



## Media Coverage and Framing of Cultural Practices that Target Nigerian Women

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**Abstract:** This study examines media coverage of unwholesome cultural practices with regard to women in Nigeria and its inherent framing patterns. Contents of five dominant broadcast and print media—Africa Independent Television (AIT), Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Vanguard, The Nation and Daily Sun were investigated while 121 media practitioners responded to questionnaire items in Rivers State, a political subdivision in the southern part of the country. Findings show an insignificant coverage of the cultural practices that denigrate women while the framing patterns exhibit a non-condemnatory stance. These unimpressive outcomes are upshots of reporters' low awareness profile of the issue, patriarchy and advertisers' lack of interest. Journalists will need to be sensitized toward these negative cultural practices to enhance their coverage and creation of framing patterns that favor of women.

**Keywords:** Broadcast media, framing patterns, cultural practices, media coverage, women.

## **Introduction**

Generally, Nigerian women are victims of gender-induced violence and discriminatory cultural practices. They are regarded as objects to be used for pleasure, temptation and elimination. For instance, a man will beat his wife and nothing will happen. Nigerians would rather expect her to go on her knees and beg him. Cultural practices against the female gender constitute a ubiquitous plague in Nigeria and Africa (Odunjinrin, 1993). Governments and multilateral institutions have come up with some policies to tackle the problem but it appears solution is still farfetched.

Violence against women is under-reported in spite of its high prevalence in many cultural settings both in the developed and developing countries (Molloy, 2000; Odimegwu, 2001). For instance, studies indicate that 10-58% of women have experienced one form of physical abuse or another by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Furthermore, cross-sectional studies show that 40% of women in South Africa, 28% in Tanzania and 7% in New Zealand reported that their first sexual intercourse was forced (Weigert, 1999). Cultural practices against women are evident in many forms, including domestic, verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual

assault, early and forced marriages, incest and female genital mutilation.

In most societies, physical abuse is often considered an acceptable behaviour, and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting the men who engage in it (Odimegwu, 2001; Watt and Zimmerman, 2002). For example, among the Luhya community in Western Kenya and Tiv-speaking people of Nigeria, wife beating is even regarded as a sign of love, which women have been socialized to accept and sometimes encourage it (Odimegwu, 2001; Ifemeje, 2008). Cultural practices against women perpetrated often by male partners are widely condoned by many Nigerian societies where the belief that a husband may chastise his wife by beating her is deeply embedded in the culture (Odunjinrin, 1993; Okemgbo, Omideyi and Odimegwu, 2002). Traditional attitudes regarding the subordination of women exacerbate problems of sexual and domestic violence (Otitte, 2000). Therefore, violence against women provides one of the most obvious illustrations of the low position and status that women are accorded in many cultures in Nigeria.

Cultural discrimination against women is also an aspect of the practices against women. Discrimination against women occurs in all spheres of the Nigerian

life and is characterized by features left by culture, colonial legacy, religion, education, politics, employment and legislation (Mollory, 2000).

Cultural practices against women in Nigeria are an outgrowth of patriarchy where the roles of men and women are socially constructed in such a way that women occupy inferior positions in the scheme of things (Odimegwu, 2001). According to Omojola and Yartey, (2016, p.84) "Patriarchy, an age-long culture controls the polity through dialogic lockdown that allows only a very few opportunities for the subaltern, especially women." Due to preference for boys in most cultures, a woman without a male child is regarded as almost barren. For this reason, the husband of such a woman usually takes another wife with the hope of bearing a male child. This is borne out of the belief in male physical, psychological and social superiority. Only the male child is regarded as capable of upholding the lineage while the female gets married into another family. Consequently, girls are treated as temporary members of their families, sometimes denied equal access to education, feeding and inheritance. Unfortunately, women are also treated as strangers in their husbands' families because of the possibility of divorce. This is reflected in the traditional practice

where daughters and natural members of a family have more rights than the wives.

Some societies in Nigeria such as the people of Abakaliki in Ebonyi State have food taboos for female children. Food sacrificed to the gods cannot be eaten by girls. They are also not allowed to eat gizzard and the anus or head of fowl. There is no nutrition-oriented reason for preventing girls and women from eating such foods.

