

Vol. 2, No. 1 | June 2020

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# Gender Issues in Nigerian Newspapers Coverage of Maternal and Child Healthcare Issues

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## Abstract

This study examines emergent gender issues in the analysis of newspaper coverage of maternal and child healthcare (MCH) in Nigeria over a one-year period. MCH is a major challenge in Nigeria as the country is among the highest contributors to maternal and child mortalities globally. Even though this pattern has wider implication to society at large, it may be regarded as being more relevant to women. Premised on gender bias and journalistic norms hypotheses, the study combines content analysis and in-depth interviews (IDI) to determine the dominant gender leading in the newspaper coverage of such a women-centred issue, and underlying reasons for the dominance. The study thus examines the dominant gender of journalists, and other voices projected in the newspaper reports on the issues. It also compares views of male and female health journalists for possible differences of opinion regarding media coverage of MCH. The study finds male dominance amongst journalists and voices quoted in the coverage of MCH issues and related stories, though there was minimal influence of gender in the overall coverage of issues. The study thus deviates from the media gender studies attributing underrepresentation of women in the media to gender bias; noting that gender imbalance is often rooted in journalistic norms pervading media operations.

**Keywords:** News Sources, Women's health, Gender bias, Journalistic norm, Niger

## Introduction

The representation of women in the news media has been a subject of inquiry for many years. In many of these studies, women were often found to be under-represented. Global surveys, such as the *Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) Reports*, *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*, have consistently reported wide disparities in the representation of women in the media with minimal progress being made over decades (GMMP, 2015; IWMF 2011). Male dominance in the news media is well established in extant literature and continues to feature in the contemporary news media environment. Male dominance often manifests in terms of more males in editorial positions in news media organisations, in addition to their dominant role as sources of news (GMMP 2015).

There appears to be a general trend in the silencing of the female voice. There are allegations that women are mostly projected in the media as objects to be desired, often with the publication of glamorously-dressed, beautiful women to fill up media space, with minimal projection of their contribution to the society (Tijani-Adenle & Oso, 2014). More often than not, they are rarely spoken to. Their voices, especially as expert sources on pressing public issues, are hardly projected (GMMP 2015). Advocacy groups have argued that the dominance of male sources over women, denies women the opportunity of shaping national discourse and the public continues to "miss important points of view" (Groch-Begley 2014, cited in Baitinger, 2015), and "perspectives of women" (Oppenheim, 2019).

Male dominance in the media has implications for media coverage of issues. It has the potential to affect the types of stories that are reported, and how they are reported, since the personal attributes and attitudes of the individual journalists tend to influence media contents (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The impact of male dominant reporting culture on the coverage of health news in the media is multifaceted. To start with, health is generally not a favoured topic in contemporary news media (GMMP, 2015; Bello, 2015). A senior correspondent in a leading newspaper in Nigeria alleged that editors in Nigeria often treat health news as "an aside, often to fill up available media spaces after business and politics" (Adesola Ayo-Aderele, Personal Communication, May 27, 2017). Covering health issues is particularly challenging for journalists in Nigeria who must face the peculiar challenges of covering the health beat. Their task is compounded by the challenges of operating in environments unfriendly to the media; journalists are often hindered and not provided with the basic tools to work with (AAAS, 2008; Bello, 2015). There are also cultural orientations that hinder coverage of health issues; certain topics are considered "taboo" for cultural reasons. Bello (2015) also notes that health journalists in Nigeria often lack access to current data regarding specific health situations to

support health stories being reported; and where available, officials sometimes refuse to make them available to journalists.

Maternal and child healthcare (MCH), being a major health challenge in Nigeria, needs delicate and expert handling, yet the challenge for coverage is likely to be greater with male dominance of the average Nigerian newsroom. It is assumed that men may be less concerned about the severity of the dire state of MCH in the country. No doubt, MCH has greater implication for women even though it has an over-riding impact on the larger society. But does male dominance of the newsroom impact on coverage of a female centred issue like maternal and child healthcare?

This paper examines gender issues that emerged in an earlier analysis of newspaper coverage of MCH issues in Nigeria (Adeniran, 2018). It compares gender differences in the number of reporters covering the issues, and the dominant gender of projected voices. It investigates possible factors contributing to observed gender imbalances in the coverage of the issues, and the implications for the promotion of maternal and child healthcare in Nigeria.

