

# Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Content in Two Nigerian Newspapers

**BATTA, Herbert E. (Ph.D.)**

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**MBANG, Mfon R.**

Department of Communication Arts

University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

## **Abstract**

This study examines the coverage of maternal mortality and morbidity content of *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspapers. The methodology adopted involved content analysis and the sampling technique used in selecting the days to sample is the systematic sampling. This study covered a 12-month period (January to December, 2015). A total of 53 maternal mortality and morbidity reports were found in the two newspapers and analysed from the sample of 104 issues of the two newspapers. Haemorrhage was found to be the maternal mortality and morbidity issue that garnered the most attention and the most reported genre was the news/feature format. However, the newspapers did not give sufficient prominence to maternal mortality and morbidity issues. It is recommended that the newspapers should give prominence to maternal health issues and set the kind of agenda that could call attention to such issues. It is also recommended that editors and reporters should undertake frequent in-house training in the area of health communication to familiarise themselves with current information and knowledge on maternal morbidity and mortality issues.

**Keywords:** Content Analysis, Agenda Setting, Maternal Mortality, Morbidity, Nigerian Newspapers.

## **Introduction**

According to the World Health Organisation (2015), about 800 pregnant women die every day in the world from causes that could have been prevented during pregnancy. Again, results from WHO reflect that 99 percent of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries and are higher in women living in rural areas and poorer communities. More than half of this 99 percent maternal deaths happen in sub-

Saharan Africa. From the 2015 WHO report, it is also stated that higher risks of complications and death as a result of pregnancy are faced by adolescents, when compared to older women. In addition, girls less than 15 years are said to face a probability of eventual death from maternal causes (one in 160 girls) in developing countries.

Between 1990 and 2013, the World Health Organisation reported that maternal mortality dropped by almost 50 percent worldwide and in 2013, 9000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth (Ogunisna, 2015). In Nigeria, however, it was observed that the country lagged behind in the area of achieving universal coverage of key maternal health interventions. A United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director, Ann Veneman, cited in Ogunjimi, Ibe and Ikorok (2012) notes that Nigeria continued to record unacceptably high maternal mortality. Ogunsina (2015), quoting a UNICEF report, adds that Nigeria is said to lose about 145 women of child bearing age every day. This matter is also linked to child deaths. The same UNICEF report states that the country equally loses about 2,300 under five-year olds everyday, which is an alarming rate. A woman's chance of dying from pregnancy and childbirth in Nigeria is reported at one in 13 cases.

The background above shows that the rate of maternal mortality in developing countries of the world, particularly Nigeria is alarming. It also shows that there is urgent need to improve maternal health as this will be vital to the overall health of the society. Since the mass media can play a significant role in influencing not just what messages are disseminated to members of the public, but also how such messages are perceived and what importance should be attached to them, the mass media owe society the duty of creating awareness about maternal mortality issues and the danger they cause to the wellbeing of people. The rationale for this study is that the nature and extent to which the press, particularly newspapers in Nigeria, reflect issues surrounding the menace of maternal mortality deserve attention.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), Nigeria is said to account for over 14 percent of the world's maternal deaths. At about 145 of such deaths per day, this figure is high if we consider that the figure translates to 576 deaths per 100,000 births and that Nigeria's population is just two percent of the world's population (Ogunsina, 2015). All the causes listed as responsible for this high maternal death rate such as: haemorrhage, infections, unsafe abortion and others (including HIV/AIDS), are preventable with proper antenatal care, skilled supervision and interventions for preventing or treating complications that could arise at child birth or after.

The mass media bear information about health and make people become aware so as to prevent recurrence and the spread of diseases associated with it. The media have the power to direct our attention towards certain issues. This is the

agenda setting function. To Cohen (1963) cited in Umechukwu (2004, p. 15), newspapers, “may not be successful in telling their readers what to think but are stunningly successful in telling their readers what to think about.” Maternal health and maternal mortality are issues of general concern; they ought to be of interest to the mass media, often credited with the power to influence behaviour.

Mass media coverage of maternal health has attracted interests from a number of scholars. Outside Nigeria, the coverage of maternal health has received attention in the mass media, particularly newspapers. A study by Firmansyah, Hegazi, Darwisayah, and Amaliah (2001) for instance, conducted in Indonesia had the objective of getting the country's journalists to step up the reportage of critical reproductive issues. The findings from the 18 media information-dissemination study had a positive impact on the coverage of reproductive health in Indonesian print media (120 articles out of 1,836). Thus, the reportage of maternal health increased in the mass media after some interventions, although the percentage was still low.

