

EFFECTIVENESS OF MASS MEDIA MESSAGES IN CREATING AWARENESS ON SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG WOMEN IN ENUGU STATE.

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Abstract

In recent times, sexual abuse has become a matter of International and national concern. The female gender is always at risk of being abused by strangers and relatives. This study therefore seeks to determine if media messages are effective in disseminating information on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state, and the objectives sought to determine the level of awareness of sexual abuse possessed by women in Enugu state, identify mass media channels used in disseminating messages on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state and evaluate the effectiveness of these messages in improving awareness of sexual abuse among women in Enugu state. The study is anchored on Social Learning Theory and the sample size is 384 as calculated by Australian Sample Size calculator. A Descriptive survey method was used in the study; with a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. Findings from the study revealed that radio and social media are effective in creating awareness on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state. It is also imperative to state that the study also revealed that a good number of women cannot differentiate between consent and abuse especially in marriage. The study also recommended that efforts should be geared towards using suitable media channels to disseminate information on sexual abuse.

Keywords: mass media, sexual abuse, awareness, sexual consent, messages

Introduction

Sexual abuse is a societal ill that is affecting every part of the world. Women around the world are always in danger of being abused by family and strangers alike. Sutherland et al (2019) stated that one in three women experiences one form of violence or another. The most terrifying part of it is that some people who are trusted by these women are the people perpetuating this violence. Sexual abuse which is one of the sexual violence perpetuated against women has gained global and national attention through the mass media. Over the years, the mass media have played various roles in the society, including education, information, entertainment, a watchdog role among others, Zun (2025). This shows that in performing the above functions, the media raise awareness on several social ills that the society needs to address. Since the mass media can influence, educate and inform, it is a powerful tool in the hands of the person that wields it. Mass media have been used by various organisations to raise awareness on topical issues like sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is a crime of violence in form of any unwanted or forced sexual act or behaviour without consent, Canadian Women's Foundation (2024). It is any form of abusive sexual behaviour by one person upon another. United Nations (2025) aptly stated that sexual abuse is the violation of bodily integrity and sexual autonomy; it can occur without force and may not involve penetration. This means that sexual assault may or may not involve penetration. It goes ahead to state that sexual abuse is the act in which one intentionally sexually touches another person without the person's consent, or coerces or physically forces a person to engage in a sexual act against their will. Sexual violence/abuse as defined by Ajayi et al (2023) is sexual act or attempts to obtain sexual acts by violence or coercion by any person no matter the relationship with the victim. Characteristics of Sexual abuse include the following;

Consent: Any sexual act without consent is sexual abuse. Consent should be clear, voluntary and not coerced. The agreement with the partners involved should remain in effect till the end.

Invalid consent: an intoxicated partner's consent is invalid because the person is not in his or her right frame of mind.

Sexual abuse covers the acts of unwanted touching, rape, sexual coercion, child sexual assault, and sexual harassment. It is usually

perpetuated against vulnerable populations like children, elderly people and those with disabilities. A lot of organisations create awareness on sexual abuse using various mass media, but it seems as if the women in Enugu state are not armed with necessary tools to fight their abusers. This work is therefore aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of mass media in creating awareness on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state.

Statement of Problem

Recently, there has been increase in the reports of sexual abuse in Enugu state with many media channels used in disseminating information on it, many women in Enugu state still possess little or inadequate knowledge on the menace. Times without number, women are abused and are expected to keep quiet due to stigmatization and cultural belief. Chime et al (2022) found that sexual abuse is prevalent in Enugu state, although there are different media message that are aimed at raising awareness of sexual abuse. It leaves one to wonder if the messages are sufficiently suitable or effective to address this problem. Many media messages are packaged to influence public opinion and effect change in society, but the conspiracy of silence and cultural silence on this matter have seem to undermine the efforts of these media messages. Therefore, this study was undertaken to determine the effectiveness of mass media in creating awareness of sexual abuse among women in Enugu state.

Objective of the Study

The study will be guided by the following objectives and it is to:

1. Determine the level of awareness of sexual abuse possessed by women in Enugu State.
2. Identify mass media channels used in disseminating sexual abuse messages among women in Enugu State.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of these messages in improving awareness of sexual abuse among women in Enugu State.

Literature Review

Sexual abuse has become widespread in Nigeria with the victims females under the age of 18. Sexual abuse is gradually causing permanent scars on the lives of women in Nigeria. As stated by includes the use of word suggestive of intention to engage in any form of sexual activity, Amole, et al (2021). Sexual abuse is such that most people don't know where consent stops and abuse starts. A lot of factors according to Amole, (2021) contribute to prevalence of sexual abuse and they include the following;

1. **Poverty:** This one of the major factors that contributes to sexual abuse in Nigeria, Children from homes are most times exposed to harsh environment that encourages sexual abuse. The case of OchanyaOgbanje who was allegedly sexually abused by her Aunt's husband and her cousin is still making waves across the country. The girl was allegedly abused for years till she got sick and died.
2. **Cultural norms:** Some cultural norms give sexual abuse the wings to fly in Nigeria. In some parts of the country, the female child is not expected to speak up when she is sexually abused. Cases abound where a daughter was sexually abused by her father over the years, yet she keeps quiet. The worst part of it is that some women are sometimes sexually abused by their partners and no one says anything about it.
3. **Illiteracy and lack of awareness;** Illiteracy and lack of awareness has contributed to the prevalence of this menace, since some women can't eve differentiate between abuse and consent.
4. **Stigma:** Some women would rather keep quiet than speak up and are stigmatized. The stigma that trails sexual abuse makes it difficult for the victims of sexual abuse to speak up. This also makes it difficult for sex offenders to get punished.

