PRESS COVERAGE OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION INNIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEW NIGERIAN AND PUNCH NEWSPAPERS

By

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Abstract
This study is an analysis of two prominent newspapers in Nigeria, New Nigerian and Punch newspapers for the purpose of looking into the coverage they gave to the issue of female circumcision. Two month editions were randomly selected to represent each year. The study was designed with the aim of knowing the way the print media cover the issue of female circumcision using the two newspapers as frames of reference. Specific objectives were designed to determine the level of coverage given to the issue and know how much coverage is given to it. Literature review showed that the struggle for women emancipation is old but little has been achieved. This was due to cultural and traditional obstacles including the mass media in that they give more coverage to men related news than those related to women. Women related news reports of interest to the media have to do with trivialities, domestic and emotional matters like fashion, cooking, love, etc. Content analysis was utilised as the method of conducting the study. The period of coverage was 2005 to 2011. It was discovered, vis-a-vis the research questions cum objectives that the newspapers studied gave coverage to female circumcision but the coverage was not much. However, New Nigerian newspaper gave much more coverage to female circumcision than the Punch newspaper.

Key Words: Mass **media, Press, Female Circumcision or Genital Mutilation, Extent of Coverage**

Background of the Study

Female circumcision comprises all procedures involving partial; or total removal of the external genital or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious, or other non-therapeutic reasons. Female genital mutilation is practiced by Muslims and non Muslims alike residing mainly in sub-Sahara Africa, which Nigeria is part of. According to the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) (2003), female circumcision in Nigeria occurs mostly at infancy i.e. before the first birthday. Three quarter of the women who underwent circumcision were circumcised at age, one. 21% of them were circumcised at the age of five or older.

According to the research, there are marked variations in knowledge of female circumcision by residence, region, education, and ethnicity. Women in the south are more than twice as likely as women in the north to have heard of the practice. These variations by region and residence are a reflection of ethnic differentials. The Igbo and Yoruba, who are primarily resident in the south-east and south-west respectively, have greater knowledge of female circumcision than the Yorubas and Igbos in the north. The research also stated the number of women circumcised in Nigeria is more in the southern regions among the Yorubas and Igbos. Irrespective at where it is practiced, different degrees of mutilation exist ranging from excision of the hood of the clitoris

or the clitoris itself to complete infibulations which involves removal of the clitoris, labia menora and labia majora, leaving a small opening for the passage of urine and menstrual blood. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2006), normal sexual intercourse is not possible without a corrective procedure and childbirth frequently result in life threatening haemorrhage. Other complications include chronic urinary disease and other infections, infertility, psychological trauma, sexual dysfunction, menstrual problems and several other negative emotional outcomes.

According to the WHO (2006), the procedure is performed on girls between the ages of infancy and pre-adolescence and is either carried out by a physician, midwife, or designated women from the community. Lack of sterile equipment, use of the same instrument on more than one child and lack of anaesthesia all contribute to the complication rate which can even include infection with human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) as the commonest.

Current estimates by the WHO show that over one hundred million women and girls have been affected by some form of genital cutting. At the current rate of population increase and the slow decline in these procedures, it is estimated that each year, a further two million girls are at risk from the practice.

The age at which girls undergo female circumcision varies according to the ethnic group practicing it. For instance, the age at which the Binis of Edo State circumcise their girls differ from that of the Yorubas, Ethiopians or Kenyans. It may be carried out when the girl is a new born, during childhood, adolescent, at the time of marriage or during pregnancy.

According to the WHO, about 89% of the cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) involve excision of the clitoris and the labia menorah. The most severe form of female circumcision is infibulation, which is more likely to be carried out on women at a later age than an early age.

Infibulation means that the entire clitoris and labia menorah are cut away and the two sides of the labia majora are partially sliced off or scraped raw and then sewn together. In Sudan and Somalia, thorns are used to hold the two bleeding sides of the vulva together or a paste of gum Arabic sugar and egg is used. The entrance to the vagina is thus obliterated, which is the purpose of the operation, except for a tiny opening in the back to allow urine and later menstrual blood to drain (Hosken, 1979).