In Nigeria, the country's health institutions had begun working on the World Health organisation's proposed areas to strengthen health systems and promote interventions; focus on policies and strategies that work and are pro-poor; monitor and evaluate the burden of maternal and new born ill health and its impact on societies; and emphasises maternal mortality as human rights and equity issue. Adeniran (2009) in Odesanya, Hassan, Olaluwoye (2015), examines media coverage of the Millennium Development Goals of which maternal mortality was a component. Adeniran content analysed two Nigerian newspapers. *The Punch* and *The Guardian* and found that MDGs about hunger and poverty, environmental sustainability and global partnership were the most reported, while MDGs concerning maternal and child health were the least reported. Similarly, Abubakar, Odesanya, Adewoye and Olorede (2013) sought to ascertain the depth of media reportage of cervical cancer - another maternal mortality issue, using two national weekly news magazines, *Tell* and *The News*. They observed a very low level of coverage of maternal health-related issues. Rather, contents were largely devoted to politics, business and advertising. Just as in Adeniran's work discussed earlier, Abubakar *et al* also found a similar trend of low awareness creation for maternal health, an issue for which Nigeria has been notoriously popular according to available statistics.

The nature and extent of coverage of maternal mortality issues by the print media as of 2015, the target year for the expiration of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals deserved some investigation. The pertinent question that this study therefore sought to answer was: what was the nature of newspaper coverage of maternal mortality at the period of the expiration of the millennium development goals in 2015?

## **Research Questions**

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What was the level of prominence given to maternal mortality issues in *The Punch* and *The Nation* in 2015?
2. What was the frequency of reportage of maternal mortality issues in *The Punch* and *The Nation* in 2015?
3. What were the sources of maternal mortality issues reported in *The Punch* and *The Nation* in 2015?
4. Which issues dominated the coverage of maternal mortality reports in *The Punch* and *The Nation* in 2015?
5. In what journalistic form were maternal mortality issues presented in *The Punch* and *The Nation* in 2015?
6. What was the depth accorded maternal mortality issues in *The Punch* and *The Nation* in 2015?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Media Coverage of Maternal Health Issues**

Since the mass media are disseminators of news reports and other useful messages, the mass media owe the society the responsibility of generating awareness about issues and calling attention to whatever constitutes a threat to the well-being of the people. Maternal mortality is an issue of general concern; it therefore ought to be one of the issues of interest to the mass media, credited with some power to influence behaviour. The logical question here is: what should the mass media, especially newspapers then do concerning maternal health in Nigeria? Johnson (2014) believes that the influence of the mass media: radio, television, newspapers, magazines and others are incalculable and ubiquitous, as everyone is exposed to them and they affect how people feel about everything, including products, or events and influence people's sense of what is important and that which is not.

Through the mass-media, news outlets have a major influence on the public and a major impact on the public opinion on certain topics. Although the mass media are relevant in the development process, to which they serve as vehicles of message dissemination, the newspaper, which is literacy intensive, is more useful in urban settings where literacy is usually higher. The radio is more popular than television among rural dwellers. The foregoing statement was among the findings of an explorative study (Asp *et al*, cited in Odesanya, Hassan & Olaluwoye, 2015) of the relationship between exposure to mass media and birth preparedness of the women living in the Mbarara district of southwest Uganda. From this, one can state that the media must rev up the reportage of maternal mortality if they must maintain the priority to educate, enlighten, and sensitise on a variety of issues including maternal health.

That is why Evidence-Based Health group, a non-governmental organisation, believes that the Nigerian media have most of what it takes to take on the fight against maternal mortality and the surrounding issues. The NGO, according to Ojosipe (2016), observes that all the media need is to engage extensively in investigative journalism as it is one way the battle can be won. Adding to this, the Country Director of the NGO, Tunde Segun, argues that the power of the media in tackling the menace of maternal mortality has not been maximised, as they (media) have the capacity to shape the thoughts of Nigerians on a given issue. Segun notes that though there are so many health organisations with specific purposes, the mass media have the power to make them accountable when they engage in detailed reportage on how things are being done and how they affect people.

In maternal health, exposure to mass media campaigns have been associated with increased use of antenatal, postnatal and delivery care services as well as improved participation of men. Zamawe, Banda & Dube (2015) for instance report that a study in Indonesia uncovered that husbands exposed to the mass media campaign which were designed to promote male involvement in birth preparation were likely to report new knowledge on birth preparedness and to participate in birth preparation than those not exposed. This clearly suggests that the mass media campaigns on maternal mortality issues may possibly be an effective strategy for increased male involvement in child birth process.

As maternal mortality remains a major issue in many parts of the developing world, the story in countries such as Cambodia is different following intensive media coverage. To make information available to all Cambodians irrespective of age and levels of literacy, for instance; the Women Media Centre of the country combined traditional media such as radio and TV and other technologies such as the Internet and the social media to increase the number of women who attend health clinics to receive antenatal and postnatal care as well as give birth at a health care facility with the assistance of professionally trained birth attendants and trained health professionals.