The recent debate on the amendment of the 1999 constitution raised a controversial question on the position and treatment of women under the law in Nigeria. Many people have expressed shock and disappointment over the unequal treatment of women by the constitution, particularly section 29 (4) (b), which technically supports child marriage.

For the foregoing reasons, media coverage of the activities associated with practices against women becomes an important issue. News content can create the necessary awareness needed by society to promote development including in the areas that concern women. To do this, it is also pertinent that such coverage come with framed reports. Framing, thus, would direct the perception of the audience such as taking condemnatory stances against such practices that demean women in the society. This study aimed at

establishing the extent the media have gone in covering and framing the cultural practices that discriminate against women in Nigeria.

### **The Problem**

In the pre-colonial Nigeria and a little after independence in 1960, cultural practices against women had received very little or no attention. This lack of visibility in public forums had been used as a weapon to perpetrate the practices. However, since the UN Declaration on the elimination of cultural practices against women (CEDAW), attempts have been made by governments, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders in Nigeria to address the powerful cultural, traditional and religious forces that have hindered the elimination of dangerous cultural practices against women.

To this end and considering the self-assigned role of the media as agents of social change and development, it became imperative to investigate how the media in Nigeria had played its role with respect to discouraging negative cultural practices against women. We were particularly interested in the framing patterns that the news and reports on these cultural practices followed in the broadcast and print media.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are the following:

- i. Determine the extent to which cultural practices against women are covered in the broadcast media in Nigerian;
- ii. Ascertain the patterns of framing of cultural practices against women in the Nigerian broadcast media;
- iii. Determine the factors that impinge on broadcast media coverage of cultural practices against women in the Nigerian, and
- iv. Ascertain the level of awareness of cultural practices against women among journalists.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***A brief on Culture***

Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits music and arts. According to Schreck (2000), it is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts morals, law, custom and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of the society. It is the shared pattern of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and effective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the member of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group. It is a people's way of life i.e. the fundamental ways of doing things common to a people.

Custom is defined in Black's Law Dictionary as a usage or practice of the people which by common adoption and acquiescence and by long and unvarying habit has become compulsory and has acquired the force of a law with respect to the place or subject matter to which it relates. According to Egbuo (2005) the customary law embodies unwritten customs and traditions, which have been accepted as obligatory by members of a community; it is a body of unwritten customs and traditions accepted as obligatory by members of the community for the regulation of the relations between its members. Osborne (1998) cited in Salami (2012) adds: "One of the most striking features of West African native custom ... is its flexibility; it appears to have been always subject to motives of expediency and it shows unquestionable adaptability to altered circumstances without entirely losing its character..." (p. 5).

### **The Concern with the Law**

It appears there is a growing interest of activists in the rights of women under the laws of Nigeria. They have been able to raise some issues including the following:

- Gender-bias Language of the constitution: The language used by the constitution is not gender neutral, perhaps because it was written by men.

For example, the pronoun "He" appears in the 1999 constitution about 235 times. Some advocates have recommended for replacing "he" with "a person" or "He and She."

- Lopsided Government's appointments and composition of agencies: Section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution does not show gender consideration in the composition of the government and its agencies.
- Indecent assaults on males and females: The Criminal Code discriminates against women on the issue of punishment against personal assaults. Section 353 of the Criminal Code provides that: "Any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults any male person is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for three years." Conversely, Section 360 provides that "Any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults a woman or girl is guilty of a misdemeanor, and is liable to imprisonment for two years." Why the difference?
- Marital rape: Can a man rape his wife? Yes, but not in Nigeria. Under the Nigerian criminal law, a man cannot rape his wife. Section 182 of the Penal Code provides that "sexual intercourse by a man

with his own wife is not rape if she has attained puberty.” Those advocating recognition of marital rape claim that this provision condones the defilement of young girls.

- Spousal abuse/wife beating: Section 55(1) (d) of the Penal Code provides that “Nothing is an offence, which does not amount to the infliction of grievous harm upon any person and which is done by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife. Such husband and wife being subject to any natural law or custom in which such correction is recognized as lawful.” One can argue that this provision condones domestic violence and may be used as justification for abuse against women in matrimonial relationships.