Hosken further added that the objective of infibulations is to make sexual intercourse impossible. Women who are infibulated have to be open to allow sexual intercourse and more cuts are needed for delivery. Infibulations is practiced in the Sudan and adjoining areas throughout Somalia, parts of Ethiopia, Egypt and northern Kenya and in parts of West Africa, for instance, Mali.

The term, infibulation is derived from 'Fibula' which means clasp or pin in Latin and can be traced back to the old Romans. A fibula was used to hold together the folds of the toga -the loose garment all roman men wore. The Romans also fastened together the large vulva lips of slave girls to prevent them from having sexual intercourse and becoming pregnant which would hamper their work. The highest rates of infibulations practice are found in Djibouti, Somalia and northern Sudan (Hosken, 1979).

According to the WHO (2006), circumcision is believed to ensure cleanliness, chastity and to minimise the sexual appetite of women and thus reduce the likelihood that they will bring shame on themselves or their families through sexual indiscretions. In Sudan, genital mutilations are connected with cleanliness and are called *Tahur* which in Arabic means purity. A woman is

considered dirty and polluted unless she is mutilated. The same is often said in Somalia. Cleanliness is also the reason given for circumcision in Cairo and Bamako.
The WHO also stated that in many ethnic groups, for instance in Mali, the operation is done traditionally before marriage as a purity rite. It is claimed that a woman can be accepted into adult society and get married only after she is operated upon.

Hosken (1979), believes that excision is perceived as a way to increase fertility and the wish of most women is to have many children as possible, especially sons on which their status in society depends. It is widely believed in Mali, Burkina Faso, and all over West Africa that the clitoris connotes maleness while the prepuce of the penis, femaleness. Hence both have to be removed before a person can be accepted as an adult in his or her sex and society. He also stated that it is believed that a girl that is not operated on will run wild and disgrace her family. In Egypt, aesthetic reasons are sometimes cited for the operations. It is said that women's external genitals are ugly and must be removed to make her acceptable to a man.

Female genital mutilation leaves lasting marks on the lives and minds of the women who have undergone it. Severe pain, shock, haemorrhage, urine retention, ulceration of the genital region and injury to adjacent tissues are some of its consequences. It has also been observed that female circumcision is cultural rather than a religious practice (Touba, 1989).

According to Hosken (1979), in Somalia the circumcision of girls takes place in the home among relatives and neighbours. The grandmother of the girl or older women officiates. The operation is not accompanied by any ceremony or ritual. The child, completely naked, is made to sit on a low stool; several women take hold of her and open her legs wide. After opening her outer and inner lips, the operator usually a woman experienced in the procedure, cut the girl with kitchen knife, she first pierces and slices open the hood of the clitoris, then she begins to cut it out. This is the case in other parts of Africa including Nigeria.
Contrary to what one would assume, not many girls die from this painful experience, there are of course various complications which include keloid shock, haemorrhage, and difficulties during childbirth and so on as discussed earlier which has led to serious campaign by NGOs, women groups against female circumcision.

Despite the campaign against the practice of female circumcision, many people in Africa especially, still hold on tightly to it due to some myth associated with the practice. Though all the myths are believed by the ethnic groups that practice it, many of the reasons are contradictory and none of them are compatible with biological facts. Most Africans who practice these operations believe that excision is a custom decreed by the ancestors and therefore it must be complied with. Most often, men refuse to marry girls who are not circumcised and since marriage is still the only career for a woman in most parts of Africa and the Middle East, the operation continues. But where is the media in all this? That is, specifically the study will find answers to the following questions: to what extent do the *Punch* and the *New Nigerian* newspapers cover issues of female circumcision in Nigeria? Does *Punch* give a better coverage to female circumcision than the *New Nigerian,* Or vice versa? Which of *New Nigerian* and *Punch* attaches importance to the report of female circumcision?

Aim and Objectives of the Study
The aim of this study is to look at the print media's coverage of female circumcision in Nigeria.
The specific objectives of this study are: -

1. To find out the extent to which *New Nigerian* and *Punch* newspapers cover issues of female circumcision in Nigeria.
2. To know if female circumcision issues are accorded importance by *Punch* and *New Nigerian* newspapers with a view to comparing the treatment of the reports vis-a-vis page placement.