In Bihar, northern India, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports that media action is said to be working as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-Funded programme which aims to improve maternal health and check infectious diseases as well as reduce child mortality. According to BBC (2016), reaching the enormous audience of the Bihar city through traditional forms of media became difficult as only young mothers were found to have had access to radio and TV. The BBC media action therefore adopted what has been called a 360-degree approach: a combination of face-to-face communication, Information Communication Technology (ICT), the mass media and community work implemented on an unprecedented scale. These sustainable, scalable, innovative and multiple channels of communication worked together to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (BBC, 2016).

It is well documented that the mass media can influence the public policy issues that receive attention and those ignored. Through the process of agenda setting, particular news stories are prioritised over other stories. This process determines which issues are presented to the public. For example, Thapa, based at Family Health International in Nepal, South Asia, noted that the media played a critical role through agenda setting in the collective effort that led the Nepal's parliament to pass a safe abortion law in 2002. MBJ Open (2016) states that local newspapers and magazines published evidence of the public health consequences of unsafe abortion along with their suggestions for policy and programming. This interaction between media and policy clearly demonstrates how the quantity and quality of media coverage of a specific public health problem can both influence, as well as reflect, public health action directed at that problem.

In addition, the media, as it is well recognised, play an enormously influential role in public response to health issues. Fortunately, in Nigeria, both the government and other sectors of the society, have acknowledged the indispensable role of the media and their substantial power in setting agenda. That was why in their efforts to promote the use and uptake of malaria prevention strategies, the Nigeria National Strategic Plan for Malaria Control Programme initiated mass media campaigns to sensitise the public, particularly pregnant women, on the effectiveness and long term benefits of correct and consistent use of insecticide-treated mosquito bed nets during pregnancy. The mass media campaigns, Ankomah, Adebayo, Arogundade, Anyanti, Nwokolo, Inyang, Ipadeola & Meremika (2014) note, were aired on national radio and television stations in English, Pidgin English, and the three main local languages in Nigeria. It is because the mass media have some power to shape opinions and mould behaviours, it is reasonable to believe that a much higher level of reporting on the health of mothers and children may help deepen awareness about the issues. Consequently, doing so may help reduce Nigeria's maternal mortalities.

### **Media Framing of Health Issues**

The media can play an important role in influencing not only what issues are presented to the mass audience, but also how these are perceived, and what importance the public should attach to them by framing the issue in specific ways. The process of framing defines not only what problems are seen as important, but also the causes and potential solutions. As Twenty Ten Theme (2014) describes it, the basis of framing is that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. For example, framing maternal mortality not just as a development issue but also as a human rights concern may enhance accountability for maternal deaths at the national level.

Studies elsewhere show that there is an association between media coverage of a global health problem and policy attention towards that problem. For example, Hudacek, Kurivilla, Kim, Samran, Thea, Quzi, Pleasant & Shanahan (2011) found

that between 1981 and 2008, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), tuberculosis and malaria received nearly five times greater media coverage than three leading causes of child mortality: pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles. According to Hudacek *et al*, HIV, tuberculosis and malaria also received correspondingly greater policy attention and research funding.

Similarly in their study, Balsegaram, Balsegaram, Malvy and Millet (2008) found that HIV, tuberculosis and malaria received greater and international media coverage than Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), human African trypanosomiasis, leishmaniasis and chagas disease. The authors concluded that several factors contributed to the lack of progress in drug development for NTDs, such as market failure of new drugs, the lack of media coverage and low visibility of those diseases exacerbated the neglect.

Another way in which the media influence health outcomes is through the deliberate use of targeted media campaigns. In Kansas, Hefni, Harafi and Campbell (2005), it was found that one factor associated with Egypt's success in reducing its maternal mortality ratio was a mass media campaign focused on maternal health. In another study in Egypt, Hutchinson and Meekers (2012) discovered a causal association between improved reproductive health outcomes and exposure to a multimedia communications campaigns on birth spacing and family planning. Effectively framing the message is key to advancing public health, since framing provides the context that shapes how the message is understood and how the facts and data presented are interpreted.

Scholars have agreed that framing constitutes a form of bias, particularly as it has to do with a process of selection and exclusion. In fact, according to Goffman (1974) cited in Maniou (2015) through framing, audiences locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its limit. Furthermore, Reese (2001, p.11) explains that, "framing is concerned with the way interests, communicator, sources and culture, combine to yield organised ways of understanding the world. Maniou (2015, p. 37) states that recent work on the public reception of media messages, "recognises that the effect of media frames in determining public thinking about social issues is not unidirectional rejecting in this way the determinism of early studies of mass communication."

As current researchers argue, the relationship between the media and the public is now theorised as dialectical, dynamic and socially situated (O'Neil, Mikulak, Morgan, & Taylor, 2009). In this perspective, it is recognised by researchers that the mass media, and especially the traditional components of print, television, and radio; in many ways constitute a poor vehicle for the communication of scientifically accurate information about health, as framing makes them prone to sensationalism, sins of omission and even sheer inaccuracy (Leask *et al*, cited in Maniou, 2015).