### **Cultural Practices against Women**

Some of the cultural practices against women in Nigeria are:

#### ***i. Early and forced marriage***

Early marriage refers to marriage of persons below the age of 18 years and is practised in different parts of Nigeria but more in the Northern parts of Nigeria (mostly among the Muslims) (Asadu, 2011). These young girls are given into marriage for various reasons, which include economic, maintenance of chastity and maintenance of family name.

Most often the girls are forced by their parents and sometimes abducted by the rich and powerful in the society.

#### ***ii. Female Circumcision***

Female genital mutilation is another cultural practise that leads to the abuse of women and is widely practiced in Nigeria. It involves the “partial or total removal of the external female genital and/or injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or any non-therapeutic reasons and is carried out for various cultural reasons such as maintenance of chastity and virginity before marriage, increasing sexual pleasure of the husbands, fidelity during marriage and intake of women into womanhood (Aduh, 2003).

#### ***iii. Wife inherited by husband’s relatives***

In some communities in Nigeria, the death of a wife of a customary marriage automatically brings the marriage to an end. However, where it is the husband that dies, the marriage does not come to an end, the wife is inherited within the family. Thus, the woman is given to any of the husband’s brothers or relations and is expected to continue to perform her matrimonial roles to him whether she likes it or not (Reychler and Jacobs 2004). Even though this practice is gradually dying out because of the influence of religion, modernization, and the current scourge of HIV/AIDS, it is

still going on in some communities in Nigeria.

***iv. Divorce***

In situations where a couple married under customary law goes through divorce, the woman is required to refund the bride-price paid on her regardless of the number of years she and her husband had been married and the number of children they have. Even when the woman has been married for forty or more years she would still be required to make the refund. Upon divorce, the children of the marriage, in most cases, are required to be in the man's custody. The woman is not entitled to properties: no house, no furniture, no farms etc. She is just asked to leave her matrimonial home for wherever (Ofie-Aboagye, 1994). The customary practice in relation to divorce as practiced by many traditional communities is certainly repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience.

***v. Widowhood rites***

In some Nigerian communities, whenever a man dies, his wife is usually suspected and often accused of knowledge of and/or complicity in his death. This is common in the southeast Nigeria. Such suspicion or accusation is never made when a wife dies. In some communities, the wife is made to undergo some life-threatening ritual to prove her innocence. In some areas, she is made to drink the water used in

washing the corpse of her deceased husband in an attempt to prove her innocence.

***vi. Domestic violence***

Several women in Igboland, also in the southeast, are victims of all manner of domestic violence. According to Egbue (2009, p.6) on this, "Violence against women constitutes a highly damaging dimension of the dehumanization of women on the basis of culture. This still remains common practice in the localities studied, either as means of maintaining masculinity and male superiority, or of keeping female spouse in check."

***vii. Payment and refund of bride price***

From all indications, the aspect of the Igbo customary law that specifies payment and refund of bride price has attracted much criticism from women's rights activists. For instance, Enemu (1990, p.32) has condemned the acts in the following terms: "One would observe that the picture painted by the refund of bride price is exactly the same painted by its payment. That portrayed a woman as a piece of chattel being bought or rejected by its owners." The author suggests that there should be neither payment nor refund of bride price. Aduh (2003) also argues that the payment and refund of bride price paints a portrait of commercialisation.

**viii. Marginalization of Women's Rights in Dissolution of Customary Law Marriage**

In the process of the dissolution of Igbo customary law marriage, women are often at a loss as they are given any financial compensation. Furthermore, they are also denied the custody of the children on the argument children belong exclusively to men under the Igbo custom.

**ix. Male Preference Syndrome**

Male sons are preferred under the Igbo culture. The birth of a son into any Igbo family calls for a big celebration and jubilation. The importance placed on the birth of a son is often reflected in the names often given to male sons at birth, such as "Amaechina", "Ogbonna", "Nwokeabia", "Nwokedi, Nwokediuko etc. Literally interpreted, these names connote and extol the importance of male children in the family. Even in the home, the girl-child is practically forced to perform all the chores, for the simple reason that she is a girl and the place of a girl is in the kitchen.

