailies, *the Punch* has no entry of human trafficking stories units in the editorial page. This was not expected as editorials give readers the stand of the newspaper on any issue, given the fact that human trafficking has drawn the attention of local, national and international communities. A study by Aja (2010) cited in Okoro, Ukonu, Odoemelam and Eze (2015) showed that factors

like editorial idiosyncrasy, ownership and house style might be responsible for determining the form of newspaper coverage.

### *Research Question Four: What are the origins of human trafficking stories reported by the three newspapers?*

The analysis of the data with regard to this research question showed that majority of the human trafficking stories were from official sources- Government, security agents and court; followed by NGOs/Human trafficking Advocates; while just a few came from an eyewitness accounts, victims and news agencies/reporters (See table 4). The implication of these findings however can be seen in the submission of Rubin and Sachsman (1976) cited in Mohammed (2015) that since reporters work with the police and courts that crime reporting always have official viewpoint. The use of police or court officials could be faulted at this level of reporting because it denies the audience the necessary background information required in covering stories.

### Conclusion

Taking cognizance of the findings of this study, we can conclude that the three newspapers have lived up to the expectation of being socially responsible to the Nigerian public by reporting news events of national importance. However, the newspapers to a large extent did not set agenda on human trafficking discourse which is evident in their infrequent reporting and rare use of editorials in their patterns of reporting because they are expected to create a particular view in the minds of the people in terms of educating, sensitizing and mobilizing them against human trafficking. Furthermore, we believe that the presentation of human trafficking stories in news format by implication prevents a more comprehensive knowledge of human trafficking by the Nigerian populace.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the light of the findings of this study:

1. Nigerian print media should continue to intensify efforts in drawing more attention to the ills of human trafficking by increasing the frequency of their reports on the issue to set the agenda on it.
2. The print media should devote more space to feature articles that provide in-depth analysis of news stories than straight news. This will provide perspectives on issues that could help in understanding the problems.
3. Efforts should be made by government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the media to carry out extensive campaigns to enlighten the populace that there is no greener pasture on the streets of the developed countries. This no doubt, will help to dissuade them from being victims of human trafficking due to false impressions.
4. Security agencies, particularly those at our borders, such as the Nigerian Immigration Service and the Nigerian Customs Service, should be trained in the area of tracking down syndicates involved in this heinous crime. The Nigerian Police should be trained to detect perpetrators of human trafficking.
5. Finally, further studies should be conducted to find out public awareness of the dangers of human trafficking in Nigeria.

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