However, health professionals and journalists have different values and goals

and that arguments can result in different concepts of validity and significance between them (Kline, 2006). For example, journalists tend to rely on expert testimony than publications and emphasise controversy rather than consensus (Nelkin, 1997, cited in Manio, 2015). Consequently, it is difficult for health professionals and journalists to agree on similar norms for the coverage of health issues. If health professionals could develop an understanding of the way the mass media operate in general and how health issues are constructed within the media environment, public health could have a more productive engagement within this environment (Leask *et al.*, 2010, cited in Maniou, 2015). In other words, Otten (1992) cited in Maniou (2015, p. 37) notes:

The role of the media in health policy is not substantially different from their role in foreign policy or labour policy. For some scholars, all powerful media essentially set the governmental agenda, while for others press coverage simply moves higher on the agenda an issue already growing. Some scholars argue that media sensationalism often pushes the government into bad policies; still others argue that by ignoring a vital health problem, the media allow the government to ignore it as well.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws inspiration from three theoretical perspectives. Thus guiding it are the assumptions of Agenda Setting, Development Media and the Social Responsibility theories.

**Agenda Setting of Theory:** Agenda setting theory, according to Baran and Davis (2012), clearly establishes that there is an important relationship between media reports and people's ranking of public issues. The theory, initiated by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972/1973, explains the correlation between the rate at which the media cover a story, and the extent that people think that the story is important. It is believed that how a person acts at a particular time is determined mainly by what issue the individual believes is important. The crux of the theory is that the media decide where, within the newspaper or broadcast, the stories of the day should appear. Some of the stories may appear on the front page and have large headlines; others which may seem less important should have a smaller headline, short and sharp without accompanying photography.

Media capture of maternal mortality issues either through news, features or opinions may help expand the audience's scope of knowledge about the issue. The media can achieve this by choosing what stories to consider important or news worthy and also the prominence accorded such report.

**Development Media Theory:** One of the assumptions of this theory is that the media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with established



national policy. Folarin (1998 p. 32) fine-tuning that assumption states that, “the media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with national ideology without prejudice to their traditional functions of information, education and entertainment.”

In relation to this article, maternal health is a key indicator of development and this is evident in the millennium development goal (MDG) number five i.e. to improve maternal health in the area of reducing maternal mortality rate and to have universal access to reproductive health. This means that the media have a role to play as agents of change. The media should be involved in disseminating messages to accelerate the development process.

**Social Responsibility Theory:** It is theoretically believed that the communication media operate within a particular socio-political context, to which they relate and provide basic social responsibilities regarding social, educational, political and health values and needs of any complex social structure (McQuail, 2005; Baran & Davis, 2012). Expectedly, as it relates to this article, newspapers as mass media should, as a social responsibility role, provide basic health information on such issues as maternal health to the Nigerian society, which have many productive and future women leaders at risk.

## **Methodology**

This study employed the content analysis research method to determine the coverage of maternal mortality by Nigerian newspapers. According to Adler & Clark (2011, p. 358), content analysis is, “a technique that is particularly useful; for doing historical investigations” which could systematically be conducted through analysis of content of any form of communication such as newspaper or magazine articles. This study examined the coverage of maternal mortality in *The Nation* and *The Punch* in order to draw conclusions on the extent to which the newspapers paid attention to the issues at the period of the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

The population consisted of all the issues of *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspapers published and circulated in Nigeria between January 1 and December 31, 2015 (12 months). These publications were chosen based on their nationwide circulation, availability, accessibility and the inclusion of contents pertaining to health. The period was chosen because it represented the target year for achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which included the improvement of maternal health. *The Punch* and *The Nation* were also selected based on the Advertisers' Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) 2014 report which ranked *The Punch* as the most read in the country, followed by *The Nation*. This population amounted to a total of 730 issues of the two purposively selected national dailies.

The study adopted 14.25 per cent sampling rate to arrive at the sample size. Kerlinger (1979) & Babbie (1990), cited in Batta (2012), recommended a sampling rate of 10 to 20 percent of the population to determine sample size. From this

therefore, 14.25 per cent of 730 newspaper issues gave 104 issues of the two selected newspapers as the sample. That is, 52 issues per newspaper for the one year study period. This sample size is in order. As Osuala (2001) states, the representative units from the population can be used to draw inferences about the total population. To select the 104 issues in the sample from a population of 730 therefore, the systematic sampling technique was adopted. This involved dividing the population by the sample size and obtaining the skip interval of seven.

### **Content Categories**

Stories in the selected publications were categorised into Maternal Mortality/Morbidity content and Non Maternal Mortality/Morbidity Content.