Overview of Mass Media

Mass media has evolved over the years to become what we know today. Abu (2021) argued that mass media comprises of all forms of channels used to communicate information to a large audience. Under this guise, we have:

1. **Radio:** this is the wireless transmission and reception of electrical impulses or signals via electromagnetic waves. The ubiquitous nature of radio makes a more available device across the world. Its ability to cut across the hinterlands makes a more suitable device for people in rural areas and when used to share information on sexual abuse will enable those in rural areas to receive these messages.
2. **Television:** this is a system for transmitting images and sound via electronic signals over a distance so that people can receive them on a television in their homes. The television has the advantage of

sound and pictures. Using the television to disseminate information on sexual abuse will make the women to view pictures and words.

3. Newspaper: This is a printed publication usually issued daily or weekly. A newspaper has the advantage of permanence. Newspaper paints pictures and words and this will enable women to remember the messages shared on sexual abuse.
4. Social media refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking. This has become a powerful tool because of its ability to report breaking news in real time. Messages on sexual abuse shared among the women have the advantage of reaching younger generations.

Empirical Review

Obayi, (2021) in the Mass Media and Gender-Based Violence in Imo state, Nigeria: A critical Analysis examined the mass media and their role in gender based violence in Imo state. A Survey design was employed and the study was anchored in Agenda setting theory and Social network theory. Findings from the study revealed that exposure to gender-based messages in Imo state is high.

While the study under review is focused on mass media and gender-based violence, the current study is focused on the effectiveness of the mass media in creating awareness of sexual abuse among women in Enugu state.

Safiyan (2024) evaluated the media's role in raising awareness of domestic violence in Kaduna North, Kaduna state, Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that social media has an important role to play in creating awareness on domestic violence in Kaduna state.

While Safiyan (2024) dealt with domestic violence, the current study deals with sexual abuse. Both deal with violence against women.

Chime et al (2022) did a study on the Prevalence and Patterns of Gender-Based Violence in Enugu state.. The study used a retrospective cross-sectional method of research and findings from the study revealed that there is an increase in the proportion of both sexual and physical abuse in 2019 and a reduction in cases in 2020.

Both the study under review and the current study deal with violence against women. While Chime et al deals with gender-based violence against women, the current study deals with sexual abuse. Both are conducted within Enugu state.

Amole et al (2021) did a study on the Prevalence, pattern and predictors of sexual abuse among young female workers in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria. The researchers employed semi structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire to gather data for the study. Findings from the study revealed that sexual abuse is prevalent among female hawkers in Kano state.

The study under review was conducted to determine the prevalence and pattern of sexual abuse among hawkers in Kano metropolis, while the current study is to determine how effective mass media is in creating awareness on sexual abuse. Both studies deal with sexual abuse.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Learning Theory of the mass media. The theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977 and it posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation and modeling. The theory lays emphasis on the importance of observation and modeling of behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. People learn new behaviours, values, attitudes and form new opinions by watching others. Women in Enugu state learn new behaviours and attitudes towards sexual abuse by imitating the actions recommended in awareness campaigns of sexual abuse. They learn to say no and stand by it, nullify the popular opinions that women always mean the opposite of what they want, by being assertive and firm. Learning from media messages that there is a difference between consent and abuse will help create boundaries and reduce the cases of sexual abuse. Women in Enugu should not wait till they become victims of sexual abuse, instead, they should imitate the positive roles played in media messages on sexual abuse in order to avoid the same happening to them.

Methodology

A survey method was used in this study, and the instrument of data collection was the questionnaire. The population for this study comprises all women living in Enugu metropolis.

The population of women in Enugu state as at the 2006 census is 468,223. However, to determine the current population of women in Enugu metropolis in 2025; the researcher applied Owuamalam's 2012

population projection rate, which is 2,3% as recommended by the United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP). The projection formula is as follows:

$$P_p = G_p \times P_i \times T$$

$$P_p = 468,223 \times 0.023 \times 19 = 193,844$$

Then, the estimated population for women in Enugu metropolis is $193,844 + 468,223 = 662,067$. Using Krejcie and Morgan, 1970 sample size table, a sample size of 364 was derived.

To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, the researcher did both pretest and retest but found no disparity.

The population was clustered into the three senatorial zones in Enugu. Simple random sampling was used to select one Local Government Area from each senatorial zone; the same random sampling was used to select one community from each Local Government Area where the questionnaires were distributed. Proportionate sampling technique was used to determine the number of question allotted to each local government area and accidental and availability sampling technique was used to reach the final respondents that took part in this study.