Significance of the Study
Women form the backbone of the society; they are found in different sectors and contribute their quota to national development. In the household, they hold an unassailable pre-eminence, tending the children and their husbands. The degree of disorganisation and chaos that occurs when they are not around in the house confirms the extent of their importance. In the Nigerian society, women are the regular visitors to the market, impartial arbitrators in family or elan disputes or disagreements, the preservers of age old customs, childbirth, marriage feasts and so on.

It is glaring that women play important roles in all societies and it is expected that these societies appreciate them in return. But this is not the case as women repeatedly have been deprived of their rights, ignored or subjugated by societal norms and culture. Issues that concern women like female circumcision are worth looking into. There is also cause for concern about female circumcision because of the serious consequences it has on the health of women, the world at large, and Nigeria in particular. Thus, the findings of the study will be useful to all including media scholars, professionals, NGOs and government at all levels.
In addition, this study may further confirm the use of the media by the elite owners in subjugating the minorities; in this case women. This stems from the fact that mass media organisation are owned and controlled by men, women are rarely given the opportunity to take control of the media.

Literature Review
In a study of three programmes on Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Kaduna, aimed at women, men and children, Imam (1985) found that most of the themes dealt with controlling females as wives and condemning female negative characteristics than with deploring the treatment of women and calling for improvement. None of the programmes put forward a positive image of women. Though insightful, Imam's work was in the 1980s and on the broadcast media with specific focus on three selected programmes. Also, she was interested in the tone and direction of the themes used in the programmes to represent women and not on how given issues were treated in terms of extent (quantitative) and importance.
Similar to Imam's study, the Women's research and documentation centre found that apart from the pre-dominance of appearance of many role stereotyping of the activities of women, studies in the United States and England in the late seventies, found that women are sometimes portrayed as unintelligent and sex objects (see Imam, 1985).
Feminist Anthropology and Gender and Development (GAD) researchers have pointed out the mediated experience of gender. The analysis of women subordination have moved from the

earlier feminist tradition which isolated gender as the main determining factor in shaping women's subordinated experiences to look at other forms of oppression and difference. The shaping of gender identity and the way women experience subordination are connected and mediated by other core variables such as class, race, age and generation, sexual orientation, history, culture and colonialism.

However, to Afigbo (1996), women have become a revolutionary force in a revolutionary age, a force that must be reckoned with by the advocate of programmes of social improvement. To Ijere (1991), women form the backbone of rural development; they are found in agriculture, and outside it. In the household, they hold pre-eminence tending the children and even the husbands. The degree of confusion that occurs when they are absent in the house confirms the extent of the importance of the role they play in the home and by extension, the society.

After the emergence of feminist movements and affirmative action, Television dramas in the United Kingdom engaged in symbolic annihilation of the liberated woman, through their condemnation and trivialisation in the mass media. Several dramas portrayed liberated women as hostile, aggressive, man-haters who lacked a sense of humour.

The image of women in the print media has not fared better than those of Television and Radio. Studies of magazine and newspaper advertisements, articles, and short stories from 1965-1975 in the United States indicated the following trends;

- More men than women are portrayed as being employed and men are shown as having high status occupations.
- Men are portrayed in recreational roles while women are known in decorative roles.
- Newspapers are written primarily by and about men, despite columns and special features on women.
- New women lifestyle sections represent only a slight improvement in issues that concern women.

The position of women as personnel and portrayal of women in the content of mass media merely represents parts of the subordination of women in advanced societies which has been completely analysed by various researchers (Imam 1985; WIN, 1985). From these research findings, it observably seems that the media have not been the ally of women in explaining their predicament especially on issues that concern them like female circumcision.

Theoretical Frame

This study is guided by the agenda setting theory of the media. The theory which was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, simply has it that the mass media could bring up issues of interest to the media (media agenda), the public (public agenda) and/or policy makers (policy agenda) to the front burner for public attention and therefore inevitable for public discourse. The media do this, according to McQuail (1994) by repeatedly reporting an issue overtime using big headlines and making it the first lead story or one of the lead stories. In the case of newspapers, the stories are displayed with big bold headlines and placed in strategic pages (front page, editorial page, centre spread and back page) of the newspaper.