**1. Maternal Mortality/Morbidity Content:** This category referred to *The Punch* and *The Nation* reports concerning the death of women during pregnancy or shortly after birth, and any life threatening condition of women such as a disease during pregnancy, childbirth or the post partum period. These include:

- a) **Haemorrhage:** Heavy bleeding during pregnancy, labour or the post partum period.
- b) **Sepsis:** A potentially life threatening complication of an infection during or after pregnancy.
- c) **Eclampsia:** Condition in which one or more convulsions occur in pregnant women suffering from high blood pressure, often followed by coma and posing a threat to the health of mother and baby,
- d) **Unsafe abortion:** The termination of a pregnancy by people lacking the necessary skills, or in an environment lacking medical standards or both.

**2. Non Maternal Mortality/Morbidity Content:** This category covered non maternal mortality/morbidity health issues that were reported within the period of study. These include:

- a) **Child Health:** Reports on the care and treatment of children.
- b) **Medical/surgical health:** The care of adult patients whose conditions or disorders are treated medically, pharmacologically or surgically.
- c) **Traditional health:** The sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.
- d) **Health policy/funding:** The decisions, plans and actions that are undertaken by the government in order to achieve specific health goals and the act of providing financial resources to finance such programmes.

The unit of analysis was the newspaper story or article which appeared in the

form of news, feature or opinion in *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspaper within the period of study. Published items on maternal mortality/morbidity in *The Punch* and *The Nation* were coded according to the following parameters.

The parameters used in gauging prominence were high, for stories placed on the front, back, and editorial pages; medium for stories captured in special pages, pull outs or supplements, while low-rated stories were those tucked in the inside pages.

Frequency of reportage meant the total number of times maternal mortality morbidity issues were covered within the study period. This was done through simple count.

Source of reports were the routes by which the reporter obtained or gathered the stories on maternal mortality/morbidity such as events and happenings, press conferences/releases, interviews, news agencies, analysis and editorial/opinion.

Dominant maternal mortality/morbidity issues were measured through the most emphasised reports on the matter in the newspapers.

Format/genre of presentation constituted the nature of stories or editorial form in the newspaper such as news/feature, editorial/opinion and special pages/pull out.

Depth was measured through items presented in the following page spaces: full page, half page, quarter page and brief story.

Using the Shoemaker (2003) model for inter-coder reliability, the result obtained was 0.91

## Findings and Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are presented in tabular form and analysed in terms of frequencies and percentages.

**Tables 1: Distribution of maternal and non maternal morbidity/mortality content**

Newspapers	Maternal mortality/ morbidity items	Non-maternal mortality/morbidity items	Total
<i>The Punch</i>	29 (54.7%)	48 (46.2 %)	77 (49%)
<i>The Nation</i>	24 (43.3%)	56 (53.8%)	80 (51%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>53 (33.8%)</b>	<b>104 (66.2%)</b>	<b>157 (100%)</b>

Table 1 shows that a total of 157 maternal mortality and non-maternal mortality/morbidity related stories occurred in the two newspapers content analysed. Of this number, 53 or 33.8 per cent concerned maternal mortality/morbidity issues whereas, 104 stories (66.2%) dealt with non-maternal mortality issues. This means that non-maternal mortality issues were reported 51 times more than maternal mortality/morbidity issues in the two newspapers. A further examination of the table shows that *The Punch* reported more maternal mortality issues by 29 stories (54.7%) than *The Nation* which had 24 (45.3%) stories. *The Nation* led in the coverage of non-

maternal mortality issues with 56 (53.8%) stories while *The Punch* recorded 48 (46.2%) stories. The table therefore shows that there was a reduced coverage of maternal mortality/morbidity issues by the two newspapers.

**Table 2: Distribution of Maternal Mortality/Morbidity Items**

Newspapers	Categories				Total
	Haemorrhage	Sepsis	Eclampsia	Unsafe abortion	
<i>The Punch</i>	19 (52.8%)	1 (25%)	2 (100%)	7 (63.6%)	29 (54.7%)
<i>The Nation</i>	17 (47.2%)	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.64%)	24 (45.3%)
<b>Total</b>	36 (67.9%)	4 (7.5%)	2 (3.8%)	11 (20.8%)	53 (100%)

In Table 2 above, *The Punch* and *The Nation* concentrated more on the coverage of haemorrhage during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period than other forms of maternal mortality/morbidity issues. This possibly means that information on other forms of maternal mortality/morbidity issues were either not sufficiently available to journalists for coverage or that journalists were not aware of them.

**Table 3: Distribution of Non-Maternal Mortality/Morbidity Content**

Newspapers	Categories				Total
	Child Health	Medical /surgical Health	Traditional health	Health policy/funding	
<i>The Punch</i>	12 (40%)	28 (46.7%)	6 (66.7%)	2 (40%)	48 (46.2%)
<i>The Nation</i>	18 (60%)	32 (53.3)	3 (33.3%)	3 (60%)	56 (53.8%)
<b>Total</b>	30 (28.8%)	60 (57.7)	9 (8.7%)	5 (4.8%)	104 (100%)

Table 3 shows that the two selected newspapers reported more medical/surgical health matters followed by child health matters. The table shows significantly that health policy/funding and traditional health matters received less attention within the period of study.