**Inequality, Violence and the Nigerian Woman**

Discrimination against women is a universal phenomenon though certain socio-cultural practices that exist in some societies like Africa and some third world countries make women more susceptible than

in others like Europe, America and other advanced countries where such practices are not as prevalent. The moment a girl-child is born in Nigeria, she starts to encounter discrimination. People who come to felicitate often greet the birth of a girl child with less glee than that of a boy. Some people even respond to questions on the sex of a new baby girl by saying she is another asewo (prostitute), especially if the mother had given birth to many female children in the past.

Nigeria is signatory to many multilateral agreements that frown at discrimination against women. For example, there is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), ratified by Nigeria in December 1991. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights in 1986, ratified and domesticated by Nigeria and the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989 and ratified by Nigeria in 1992 and most importantly the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003 – a unique piece of legislation which takes into consideration the provisions of other international instruments on human rights that touch on women's rights and the need for equality and freedom from discrimination.



Unimpressively, however, these have not succeeded in curbing the discrimination menace. But according to NCWS (2014):

Some of these beliefs have been practiced for so long that they are embedded in the societal perception almost as a legal norm. Such that the laws of the land and international instruments which protect the rights of women, are flagrantly infringed in the guise of these age long cultural and/or religious belief (p.46).

Domestic violence is deep-rooted in many African societies, including Nigeria, where wife beating is considered a prerogative of men (Odumengwu, 2001; Ofie-Aboagye, 1994) and a purely domestic matter by the society (Rivera-Izabel, 1995). Domestic violence is one of the greatest barriers to ending the subordination of women. Women, for fear of violence, are unable to refuse sex or negotiate safer sexual practices, thus increasing their vulnerability to HIV if their husbands are unfaithful (Watts, Ndlovu, Njovana and Keogh, 1997).

### **Mass Media, Social Change and Development**

McQuail (2010) has identified some functions that media perform to promote national growth and development. Prominent among these is media as social change. In media and cultural studies, two types of social change are visible:

First is major or macro social change that often appears to be revolutionary. Media were the catalyst of change in the following examples:

- The Arab Spring
- The emergence of South Sudan as a sovereign nation
- Barack Obama's win as the President of the United States
- Live telecast of Gulf War;
- The emergence of social media.

The second captures the minor or micro social change that appears to be quite subtle but can exert enough power to change the existing social order. Minor social changes often deal with ethnicity, individuality, social and cultural categories (social identity) (Ihechu, Okugo and Onwukwe, 2015) such as languages, emotions, conventions, rituals, hierarchies, deliberate praxis, exterior and interior behavioural expressions, milestones, traffic signals and all possible mundane exercises that affect life.

For media to be agents of minor or major social change the following are the processes that must occur in their contents namely:

- Priming: Publishing preponderantly about some issues in a way that alters the standards by which the audience evaluates those issues.
- Framing: Preparing some content preponderantly to make

them have more meaning than others to the audience.

- Agenda Setting: Publishing to influence the value or importance placed by the audience on the topics of public discourse or agenda.
- Media Cultivation: Using content to change the audience's behaviour (or even ideology) in the long run. This has capacity to change the socio-political and economic order.

### **On Framing and Agenda Setting Theories**

The theories underlying this study are Framing theory and Agenda Setting theory. Framing expands the agenda-setting tradition by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand. In essence, framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media place on the information they convey. They are thought to influence the perception of the news by the audience. In this way it could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting – they not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also

how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory). Framing techniques according to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) entail:

- Metaphor: To frame a conceptual idea through comparison to something else.
- Stories (myths, legends): To frame a topic via narrative in a vivid and memorable way.
- Tradition (rituals, ceremonies): Cultural mores that imbue significance in the mundane, closely tied to artefacts.
- Slogan, jargon, and catchphrase: To frame an object with a catchy phrase to make it more memorable and relate-able.
- Artefact: Objects with intrinsic symbolic value – a visual/cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the object itself.
- Contrast: To describe an object in terms of what it is not.
- Spin: To present a concept in such a ways as to convey a value judgment (positive or negative) that might not be immediately apparent; to create an inherent bias by definition.

In the light of the foregoing, we analyze the media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria.

## **Agenda Setting Theory**

Agenda-setting theory describes the "ability news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important. By comparing the salience of issues in news content with the public's perceptions of the most important election issue, McCombs and Shaw (1968) cited in Ibrahim (2012) were able to determine the degree to which the media determine public opinion. Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basic assumptions underlie most researches on agenda-setting:

1. The press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it;
2. Media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues.