Presentation of Data

Here, data generated from the field using 346 copies of the questionnaire that were duly filled and returned were used for the analysis..

Level of Awareness possessed by Women on Sexual Abuse

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1	Sexual abuse is a sexual act against a person	71 20.5%	114 32.9%	88 25.4%	73 21.2%
2	Sexual abuse involves suggestive touching	124 35.8%	165 47.7%	34 9.8%	23 6.7%
3	sexual abuse may or may not involve sexual intimacy	86 24.8%	159 46%	72 20.8%	29 8.4%
4	A partner can be sexually abused by his/her partner	58 16.8%	50 14.4%	166 48%	72 20.8%
5	Sexual abuse involves violence	94 27.2%	100 28.9%	62 17.9%	90 26%

From the table above on the level of awareness possessed by women on sexual abuse in Enugu state, it can be seen that although the level of awareness possessed by Enugu women is high, some of these women

cannot tell where this sexualoffense starts from. It is worthy of note that a lot of the respondents are not aware that someone can be sexually abused by his/her partner as seen in the data generated in the item 4 of the questionnaire.

Various Mass Media through which Messages on Sexual Abuse are Disseminated among Women in Enugu State.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
6	Radio	102 29.5%	126 36.4%	58 16.8%	60 17.3%
7	Television	67 19.4%	78 22.5%	106 30.6%	95 27.5%
8	Newspaper	40 11.6%	52 15%	134 38.7%	120 34.7%
9	Social media	134 38.7%	96 27.7%	74 21.4%	42 12.2%

From the data presented in the table below, it can deduced that women in Enugu are mostly exposed to media messages on sexual abuse through the radio and social media, followed by television. This means that in order to disseminate information to the women in Enugu on sexual abuse, radio and mass media should be used.

Effectiveness Of Mass Media In Creating Awareness On Sexual Abuse Among Women in Enugu State.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
10	I know that there is a difference between consent and sexual abuse	96 27.7%	134 38.7%	94 27.2%	22 6.4%
11	I am aware that suggestive touching is a sign of potential sexual abuse	62 17.9%	70 20.2%	108 31.2%	106 30.6%
12	I learn to report any case of sexual abuse to the authorities	160 46.3%	96 27.7%	62 17.9%	28 8.1%
13	I learn to say no and seek help when confronted with sexual abuser.	143 41.3%	103 29.8%	52 15%	48 13.9%

On the effectiveness of mass media in creating awareness on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state, it can be seen that the mass media is effective in creating awareness on sexual abuse. Although some married women cannot distinguish between consent and sexual abuse, from the responses generated in item 11, greater percentage of the respondents do not know that suggestive touching is a sign of potential sexual abuse.

Discussion of Findings

In line with the objectives of the study which is to evaluate the effectiveness of mass media in creating awareness on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state; findings from the study revealed that the level of awareness of sexual abuse is high, still; some respondents are not aware that certain behaviour is a potential sign of sexual abuse. Women in Enugu state are still of the opinion that a partner cannot abuse his partner as revealed by the findings of this study. It is also worthy of note that some of the respondents do not know that sexual abuse may or may not involve intimacy. This shows that although the awareness of sexual abuse is high, its knowledge is low among women in Enugu state.

This finding aligns with Obayi (2022), which reports that the exposure to gender-based messages in Imo state is high.

Findings from the study also revealed that a greater percentage of women in Enugu state receive messages on sexual abuse through the radio and social media. This is expected given the nature of the study population. Since a large number of respondents are youths, it is expected that they have access to social media. This means that to effectively create awareness of sexual abuse in Enugu state, radio and social media should be used to disseminate the messages to women in Enugu state.

This finding is in line with Safiyan (2024) which stated that social media has an important role to play in creating awareness on the impact of domestic violence in Kaduna state.

Findings from the study also revealed that the mass media is effective in creating awareness on sexual abuse among women in Enugu state. Finding from the study also revealed that a good number of the respondent cannot differentiate between consent and sexual abuse as revealed in item 11 of the questionnaire, where 29.2% and 6.4% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that they don't know the

difference between consent and abuse. This is a sad reality that some people may not even know that they are abused by their partners.

This finding is in line with Safiya (2024) which show that the media play an important role in creating awareness on domestic violence.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of mass media messages in creating awareness of sexual abuse among women in Enugu state. The findings show that mass media plays important role in informing the nature of abuse, causes, signs consequences and difference between consent and abuse. Since studies have shown that the media has the power to influence and drive change, then; the role of the media in raising awareness on sexual abuse cannot be overemphasized. Its ability to reach a wide audience makes it a suitable means of awareness creation on any social ill. However, the effectiveness of these messages depends largely on frequency, clarity and relevance to these women's experience, although stigmatization and cultural belief may discourage victims of sexual abuse from reporting abuse, but through social learning theory; these victims can find their voices and put a stop to this menace.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

The government should help in designing and sponsoring of media messages on sexual abuse that will help in raising awareness on sexual abuse.

The government and other concerned organisations should prioritize using radio and social media platforms for social abuse campaigns.

Women's affairs should partner non-governmental organisations and civil societies to develop media contents clarifying consent and abuse.

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