## **Literature review**

The Nigerian mass media in almost all its ramifications are highly dominated by men. This dominance is reflected in the form of participation, content and hierarchical status. Women in Nigerian news media are rarely found in top-management positions, thus making it impossible for them to contribute to key decisions on matters of finances and company policy. However, they appear to be making significant progress at the middle and senior management levels (IWMMF, 2011).

Women's voices and issues are continually underrepresented. Data from the *Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015* report on Nigeria notes a relatively low participation of women in the field compared to their male counterparts. Women have also reportedly been invisible in Nigerian media content; they rarely feature as news subjects with only 18 percent inclusion rate compared to 82 percent males (GMMP, 2015). The report notes a tendency for male reporters to focus attention on male news subjects in their stories whilst female reporters feature more feminine subjects, suggesting that the continuing domination of the news media by males tends to silence women voices, along with their issues, interests and aspirations within the society.

Engaging and sustaining more female participants in the media industry can be challenging. Despite greater enrolment of women on media-related courses in many higher institutions in Nigeria, it appears more males often venture into the media industry and eventually survive as media practitioners. This is consistent with the trend

observed in the USA where credit and by-lines of male reporters still dominate news media across media platforms (York, 2017; Oppenheim, 2019). Oyinade, Daramola, and Lamidi (2013) acknowledge male dominance in the Nigerian media, noting that the few women who ventured into the "male-dominated industry" met with great resistance, having to "fight for respect, equal opportunity, and credibility" (p. 27). They add that men continue to occupy key decision-making positions to the detriment of women, whose absence in top positions has likely contributed to the shortage of women voices in the media, less emphasis on women issues, "and, where they are covered, they are perceived [or presented] from a male point of view" (p. 37).

Male dominance of the industry sometimes manifests in higher pay for male journalists. In his study, Fapohunda (2013) observes that there is a gender pay gap in favour of men. The gender bias in the Nigerian media may also be attributed to the absence of female ownership of the dominant mainstream news media outfits as they only feature as publishers of specialised magazines.

The perceived entrenchment of the male perspective in media coverage of issues may also be traced to masculine newsroom cultures; when (predominantly male) editors persist in stereotypical beat assignment. Male reporters are preferred on "prestigious beats" such as politics, while women are assigned to less revered beats like education and fashion (Craft & Wanta 2004). The output from women who work within such newsrooms is likely to be shaped by dominant male viewpoints (Correa & Harp, 2011). This gender bias breeds imbalance in the perspectives of stories available to society. Having more women in key decision-making positions in news media organisations may increase newsroom diversity, thus enabling women to provide varied perspective to coverage of issues (Correa & Harp, 2011; Craft & Wanta 2004). The gender bias in the Nigerian media may also be attributed to the absence of female ownership of mainstream news media outfits. Women tend to feature as publishers of specialised magazines.

Although the gender bias hypothesis reflected above is popular in studies on women representations in the media, other studies have also considered how *journalistic norms* may help to entrench the underrepresentation of women. Such studies have argued that the underrepresentation of women noted in media coverage of varied issues, cannot be isolated from the prevailing newsroom environment and the social environment within which media operates (Baitinger, 2015, Kruvand, 2012a).

Kruvand (2012a) conducted a content analysis of coverage of oral contraceptives in the *New York Times* over its first 50 years of existence spanning 1960-2010, particularly in the light of the controversies surrounding its launch over the years. The study adopted news values and selection of sources; and the framing theory, as its

theoretical framework. It examined variations in sources and the framing of stories on the birth control pill over the years, while reflecting on the implications of the changes in the news coverage for American journalism and society. Regarding the types of named sources directly quoted or paraphrased in the news articles, the study found substantial variations in frequency in the use of particular categories of sources over the five decades. Notably, women were scarcely used as sources in the 1960s and 1970s, when women were virtually absent in top hierarchy of society.

With the emergence of women in varied fields of human endeavour, more female sources emerged, and eventually rose to be in the majority by the fifth decade of the study period. The average number of female sources used in the stories increased substantially over the years, thus "reflecting a wider range of viewpoints". This was in addition to "more first-hand accounts from users of the pill" (p. 48). There was, however, little variation in the use of scientists, academics, and researchers over the years. Relating the findings to developments within the society over the study period, Kruvand concludes that the journalists' choice of sources, their use of frames were largely restricted by the existing news values system and organisational routines. He describes the dramatic shift in the coverage over time as "reflective of changes in both journalism and society" (p. 34), especially as the society became polarised.