**Table 4: Prominence accorded maternal mortality/morbidity content**

Newspapers	Prominence			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
<i>The Punch</i>	1 (33.3%)	9 (64.3%)	19 (52.8%)	29 (54.7%)
<i>The Nation</i>	2 (66.7)	5 (35.7%)	17 (47.2%)	24 (45.3%)
<b>Total</b>	3 (5.7)	14 (26.4%)	36 (67.9%)	53 (100%)

Table 4 indicates that maternal morbidity and mortality stories did not significantly attract front page placements or formed a serious subject for editorial pages in spite of the fact that 2015 was the target year for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

**Table 5: Frequency of maternal mortality/morbidity content**

Newspapers	Frequency	
	Number	Percentage
<i>The Punch</i>	29	54.7%
<i>The Nation</i>	24	45.3%
<b>Total</b>	53	100%

Table 5 records the number of times maternal morbidity and mortality issues were reported in each of the two newspapers. This table shows that *The Punch* led in the coverage of maternal morbidity and mortality issues.

**Table 6: Sources of maternal mortality/morbidity content**

Newspapers	Sources of stories per newspaper						Total
	Coverage/ occurrences	Press release	Press conferences	Interviews	Analyses/ editorial opinion	News agencies & other publications	
<i>The Punch</i>	18 (54.5%)	3 (75%)	1 (100%)	2 (40%)	1 (33.3%)	4 (57.1%)	29 (54.7%)
<i>The Nation</i>	15 (45.5%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	3 (60%)	2 (66.7%)	3 (42.9%)	24 (45.3%)
<b>Total</b>	33 (62.3%)	4 (7.5%)	1 (1.9%)	5 (9.4%)	3 (5.7%)	7 (13.2%)	53 (100%)

Table 6 shows that the majority of maternal morbidity and mortality news reports were gathered as the problem occurred in different health institutions in parts of the country. That is to say, the reportage was event-specific, incidental and reactive; rather than proactive and routine.

**Table 7: Journalistic format of maternal mortality/morbidity content**

Newspapers	Format Variables			Total
	News/feature	Editorial/opinion	Special pages	
<i>The Punch</i>	19 (52.8%)	1 (33.3%)	9 (64.3%)	29 (54.7%)
<i>The Nation</i>	17 (43.2%)	2 (66.7%)	5 (35.7%)	24 (45.3%)
<b>Total</b>	36 (67.9%)	3 (5.7%)	14 (26.4%)	53 (100%)

Table 7 above shows that most of the publications were news/feature items. This means that the issue of maternal morbidity did not sufficiently attract editorial and opinion writers.

**Table 8: Depth of coverage of maternal mortality/morbidity content**

Newspapers	Depth Variables				Total
	Full page	Half page	Quarter page	Brief story	
<i>The Punch</i>	3 (37.5%)	3 (60%)	17 (58.6%)	6 (54.4%)	29 (54.7%)
<i>The Nation</i>	5 (62.5%)	2 (40%)	12 (41.4%)	5 (45.5%)	24 (45.3%)
<b>Total</b>	8 (15.1%)	5 (9.4%)	29 (54.7%)	11 (28.8%)	53 (100%)

Table 8 shows that on the whole, the majority of the stories were given quarter page space in the two newspapers selected for this study.

The following discussion of findings is based on the research questions.

**What was the level of prominence given to maternal mortality/morbidity issues in *The Punch* and *The Nation*?**

Table 4 reveals the level of prominence the two newspapers accorded maternal morbidity and mortality. The Table shows that 5.7 percent of the stories received high prominence, while 67.9 percent were accorded a low status. Low status here indicates that while very few of the stories appeared on front, back or editorial pages, the majority were tucked in the inside pages. This implies that maternal morbidity and mortality issues were not given high priority by the two newspapers.

In relating this finding to the theoretical framework, some reasoning for the agenda setting theory is observed. The theory holds that the importance of an issue is indicated through its banner headlines or front page placements in newspapers, and this would accordingly be regarded as important by the consumers. This finding therefore shows that the newspapers involved in this study failed to set the agenda for public discussion on an issue such as maternal mortality, thus failing to raise issues for both the government and the populace. This further indicates that *The Punch* and *The Nation* did not pay great attention to the matter of maternal mortality (as germane as it was during the period investigated) and being an issue that affects the entire citizenry of the country.

**What was the frequency of reportage of maternal mortality issues in *The Punch* and *The Nation*?**

Table 1 clearly indicates that out of 157 news reports during the period under study, 53 were reported about maternal mortality/morbidity. This represents 33.8 percent of the entire news reports and shows that maternal mortality/morbidity received some coverage by the two newspapers.