In relation to this study, we examine how the mass media in Nigeria have been able to capture or set agenda on cultural practices against women and some factors impinging on the agenda setting function in this regard.

## **Methods**

The research design for this study encompasses survey and content analysis. The two methods were

adopted to enhance the quality of results from three sets of population. The first set consisted of all the programme schedules of broadcast stations. The second had all the editions of newspaper and magazines in Nigeria while the third was made up of reporters, editors and other practitioners in Nigeria. Based on visibility, the following media were selected:

1. Broadcast: Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and Africa Independent Television (AIT)
2. Print: Daily Sun newspaper, Vanguard newspaper and The Nation newspaper.

The first population set had 184 programme schedules from the two stations under study for March, April and May (that is, 92 days for each station).

The second accessible population was 276; being the total number of editions published by the three newspapers under study in three months. The units of analysis were representations of cultural practices against women in Nigeria as reflected in news, editorials, cartoons/pictures, commentaries/documentaries, advertisements/commercials, press/news release; etc. The frames are identified based on the patterns/techniques of framing as captured by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996).

The third population was 175 being the total number of journalists in Rivers State. This figure was gotten from the National Union of

Journalists (NUJ) Secretariat in Port Harcourt in the River State of Nigeria.

**Results**

Table 1: Coverage of cultural practices against women in the selected broadcast media

Media	Total number of programmes for the period under study	Number of programmes on cultural practices against women	Percentage
FRCN	1,245 (100%)	9	0.7%
AIT	1,567 (100%)	21	1.3%
TOTAL	2812 (100%)	30	1.066%

The table above shows data on the coverage of cultural practices against women by the media organizations within the period

under study. Only minute percentages were recorded for the media organizations which in any case is just 2% added together.

Table 2: Specific cultural practices against women reflected in the broadcast media

Media	Early marriage	Widowhood practices	Female genital mutilation	Domestic violence/battering	Divorce	Wife inheritance	Male preference syndrome	Bride price refund/sale in marriage	total
FRCN	1	3	3	2	-	-	-	-	9
AIT	2	1	5	12	1	-	-	-	21
TOTAL	3 (10%)	4 (13%)	8 (27%)	14 (47%)	1 (3%)	-	-	-	30(100%)

Table 2 shows that domestic violence/battering has the highest reported cases in the media within the period understudy, followed by female genital mutilation, widowhood practices, early marriage

and then divorce. Other issues such as wife inheritance, bride price refunds/ sale of women in marriage as well as male preference syndrome were not captured by the media.

Table 3: Genre of coverage of cultural practices against women in the broadcast media

Media	News	Talk show	Ad jingles	Documentaries	Drama/play/soap-opera	total
FRCN	5	2	-	-	2	9
AIT	11	3	-	2	5	21
TOTAL	16(53%)	5(17%)	-	2 (7%)	7 (23%)	30(100%)

The table shows that within the period understudy, a majority percentage of 53% was recorded for NEWS genre in the coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria followed by drama,

play/soap-opera, talk shows, and documentaries. Ad/jingles did not feature in the coverage of cultural practices against women within the period under study.

Table 4: Items and Genre of coverage of cultural practices against women in the print media

Media	News	Editorials	Cartoons/pictures	Features	Adverts	Total
Daily Sun	2	1	2	3	-	8(38%)
Vanguard	2	-	-	3	1	6(29%)
The Nation	1	1	1	4	-	7(33%)
Total	5(24%)	2(10%)	3(14%)	10(48%)	1(4%)	21(100%)

Table 4 provides some information on both the items and genre of coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. The picture that emerges from the table is that 21 items of cultural practice against women were identified within the period. Among the three

newspapers, *Daily Sun* had the highest percentage in terms of coverage of the issues with the percentage of 38% followed by *The Nation* and *Vanguard*. The highest percentage was identified in Features (48%) followed by News (24%).