In another study, hinged on the popular belief that underrepresentation of women in the media is rooted in gender bias in news media, Baitinger (2015) explored two postulations for perceived dominance of male news sources in the media. The first, which is the *gender bias hypothesis*, suggests that women's voices are often less projected in the media due to the dominance of male in the profession and their tendency to project issues from the male perspective. The other is the *journalistic norms hypothesis*, which relates to the journalistic norms of news values, such as striving for objectivity and balance, attribution of sources. In their adherence to journalistic norms, journalists tend to favour candidates in positions of authorities, who mostly often turn out as men thus increasing male dominance. Journalistic norm implies that they get the best candidate to speak on an issue irrespective of the gender so long as the candidate is perceived to be in a position of knowledge to speak authoritatively on issues being raised. Journalistic norms favour the inclusion of established authority over the ordinary citizens. Unfortunately, the elite group often favoured as credible news sources by journalistic norms tends to be dominated by men, given the nature of power within patriarchal societies. It has been noted that journalistic norms tend to perpetuate a gendered news environment; women have traditionally been political outsiders, so they are deemed to lack characteristics expected of the most newsworthy sources (Baitinger, 2015). Baitinger's study found limited use of women as expert sources in selected television news programmes, but noted that the underrepresentation is rooted in "journalistic norms to provide balance

and credibility in reporting", which favour use of sources with specific attributes that are often not common among women (Baitinger, 2015, p. 579).

In furtherance to studies examining underlying reasons for possible gendered newsroom environment, this study applies Baitinger (2015) suggested hypotheses, *gender bias hypothesis* and *journalistic norms hypothesis*, to examine women's representation in newspaper's coverage of a women centred issue, maternal and child healthcare. It examined male dominance in coverage of women-related issues; investigated the underlying reasons for such dominance; and the extent to which male dominance impacts on coverage of MCH. Three research questions thus guided the study:

1. What is the dominant gender of reporters covering MCH issues?
2. What is the dominant gender of sources quoted in MCH stories?
3. What is the perception of male and female journalists to newspaper coverage of MCH issues?

## Method

The study adopted the mixed method approach combining content analysis and in-depth interview (IDI) methods. The content analysis method was used to examine newspaper coverage of maternal and child healthcare (MCH) issues over a twelve-month period. Four 'national' newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* were purposively selected for the study based on their wide reach across the country, and in specific regions. All print editions of the selected newspapers published over a 12-month sample period from July 2015 to June 2016 were assessed for eligibility by flipping through the pages for MCH related news and feature stories. A total of 1,046 stories comprising 300 news and 746 features, which formed the unit of analysis, were analysed.

The study examined the gender of journalists who reported MCH-related stories over the sample period to determine if female journalists reported the issue more than male journalists. To determine this, the name(s) written as by-line (when provided) for each of the analysed features and news stories across the four sampled newspapers were recorded during the coding process of the content analysis. The names were later collated for each newspaper. Each name was searched online, along with the affiliated newspapers, using Google search for possible identification of the person's gender.

The generated result most similar to the searched name was then checked with primary focus on results indicating possible LinkedIn profile of the individual. Where no LinkedIn account was found for an individual, the search was extended to other social media covering, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat for likely match. To be sure the final result was the exact individual's, there must be a direct reference indicating the individual works with, or had worked with, the affiliated newspaper organisation around the time of the study period on the profile view of the specific social medium. Where no such data was found on an individual using any of the aforementioned options, specific news mentions involving the reporter and the affiliated newspaper organisation, such as award events were examined for supporting picture or possibly gender mention in the news content.

This content analysis was complemented with findings from in-depth interviews of health journalists in ten leading newspapers in Nigeria (Olukotun, 2017). Each of these were selected by virtue of their position as head of the health desk at their respective newspapers. Incidentally, there were an even split of respondents - five male health editors (MHE) and five female health editors (FHE). These journalists were asked to react to specific questions relating to media coverage of MCH related issues. Their responses were analysed based on their gender to gauge possible influences of their gender on the degree of importance they feel should be accorded the issue.