Therefore, any issue that is not of interest to the media and their owners are not brought up as agenda for public focus. Invariably, the theory will help to explain the findings of the study. In the event that adequate coverage and importance is given to the issue of female genital mutilation, it could be said that the particular newspaper may have done so for the purpose of bringing it up for public focus. If however it is poor coverage, the particular newspaper may have

done so to satisfy other agenda perhaps, policy agenda or media agenda which are sometimes interwoven whereby media agenda could become policy agenda and policy agenda could become media agenda as well.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is quantitative content analysis. Using a suitable self designed coding sheet as instrument for collecting data.

Instrument of Data Collection

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2000), coding is the process of classifying responses into meaningful categories. It involves combining detailed information into a limited number of categories that enable simple description of the data and allow for statistical analysis. The main purpose for coding is to simplify the handling of many individual responses by classifying them into smaller number of groups, each including responses that are similar in content (Lazarfeld and Barton, 1951).

A coding sheet is also a table under which information is categorised. The categories in the study are features, cartoons, editorials, straight news story, and pictures. Features include articles, letters to the editor, rejoinders and so on, all concerning female circumcision. Cartoons refer to line drawings basically done to entertain and at the same time, inform the public about female circumcision. Editorials refer to the view or opinion of a newspaper organisation on an issue of importance. The issue could be anything but most times, they deal with current issues.

While straight news story refers to news reports concerning female circumcision, pictures refer to graphical representation of issues concerned with female circumcision. The direction (tone) of this study includes negative, neutral, or positive tone of the stories carried on female circumcision. Negative refers to the coverage that encourage or is in support of female circumcision. Positive refers to the coverage that discourages female circumcision while a neutral tone refers to the coverage that does not take a definite stand either for or against female circumcision.

The unit of analysis of this study is any sentence, paragraph or news story that makes reference to female circumcision. These are coded under the news reports, features, editorials, cartoons, etc. categories respectively. These categories are so chosen because the study is aimed at comparing two newspapers' treatment of female circumcision in terms of how many and how well issues about it are treated. It is not aimed at comparing the coverage of female circumcision stories with other content categories like business and economic stories, politics, sports etc. As Wimmer and Dominick (2000:144) put it, the "precise makeup of this system (categories), of course, varies with the topic under study". It is the topic that determine the categories as there is no hard and fast rule about categories in content analysis to that extent even though the categories must be exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

The population of this study is the *New Nigerian* and *Punch* newspapers' editions of the year 2005 to 2011 (the period was chosen because it fell within the 'second' and 'third' democratic periods where every group's - gender or otherwise - rights ought to be protected) and they are two thousand, eight hundred and eighty (2880) in number. The sample size is five hundred and seventy six (576). This is in accordance with the recommendation by Alkaleri (1999), that a

minimum sample size of twenty percent (20%) should be used for population size that is up to one thousand in number. As stated above, the population of this study is two thousand eight hundred and eighty (2,880). This makes the sample size of five hundred and seventy six (576), which is 20%, adequate for this study. The sample size was selected randomly. The data from this study was analysed with frequency tables, paragraphs and percentages. The data was interpreted in relation to the research questions.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2005 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	2	100
Pictures	0	0
Total	2	100

Table one above reveals that *Punch* newspaper, in 2005, gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in its editorials, straight news reports, cartoons and pictures but gave only two feature stories.

The report was positive in the sense that it was against the practice of female circumcision. The table also indicates that in the year in question, *Punch* newspaper only reported female circumcision twice,

Table 2: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2005 by *New Nigerian* Newspaper

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	1	100
Pictures	0	0
Total	**1**	**100**

The *New Nigerian* newspaper, as it is in table two, gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in its editorial, straight news stories, cartoons and pictures. It also indicates that the issue of female circumcision was reported once in the entire year. The feature report was positive in the sense that it was against the practice of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM).

Table 3: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2006 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	0	0
Pictures	0	0
Total	**0**	**0**

Table three indicates that *Punch* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to the issue of female circumcision. It made no report of it in its editorials, straight news stories, cartoons, features and pictures. The above also reveals that in 2006, there was no report on female circumcision in the *Punch* newspapers.

Table 4: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2006 **by** *New Nigerian* **Newspaper**

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	1	100
Pictures	0	0
Total	**1**	**100**

The table above reveals that *New Nigerian* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to the issue of female circumcision in its editorials, straight news stories, cartoons, and pictures. It also reveals that it made only one report of it in one of its feature stories. Therefore, it is appropriate to say in the year 2006, the *New Nigerian* newspaper only reported on the issue of female circumcision once.