Table 5: Frames in the coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria

Media	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	Total
AIT	-	10	2	-	-	-	9	21
FRCN	-	4	1	-	-	-	4	9
Daily Sun	1	5	1	-	-	-	1	8
Vanguard	-	3	2	-	-	-	1	6
Nation	-	4	1	1	-	-	1	7
Total	1(2%)	26(51%)	7(14%)	1(2%)	-	-	16(31%)	51(100%)

KEYS: F1 = housewife syndrome; F2 = male preferences; F3 = widowhood rights; F4 = marital rape; F5 = wife beating; F6 = exclusions; F7 = wife-servants.

Table 5 shows that there are frames in the coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria, and using the framing techniques listed earlier, the patterns of framing of the issues

in the media can be identified. For each of the items on cultural practices against women in each of the titles, the table reveals the framing pattern for each media.

Table 6: Awareness of cultural practices against women among the journalists

Responses	Scores	Frequency	%	Average score
Highly aware	5	12	10	0.49
Aware	4	17	14	0.56
Moderately aware	3	25	21	0.61
Unaware	2	24	20	0.39
Highly unaware	1	42	35	0.34
Total		121	100	2.39

Overall awareness rating = 47%

Table 6 shows that awareness is very low (47% with an average score of 2.39) and does not match

the spate of increase in cultural practices against women.

Table 7: Constraints of media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Low awareness/knowledge among reporters	32 (38)	84% (100%)
Low audience interest	7 (38)	18% (100%)
Culture of patriarchy	30 (38)	79% (100%)
Lack of sponsorship	31 (38)	81% (100%)
Poor government/NGOs attitude	15 (38)	39% (100%)
Scarcity of happenings/occurrence	3 (38)	8% (100%)

From Table 7 it is evident that low awareness/knowledge, culture of patriarchy, and lack of sponsorship are the most pronounced identified constraints to effective coverage of cultural practices against women in the media.

### Discussion

**RQ 1:** To what extent do the media cover cultural practices against women in Nigeria?

Analyses of data in Tables 1 through 4 show the coverage of cultural practices against women in the media within the period under study. For the broadcast media, out of 2812 items/programmes for the period under study, 1.06% was on cultural practices against women in Nigeria. What is more, the media seem to be selective of the cultural practices against women covered. For instance such issues as wife inheritance, bride price refunds/sale of women in marriage as well as male preference syndrome were not captured in the media within the

period under study. In the same vein, some genres of the media programs adjudged to be very efficient in facilitating audience interest and internalisation of media message (Asadu, 2011; Ibrahim, 2012) were missing in the coverage of cultural practices against women such genres include soap-operas/drama and short plays, advertisements, among others. For the print media, coverage of the issues was very low in Nigeria. Only a total of 21 items on cultural practices against women featured in the media analyzed. This is out of at least 70 items in each of the 36 editions of the newspapers analyzed within the period. However, high percentage (41%) for Features genre shows some case of some elaboration by the media on the issue and hence impressive.

From the analysis so far, it could be deduced that the extent of coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria is very low compared to the period under study. This was a

period set aside world over to celebrate womanhood and one would expect that more attention should have been directed at such issues within such period. Again , cultural practices against women in Nigeria has become a disturbing issue as most NGOs, government agencies as well as women ministries, agencies and civil society organizations in Nigeria have been re-echoing the need for all hands to be on deck in eradicating certain cultural practices against women. For instance, the National Council of Women Society (NCWS) in their communiqué at the end of their 2014 national convention observes as follows:

The task of liberating the Nigerian woman and indeed the African women from obnoxious, barbaric and outdated cultural practices is a collective one. It is an action that requires all and sundry and most importantly the media...we need the media to tell our stories, our experiences and ordeals... that way, the society can fill our plight and that marks a big step towards ending ill-treatments against women in the name of culture (p.8).

However, some reasons could be adduced for the poor coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. We live in a society overtly taken over by preponderance of political and economic issues. These

issues take the media 'front burner' and as such are given almost all media attention and focus. Issues such as cultural practices against women are taken less seriously and can hardly compete for a space in the media. There is however, the need for the media to strike a balance in this regard.