To promote anonymity, each interviewee was assigned a label according to their gender and serial number on the list - FHE 1 to FHE 5 representing the female editors, and MHE 1 to MHE 5 the male editors. Their respective newspapers - labelled Newspaper 1 to Newspaper 10, was also indicated in their labels. The in-depth interviews focused on practices relating to media coverage of MCH and related issues. Responses were analysed to gauge possible influences of gender on perspectives expressed, and to understand potential weight which respondents felt should be accorded to the relevant issues.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the journalists who wrote news and features on MCH issues over the sample period. More male journalists covered the MCH-related items analysed in the study, in three of the sampled newspapers.

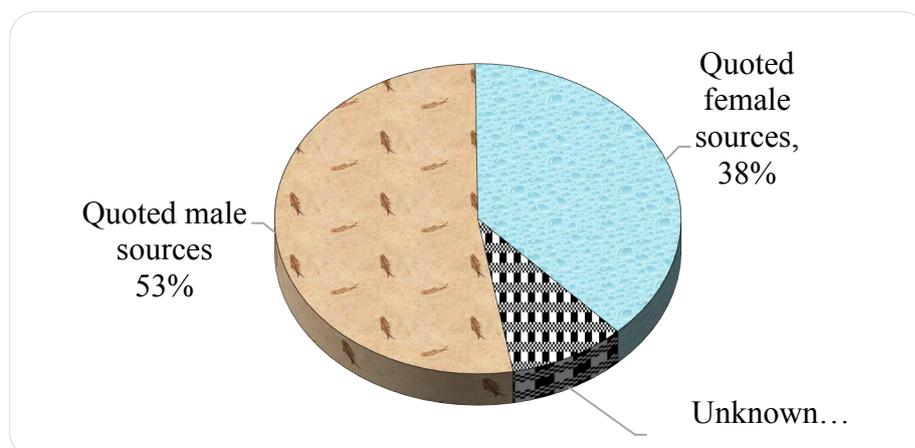
Table 1: Gender of reporters of MCH-related stories in sampled newspapers

Gender of Reporters	Newspapers (Percentage)				
	Punch	Nation	Daily Trust	Leadership	TOTAL
Male	44.3	55.1	61.0	51.8	54.1
Female	53.8	40.1	33.3	33.7	39.0
Male & Female	1.9	4.8	5.7	12.4	6.4
Unknown	0	0	0	2.1	0.5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(n)	(158)	(147)	(267)	(193)	(765)

Source: Field data, 2017

When viewed together, male reporters had the greatest number of stories with 54 percent (54.1%, n=414) coverage of the 765 news and features with identified by-lines. Female journalists recorded 39 percent coverage (n=298). Stories combining male and female writers were also noted in the study and they accounted for over six percent (6.4%, n=49). All the sampled newspapers follow similar pattern except for *Punch* which published more stories by female reporters. That may be related to the fact that the newspaper published most of its MCH-related stories on its dedicated health pages and the two reporters on the desk during the sample period were females. The four reporters whose gender were unidentified all published their stories in *Leadership*.

Figure 1: Gender of Quoted sources in analysed MCH-related stories



Source: Field data, 2017

The study also recorded the gender of every source quoted; these were then summed up in the analysis of the stories. Gender of quoted sources was determined through the pronouns referring to each source, where available. Otherwise, the unidentifiable source(s) were noted and also summed up and recorded in the coding process. A total of 2,024 sources were identified from the content analysis. Majority of the sources (52.6%, n=1,064) were identified as males, around 38 percent (38.1%, n=772) were females. Less than one-tenth (9.3%, n=188) of the gender of the identified sources could not be determined - there were no references indicating their particular gender.

The study explored more gender-related issues during the in-depth interviews with health editors on coverage of MCH and other health issues. The dominant themes from the interviews are presented below with key excerpts:

**Source selection:** Findings from the study suggest that gender is hardly a concern of health journalists in the selection of sources for MCH and other health stories. Both male and female respondents noted that in the selection of sources, they prioritised expertise and willingness, over gender. They attributed the possibility of having more male sources, especially expert sources, to the dominance of men as professionals in varying fields, and in positions of authorities, over women in the society.