Table 5: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2007 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	1	100
Cartoons	0	0
Features	0	0
Pictures	0	0
Total	**1**	**100**

According to table 5, *Punch* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to the issue of female circumcision in its editorials, cartoons, and pictures but gave one straight news report. This is to say that in the year 2007, *Punch* newspaper reported on the issue of female circumcision once. The report was positive in the sense that it was against the practice of female circumcision.

Table 6: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2007 **by** *New Nigerian* **Newspaper**

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	**0**	**0**
Straight news stories	**1**	**25**
Cartoons	**0**	**0**
Features	**3**	**75**
Pictures	**0**	**0**
Total	**4**	**100**

Table six indicates that *New Nigerian* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in its editorials, cartoons, arid pictures; while it gave 25 percent coverage to it on its straight news stories and 75 percent to it in its features. The table also reveals that in year 2007, *New Nigerian* newspaper reported on the issue of female circumcision four times. Once in its straight news stories, which was positive and thrice in its features, with two of the reports positive as they discouraged the practice of female circumcision; while the other was neutral in its coverage as it did not encourage nor discourage the practice.

Table 7: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2008 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	**0**	**0**
Straight news stories	**0**	**0**
Cartoons	**0**	**0**
Features	**0**	**0**
Pictures	**0**	**0**
Total	**0**	**0**

Table 7 shows that in 2008, *Punch* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in its editorials, straight news stories, cartoons, pictures and features. It also reveals that *Punch* newspaper, in the year in question, gave no coverage to the issue of female circumcision.

Table 8: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2008 by *New Nigerian* Newspaper

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	1	100
Pictures	0	0
Total	**1**	**100**

This table indicates that *New Nigerian* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to the issue of female circumcision in its editorials, straight news stories, cartoons and pictures. It also shows

that in the whole of 2008, the *New Nigerian* newspaper only made one report of female circumcision however, it did not take a definite stand either for or against the practice of female circumcision.

Table 9: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2009 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	0	0
Pictures	0	0
Total	**0**	**0**

The table above has shown that in 2009, no report of female circumcision was made. *Punch* newspapers gave zero percent coverage to the issue in its editorial, straight news stories, cartoons, feature and pictures.

Table **10: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2009 by** *New Nigerian* **Newspaper**

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	0	0
Pictures	0	0
Total	**0**	**0**

This table also reveals that *New Nigerian* newspaper gave zero report of female circumcision in 2009. It gave zero percent coverage to it in its editorial, straight news stories, cartoons, features and pictures as they relate to or concern the issue of female circumcision.

Table 11: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2010 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0 0	0 0
Cartoons		
Features	0	0
Pictures	0	0
Total	**0**	**0**

Table 11 reveals that the *Punch* newspaper in the year in question gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in its editorial, straight news stories, cartoons, features, and pictures. This is to say that in the year 2010, *Punch* newspaper had no report on female circumcision.

Table 12; Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2010 by *New Nigerian* Newspaper

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	1	100
Pictures	0	0
Total	**1**	**100**

The table above indicates that *New Nigerian* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in the editorial, straight news stories, cartoons and pictures but reported the issue once In its features. This is to say that in the year 2010, the *New Nigerian* newspaper reported on the issue of female circumcision only once. The report was positive as it was against the practice of female circumcision.

Table 13: Coverage of Female Circumcision in the year 2011 by *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Features	1	100
Pictures	0	0
Total	**1**	**100**

The table above points that zero percent coverage was given to the issue of female circumcision in its editorials, straight news stories, features, cartoons, and pictures. This is to say that in the whole of 2011, *Punch* newspaper made no report on female circumcision.

Table 14: Coverage **of Female Circumcision in the year 2011 by** *New* ***Nigerian*** **Newspaper**

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	3	75
Cartoons	0	0
Features	1	25
Pictures	0	0
Total	**4**	**100**

The table above shows that *New Nigerian* newspaper gave zero percent coverage to female circumcision in its editorials, cartoons, features, and pictures, while 75 percent coverage was given to straight news stories while 25 percent coverage was given to features. This is to say that in the year 2011, four reports were made, and they were positive as they discouraged the practice of female circumcision while the feature report was also positive.