The answer to research question two is certainly that the frequency of coverage of maternal morbidity and mortality was lower, compared to that of non-maternal health issues. This finding supports Adeniran's (2009) finding that the Nigerian press reported more of hunger and poverty, environmental sustainability and global partnership components of the millennium development goals than the ones concerning maternal health. Some observations can be made from this: it may mean that journalists considered other targets of the eight millennium development goals more important than the maternal health target. On the other hand, it could mean that other goals of the MDGs were more preferable to maternal health issues. Or it might suggest that journalists were not knowledgeable enough in maternal mortality matters.

### **What were the sources of maternal mortality issues reported in *The Punch* and *The Nation*?**

Table 6 provides data meant to answer this research question. The table indicates that the majority of the stories on maternal morbidity and mortality were sourced from events and happenings at 62.3 percent. This could imply that the journalists reported development when there is a major activity occurring about the specific issue. For example, this study shows that the two newspapers rarely conducted interviews or investigated prevailing circumstances. The newspapers informed the public on maternal health issues via reports gathered from press releases (7.5%) and press conferences (1.9%) showing that reports lacked diverse sourcing.

This finding is not far different from that of the Woman and Child Feature Services (AWCFS) report cited in Uwom and Oloyede (2011), that most reports covered by the media, among other sources, were covered through statements made by policy makers, seminars or sensitisation workshops organised by organisations, which can be grouped under coverage and occurrence. However, the dearth of investigative reports and critical analysis of development news coverage, as it were in the coverage of maternal mortality, also suggests that the press in Nigeria appears weak on its health surveillance function. In sum, the press also slacked in its role as disseminators of maternal health news, as embodied by the development media theory.

### **Which issues dominated the coverage of maternal mortality reports in *The Punch* and *The Nation*?**

Table 2 indicates that of the four categories delineated in the study, haemorrhage scored 67.9 percent, sepsis had 7.5 percent, eclampsia attracted 3.8 percent while unsafe abortion scored 20.8 percent. It shows that haemorrhage issues dominated the coverage of maternal mortality and morbidity in the two dailies. The high reportage of haemorrhage may be attributed to the series of cultural factors causing high rate of maternal deaths, particularly in rural communities.

The significance of this finding lies in the fact that print journalists need to be fully abreast of information on all aspects of maternal mortality and morbidity prevalent in the population. They also need to be sufficiently interested in the issues if they must develop a significant corps of readership.

This finding has some implication for the agenda setting theory. It suggests here that as far as maternal mortality issues are concerned, the newspapers selected for this study presented a lean agenda to the reading public. By concentrating on haemorrhage, the newspapers tended to limit the exposure of readers to a narrow perspective of the problem. It could also mean that haemorrhage is the prevailing problem. The implication for journalism practice therefore is that, to broaden the scope of exposure for the reading public, the newspapers have to widen the range of coverage of maternal mortality and morbidity issues. By so doing, they would be better placed to set significant agenda on the issues.

**In what journalistic form was maternal mortality information presented in *The Punch* and *The Nation*?**

The categories of format were spelt out in this study namely: news/features articles, editorial/opinion articles, and special page/pull out articles. Table 7 shows that 67.9 percent of the stories were presented in the news/feature format. In addition, 5.7 percent of stories belonged to the editorial/opinion format, while 26.4 percent of maternal mortality stories were presented as special page/pull out articles.

This finding implies that the newspapers reported maternal mortality and morbidity news more as they occurred with analysis of the reports in form of features. Editorials are said to be the authoritative voice of media organisations but in this study, little attention was paid to editorials, an avenue for the media to take a stand on maternal health issues. According to Gupta and Sinha (2010), newspapers reach many people, very quickly; and by implication, the press can play a very important part in increasing people's knowledge about health. They can do this by publishing more authoritative journalistic articles especially editorials and opinions. Most journalists are under pressure to get their reports to the public and by this, their concern is to inform and educate but the role of the media in a critical issue such as maternal mortality and morbidity should go beyond informing and educating to explaining and analysing.

**What was the depth accorded maternal mortality issues in *The Punch* and *The Nation*?**

Table 8 shows that the majority (54.7 percent) of the stories were published in quarter page space, followed by brief stories at 28.8 percent. Also, 15.1 percent belonged to the full page space, while 9.4 percent attracted the half page space. Citing GOI, Fawole and Olajide (2012), argued that the total amount of space allotted to an issue is one of the criteria for evaluating the importance editors attach to such issues. Therefore, if the full page reports are fewer as seen from the data in Table 8 above, it means that the newspapers involved in this study failed to give sufficient depth to maternal mortality and morbidity issues. It further means that to perform its social responsibility function effectively, the newspapers must do well to give sufficient depth as well as more frequency to maternal health issues.

A total of 53 reports were found and analysed out of the 104 issues of the newspapers studied in this research. The newspapers did not give prominence to maternal mortality and morbidity issues by way of placement and giving enough space, thus failing to set sufficient agenda for public debate on the issue, create awareness and as such achieve the desired objective. The non placement of maternal health issues on the front pages of the newspapers strongly suggests that the newspapers may not have considered maternal mortality and morbidity issues a priority in society. However, the practice of lumping special beats such as science, health, environment into special or pull out pages, away from front and back pages may be responsible for this.