It's not like men are being preferred over women, it's just experience, the expertise, how long they (men) 've been in the field and the authority that they have in that field. (FHE<sup>1</sup> 1 - Newspaper 1)

If you look at the country, you still have more males who are educated, who are in positions of power than females... If I get to an event, and there are six people giving lectures, four of them may be males. So, in terms of percentage, I already have more male experts to quote in my story. Hence, if I have issues, I will tend towards more males. Perhaps I will talk to two of the male speakers, and one female. (MHE 2 - Newspaper 3)

Respondents disclosed that they may only consider gender of affected individuals when writing on health issues that specifically affect each gender. Otherwise, male respondents denied specifically seeking out male sources to use as their sources, neither are female respondents likely to prioritise using female sources.

However, two respondents - a male and a female - noted the possibility of gender influencing their selection of sources especially for MCH-related issues. This was

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<sup>1</sup> FHE is used to represent Female Health Editor while MHE represents Male Health Editor for anonymity of respondents

largely attributed to cultural restrictions and possible sensitivities associated with specific issues inherent to MCH.

It is not easy for a male reporter to be talking to a woman about personal issues. Even the woman will not be comfortable. 'How can he be asking about my menstrual cycle?' Even the man may not be interested. 'You know it's a woman thing, how do I concern myself with that?' Hence, female journalists will want to go to females, even the specialists, and males too will likely do the same, except in some cases. (MHE 3 - Newspaper 6)

When you look at our cultural outline, it's kind of, 'You are a man, you are talking to somebody else's wife. Are you looking for trouble?'... even in the course of duty. (FHE 5 - Newspaper 10)

**Topic selection:** Findings from the study suggest that gender is sometimes considered when determining topics or issues to write on, although with little regard for the gender of the reporter making that decision. On the coverage of MCH-related issues examined in this study, the male respondents appeared more emphatic on the need for regular coverage of issues relating to women and children. For instance, three of the four excerpts from the IDI transcripts presented below and emphasising regular and improved coverage of MCH were from male respondents:

It is something we have to keep talking about; [that] women should not keep dying in the process of giving life. That is just our own slogan. So it is something that is actually worthy of receiving media attention for as long as possible, until there's a solution. (FHE 1 - Newspaper 1)

No amount of media attention given to [the issue of MHC] can be too much. (MHE 1 - Newspaper 2)

In fact, it is something we should be talking about every day. In Nigeria, being pregnant is very risky. In some other countries, once you are pregnant, you are almost sure you will give birth. At least, 95 percent will be sure they will give birth. But here, I'm sure its 50-50. Once you are pregnant, you just don't know what will happen at the end of the day. Whether you will be alive, whether the baby will be alive, you won't be able to tell. (MHE 2 - Newspaper 3)

Pregnancy is a natural requirement for the future, and for women. So, it's not something that should be a life and death matter. But once it starts getting there, the country has no choice but to prioritise. I think Nigeria really needs to prioritise MCH care. (MHE 3 - Newspaper 6)

Also, some male respondents reported having a preference for female-related issues for several reasons:

I write about males, I write about females. I don't know. I even have more preference, more bias, to write about females, maybe because they have more health issues than males. (MHE 2 - Newspaper 3)

In health reporting, one thing I have come to understand is that there are two groups that are most vulnerable, and they are the pregnant women and children under five. They are very critical. So, it is just the natural thinking. (MHE 5 - Newspaper 7)

I have come to realise that if you write a story about a woman, that story is more likely to receive media attention than if it is about a man. Using a woman as a subject in a story makes your story more alive. (MHE 3 - Newspaper 6)

A male respondent alleged that women sometimes avoid writing on MCH-related issues while men remain at the forefront of projecting such issues.

The funny thing is that even women (women columnists, women journalists), who are most affected by these issues, don't use their pages to push these issues. They write about other issues. Most times, it is the men that try to bring out some of these issues. (MHE 3 - Newspaper 6)

A female respondent provided supporting evidence for this view, she appeared critical of the researcher's query on limited coverage of MCH-related issues, saying:

So, it should always be MCH, every week? Ah! Ah! Be fair to other issues as well! (FHE 2 - Newspaper 4)

Only two respondents, a male and a female hinted that they sometimes consider their gender when selecting issues to write on. The male respondent disclosed that:

...issues of (not really being selfish, but), things that affects you directly, as men. You know, somehow you [tend] to talk about them because, come to think of it, most times it's men that buy the paper. (MHE 5 - Newspaper 7).