Aggregate Coverage of Female Circumcision (2005-2011) by the *Punch* Newspaper

Categories	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Length of page 1 ½ ¾ ¼**	**Inside page**	**Front page**	**Back Page**	**Head line point < 30 is non-prominent white 31 above is.**
Editorials								
Straight								
news stories	+							
Features	++			XX ((				—
Pictures								
Cartoons								

Categories	**Frequency of occurrence**	**Percentage**
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	I	33.3
Features	2	66.7
Pictures	0	0
Cartoons	0	0
Total	**3**	**100**

It should be noted that out of 2880 editions of the *Punch* newspaper content analysed, only three editions carried reports on female circumcision, making it 1.07% of the total population. The feature reports were in half pages in the inside page of the newspapers while the straight news story was in three quarter of one of the inside pages. All the font sizes used in casting the headlines were above 31 which gave the story some sort of prominence.

The table above also reveals that during the period the research covered, *Punch* newspaper did not give much coverage to the issue of female circumcision in its editorials, cartoons, and pictures category. From year 2005 to 2011, it clearly indicates that the issue of female circumcision was not given much coverage and as such not worthy of being set as agenda for public discourse.

Out of the editions of *Punch Newspaper* that reported on the issue of female circumcision, 33.3% was written as straight news story while 66.7% of the reports was written as features. None of its editorials was on female circumcision; this goes to show how irrelevant the *Punch* newspaper

seems to see the issue of female circumcision. The WIN document (1992:46) lends support to this by stating that; ...there was a disproportionate prominence in the Newspapers' reporting of male and female issues. The most distinctive feature of media news stories in relation to women was not their biases and negative nature but the fact that reporting hardly exists.

It is a known fact that editorials serve as print media organisations' mouthpiece. Organisations use their editorials to let the public know their stand or view point on issues of importance. Since *Punch* newspaper never deemed it fit to talk about female circumcision or female genital mutilation, it goes to show the level of importance it attached to the issue.

Punch newspaper is widely circulated and read in the southern part of this country and so, it is expected that the paper covers issues that affect people in the region. According to the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, there is a high prevalence of female circumcision among the Yorubas (61 percent) and Igbos (45 percent). The survey also stated that the Yorubas have the largest proportion of circumcised women.

Adejide (1985) also corroborated the statement of WIN document by stating that the media have not yet become the ally of women in explaining their predicament an encouraging their male compatriots to appreciate the need for the improvement of the lot of women and work for it and the media have a great deal to give in this regard.

Aggregate **Coverage of Female Circumcision (2005-2011) by** *New Nigerian* **Newspaper**

Categories Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Length of page 1 ½ ¾ ¼**	**Inside page**	**Front page**	**Back Page**	**Headline point < 30 is non-** prominent white 31 above is.
Editorial							
Straight news stories	++++			"S"	((		
Features ++++	00	///	xx ((((((xx				
Pictures							
Cartoons							

Categories	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Editorials	0	0
Straight news stories	4	33.3
Features	8	66.7
Pictures	0	0-
Cartoons	0	0
Total	12	100

As the table indicates above, out of 288 editions of the *New Nigerian* newspaper under study, the paper reported the issue of female circumcision twelve times which is 4.17% of the total population. Zero percent coverage was given to editorials, cartoons, and pictures while 333% of straight news story was made while 66.7% of features were made about female circumcision. Eight of the twelve reports were features, while four were straight news reports. All the feature reports were positive and three of them were written in full pages, four written in half pages while a three quarter page was assigned to one of the reports. There were also inside page stories with font size above 31 point, which gave them some sort of prominence.

Two of the straight news stories were placed in a three quarter page, while the other two were placed in a one-quarter page in one of the inside pages of the newspaper with font size above 31 which again gave the stories some sort of prominence.

When compared to the coverage by *Punch* newspaper, it is necessary to state that the *New Nigerian* newspaper seems to give better coverage to issues related to female circumcision. This is not to say that the coverage given to female circumcision by the newspaper does not have some loopholes; as one can see from the table above, the *New Nigerian* newspaper never made mention of the issue of female circumcision in its editorials which serves as its mouthpiece. It is through editorials that one would have gotten the publication's stand on the issue; neither did it mention the issue in the cartoons and pictures which are interesting and effective ways of educating and enlightening the public.