**RQ 2:** Are there frames? What is the pattern of media framing of cultural practices against women in Nigeria?

Analysis of data in table 5 provides information on frames and framing of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. It shows there are frames which fall in line with Fairhurst and Sarr's presentation (1996). For the media organizations analyzed, three framing patterns were predominant. They are Stories/Myths, Spin and Tradition patterns. The stories/myths pattern suggests that cultural practices against women are vividly narrated in the media with little or no perspectives. The spin pattern suggests that audience are left to make value judgment while the tradition pattern implies that the media present the issues as more of tradition that should be left sacrosanct (or 'respected') as far as culture is concerned. What could be made out of this framing pattern and based on the explanation of these frames as done by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) is that the media seem not to have taken a neutral stance with



regard to cultural practices against women in Nigeria.

**RQ 3:** What factor(s) impinge on the media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria? Analyses of data in tables 6 and 7 reveal that some factors actually impinge on media coverage of these issues and the most predominant factors are low awareness/knowledge among journalists/reporters, culture of patriarchy, and lack of sponsorship. Knowledge/awareness among journalists is a very important index for determining media coverage of an issue. "One cannot give what one does not have," so the saying goes. In Table 6, it is clear that the level of knowledge/awareness of reporters on cultural practice against women is very poor considering the enormity of the costs of these to the society. Some respondents expressed the view that asking them about awareness on cultural issues against women is like asking them whether they know that there is culture. This explains the low awareness level.

Culture of patriarchy has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian and African societies. Male dominance and cultural arrogation of 'powers' 'rights' and 'privileges' in matters affecting both male and females are the order of the day. In fact such has come to be accepted as part of the Nigerian culture/tradition or

customs. This transcends to a situation where in the early days of evolution, male offspring were given educational preferences than their female counterparts. The result today is that in most vocations, males seem to be more; the media job inclusive (Asadu, 2012; Okugo & Onwukwe, 2012). Consequently the penchant exists to de-prioritize such issues as cultural practices against women and simply consider it a cultural phenomenon which societies have come to live with.

Sponsorship of media content in Nigeria is common practice, which erodes objectivity in content and subjects journalists to undue pressure from their employers whose interests, amongst others, include profit. Issues such as cultural practices against women are among those topics that can generate sponsorship in good time. Hence, issues in the news that make sense in terms of profits is likely going to be given more attention than those that do not"

**RQ 4:** To what extent are journalists aware of cultural practices against women?

Table 7 shows that journalists' awareness level in relation to cultural practices against women was very low. There was an average awareness rating of 47% with an average score of 2.39 which was below the 3-point on a 5-point scale.

This result is the opposite of the spate of increase in cultural practices against women. Most of the respondents seem to consider cultural practices against women as issues that deserve less attention. Some respondents expressed the view that asking them about awareness on cultural issues against women is irresponsible on the part of the journalists. In summary, the journalists are not aware and this invariably affected the coverage level as well as the level of framing of the issues arising from such practices.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the data analysed and findings made in this study, we conclude that the cultural practices against women in Nigeria have not been given adequate coverage by the media. The media in Nigeria need to stand up to its responsibility of sensitising the citizens on so many social issues among which is cultural practices against women in Nigeria. We also conclude that the media have not set agenda on cultural practices against women in Nigeria. The framing patterns reflect a neutral stance which ought not to be so considering the increasing and disturbing cases of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. Moreover, the framing patterns of the media on this issue do not guarantee a possible change of perceptions/beliefs as it concerns

cultural practices against women in Nigeria. On the trail foregoing, the following are recommended:

- i. Media organisations in Nigeria should realise the need to report cases of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. Therefore, the journalists should be enlightened on the societal expectations in these areas so as to make the society realise the negative impacts of those practices on the development of the society.
- ii. At this era of civilisation, framing culture practices against women has become imperative so that NGOs and civil rights groups would be encouraged to sponsor analyses, columns, commentaries and programmes to enhance regularity of such media offerings.
- iii. There is need for the media in Nigeria to utilize such genres of coverage such as soap-opera, drama, short plays, etc. These have been adjudged to facilitate internalisation of media messages. However, “a careful assessment of the content displayed is crucial” (Morah and Omojola, 2013, p.399) to avoid unpleasant reactions.
- iv. They should also give in-depth reports as well as beef up editorials about harmful acts

v. The women should be involved in covering and investigating such practices. Thus, they should ready to move away from comfort zones.

vi. Traditional rulers and cultural educators should be involved in the education of practices against women.

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