In this study, the most reported maternal health issue was haemorrhage. By paying more attention to haemorrhage, the newspapers limited the exposure of readers to a narrow perspective of the problem, thereby setting a lean agenda in the process. However, this may also reflect the prevalence of haemorrhage. The newspapers also relied more on events as sources of reports for publication as seen in the 33 (62.3%) stories that were sourced through coverage/occurrences. This finding is in line with the findings of the African Women and Child Feature Services (AWCFS) report cited in Uwom and Oloyede (2011) noting that most reports covered by the media were covered through statements made by policy makers, research findings by medical experts and researchers and also seminars or sensitisation workshops carried out by organisations.

The major speakers in most of the maternal health reports were medical experts. It means the reporters gave credence to information from medical experts more than other sources. This result also supports the evidence in Obijiofor (2010) citing McLeod & Detenber (1999) which states that journalists rely more on official sources and use the same to add prestige to a story, and to maintain the illusion of objectivity.

The most used journalistic format through which maternal mortality and morbidity issues were presented was news/feature with 36 (67.9%). Little attention was paid to editorial/opinions as there were only 3 (5.7%) editorials/opinions published on the maternal health issues during the period of study. Reports in special pages were featured 14 (26.4%) times. This finding implies that the newspapers reported maternal health issues just as they occurred and did not give elaboration or depth in the form of editorials and opinions

The mass media are an important ally in any public health situation because they serve the role of being a source of correct information as well as an advocate for correct health behaviours. As Gupta and Sinha (2010) state, newspapers reach many people, very quickly; and by implication, the press can play a very important part in increasing people's knowledge about health matters including issues pertaining to maternal health. They can do this by publishing extensive reports especially in editorials and features. In this digital age where citizens read their newspapers online, it is also important to include maternal health information for online readers.

This study has deep implications for health communication. It implies that newspapers, indeed the mass media, should expand their scope of coverage to contribute significantly to creating awareness of maternal health issues not only for pregnant women but for the general public, policy makers, and political/governmental stakeholders. Apart from this, newspapers and other mass media should continue to educate the public on a sustainable basis about problems such as maternal morbidity and mortality that threaten the survival of the society. This responsibility is necessary to stave off avoidable death. By so doing, the media help to expand the functions of health workers.

Thirdly, the study implies that the mass media should continue to play a crucial role in advocating among legislative, executive, and civil society levels for increasing attention to maternal health issues. This could be in the form of championing higher budgeting to fund maternal health worker training and better remuneration, more research into maternal problems, establishing more maternal health centres, etc.

Fourthly, based on research, particularly in this digital age of netizens, newspapers and other mass media should quickly gravitate toward taking maternal health messages to the social and new media platforms where an increasing number of citizen are getting their information. Generally, it means that newspapers and other media of communication can and should increase the frequency, depth, and prominence accorded maternal health issues as well as other health matters through more news, pictures, opinions, features, editorials, columns, pull outs, and special sections. This of course would be in addition to interpersonal, small group, and public means of communicating health information.

## **Conclusion**

Maternal mortality and morbidity issues were not accorded priority by the two Nigerian newspapers during the period investigated. Out of the 157 news reports during the period under study, 53 were reported about maternal mortality. This represents 33.8 percent of the health news reports. The majority of maternal mortality and morbidity news reports (62.3%) were sourced from events and happenings. However, others were press releases (7.5%), press conferences (1.9%), interviews (9.4%), analyses, editorials/opinions (5.7%) and news agency/other media publications (13.2%). News reports about haemorrhage dominated the coverage of maternal mortality and morbidity issues in the two newspapers. Maternal mortality and morbidity reports were presented as news/feature articles (67.9%), editorial/opinion format (5.7%) and 26.4 percent of the reports belonged to the special page/pull out articles. Full page stories scored 15.1 percent, half page reports had 9.4 percent, and quarter page reports attracted the majority 54.7 percent, while brief story scored 28.8 percent. The conclusion therefore, is that maternal health issues require more frequent, wider, greater, and deeper attention by the newspapers.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made considering the findings of this work:

1. The newspapers should endeavour to give adequate attention to issues concerning maternal health in their day-to-day activities such as is given to politics and other issues of national concern. Greater attention should be given to front and back page placements, editorial/feature treatment, and

more in-depth consideration.

2. The relevance of maternal health to Nigeria's development agenda demands that editors and reporters should undergo training to constantly keep abreast with maternal health issues as they arise. Workshops, conferences and symposia should be organised by newspaper organisations for that purpose.
3. Further studies on how maternal mortality and morbidity issues are reported across mass media types: radio versus television, newspapers versus radio and so on, may become necessary.

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