These findings are corroborated by those of Akpan (1979) (Cited in WIN, 1985). He studied the *Daily Times* and *New Nigerian* newspapers' coverage of women issues. The study showed that over a month period, news stories on men received 90% while women received 10% of column inches. While for *Daily Times* newspaper women received 10% of column inches. While for *New Nigerian* women received 2%. For front page stories, women appeared 18% for *Daily Times* while 3% for *New Nigerian.* This goes to say that women and women's issues are ignored in newspaper's news reports.

Since the *New Nigerian* newspaper did not mention the issue of female circumcision in its editorials during the period the study covered, one cannot but infer from this that it did not deem the issue fit to be put in an editorial, invariably, saying or seeing the issue as not too important for it to set agenda on.

Relating Results With Research Questions

It should be noted that out of a sample size of 576 newspapers, only 15 editions out of the total population gave coverage to female circumcision and related issues, which makes the number 2 .6% of the population. This percentage makes it so clear that the newspapers do not really give much coverage to the issue of female circumcision. This answers the question on the extent *Punch* and *New Nigerian* newspapers cover the issue of female circumcision. The newspapers carry stories of female circumcision but it is not up to what is expected of them as media outfits. The media is expected to inform and educate the public about social issues of importance. This appears not to be the case as both papers did not to regard the issue of female circumcision as important. No in-depth analysis and investigation of the issue was ever made by both papers neither did they give any follow-up stories. They only reported the issues on the surface level.

To answer the question of what prominence both the *Punch* and the *New Nigerian* newspapers gave to stories of female circumcision, it is pertinent to note that all the stories were placed in the inside pages of the two newspapers, none of them was carried as front page stories and only two

editions out of 576 gave the issue a full page coverage. No editorial was written on the issue of female circumcision neither was there any cartoons or pictures. Most of the stories were written in feature form (1.74%) while 0.87% of the stories were straight news stories. These findings answer the question that not much prominence was given to the issue of female circumcision by both papers.

It is also necessary to note that out of the 288 editions of the *Punch,* the paper reported on the issue of female circumcision three times which is 1.04% coverage while *New Nigerian* newspaper reported twelve times out of 288 total populations which is 4.17% coverage. This answers the question of which newspaper cover female circumcision much more and better between *New Nigerian* and *Punch* newspapers. In this case, the *New Nigerian* newspaper did better in terms of extent of coverage.

Summary of Findings

It was found in the end that: -

1. Out of 576 editions analysed, only 15 of them had stories or reports on female circumcision during the period of the study (2005-2011), making it a mere 2,6% of the total population.
2. Out of the editions that gave coverage, 66.7% of it were in the form of feature while 33.3% covered it in straight news form. It was found out that none of the newspapers under study ever gave an editorial on the issue.
3. The *Punch* and the *New Nigerian* newspaper both gave poor coverage to the issue of female circumcision but the *New Nigerian* gave a better coverage to it than the *Punch* newspaper.

Conclusion

It is quite interesting to note that despite the watchdog role of the media to expose all ills in the society and set agenda against them, it still fails to cover some important health related, life threatening issues like female circumcision as it was in the past and even in a democratic era where the press is supposed to protect the rights of major and minor groups. Since we are in a democracy and the institutions in the society are expected to be democratic as well, it is expected that the media should be democratic in its coverage of issues that concern the society. But the reverse has been the case. In fact, insignificant coverage was given to female circumcision. Surprisingly, however, the *Punch* located in the south of Nigeria where the practice is prevalent seemed to ignore it than *New Nigerian* newspaper which is located in the north where the practice is minimal.

Recommendations

The functions of media include educating, informing, enlightening and forming public opinion and character toward positive change. But the reverse seems to be the case based on the findings of this research; the media seem to have failed in educating the public about important issues that affect women like female circumcision. It is based on this that the following recommendations ace made:

1. The press particularly, newspapers should have columns or pages dedicated to female health issues which will go a long way to bring about increased coverage of female health issues.

2. Women groups should establish newspaper to propagate their interests in line with the advice of McQuail (1994) embodied in the democratic participant media theory.

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