For the female respondent,

It must be something that I can use for my health. If it's something I can't apply to myself, that I know my readers will not benefit from, it's not worth it. (FHE 4 - Newspaper 8).

**Men talk, women hardly speak:** One issue emphasised by the respondents, regardless of their gender, was the (un)willingness of affected individuals to speak on issues when prompted. They all noted that men were often used as sources mainly due to

the unwillingness of women to talk to the media. The respondents attributed the apparent silencing of women's voices in the media to the reluctance of women to speak out on issues, even when they are prompted. Men appeared to be more favoured in this regard. A female respondent emphasised this point as follows:

Even in other beats, politics, business, how many women make the news? You want to talk to them, they are like ... [reluctant, uncooperative ...] but men talk. Men volunteer information, they know how to, they know what to say. Let's give it to them. They know when to cut you short. They know when you want to put words in their mouth. So, that's the issue, women don't talk, and we need to be talking. (FHE 5 - Newspaper 10)

A male respondent also empathised the point describing it as a women's problem.

Maybe because of the society we are (in), women are sometimes not willing to talk... (Cited instances of female professionals in positions of authority, who rarely grant press interviews). I don't know; maybe it's a female thing. But for males, they are ever willing to grant interviews. Maybe you women should ask yourselves the question. If I want to interview you now (addressing the researcher), you may not be willing to grant the interview. It's like a gender problem. I don't think the problem is from us. It's the willingness of the available sources. And most times, the female sources are not that willing. (MHE 4 - Newspaper 7)

Even respondents who de-emphasised the influence of gender in source selection still noted the tendency to rely more on male sources due to the lack of cooperation from female sources.

I don't think anybody will deliberately choose a male respondent when they are talking about issues that affect women. The midwives are there, gynaecologists are there, and we have a substantial number of women among them...And it's not all the time that women are quiet. There are times that women may not be willing to talk... If for instance, a woman is not willing to talk and her husband is willing, will you write-away the story? So, it depends on the situation. (FHE 3 - Newspaper 5)

In our reportage, gender is not really an issue... What you are after is the person's ability to deliver. Can he give you the information you want? (sic) That's what you are after, not the gender. Gender has nothing to do with it. It's accessibility... If the woman is approachable, why not? However, it's easier for you to approach a man to talk than for you to talk to a woman. Not all women are approachable. And if the woman is not there, what do you do? (FHE 4 - Newspaper 8)

That said, another respondent noted the further possibility of the emotional strain on women; this may prevent them from recounting their experiences - especially as relates to MCH-related issues.

Sometimes, the woman wants to talk, but she is emotional because she is the one suffering the issue, so the man will have to come in. (FHE 5 - Newspaper10)

## **Discussion of findings**

The first research question examines the dominant gender of reporters covering MCH issues. This study found that the majority of the MCH-related stories analysed in the study were written by males despite MCH issues having greater direct implications for women than for men. As established in the extant literature (e.g. Anyanwu, 2001; GMMP, 2015), the dominance of male reporters in the analysed items reflects the dominance of males in the Nigerian media industry. Even though MCH care may be considered more of a feminine issue, women journalists are apparently not at the forefront of projecting MCH-related issues in the media. The speculations of more female journalists covering health issues (North, 2016) may be irrelevant in this regard as several of the analysed items were published in 'other' inside pages, not in the dedicated health pages where health journalists are more likely to publish their stories. Hence, a fair percentage of the health stories published were likely to have been written by the general beat reporters. The dominance of male authors therefore supports the idea of male dominance in newspapers and the media industry in general in Nigeria.

Male dominance in this national context may also be due to the deliberate avoidance of female-centred issues by some women journalists to avoid unfair labelling by their colleagues (Anyanwu, 2001). This view was also expressed by one of the male health editors interviewed in the study (MHE 3 - Newspaper 6) who noted that, women journalists and columnists mostly prefer to use their pages for other issues than to advocate for improved MCH; thus men are left at the forefront of MCH advocacy. This being the case, merely increasing the number of women in the newsroom may not yield better coverage of MCH issues in Nigerian newspapers (Anyanwu, 2001).

A more realistic analysis of the true situation could be achieved when investigating issues relating to MCH deserving of extensive media attention, if the inputs of both male and female respondents are considered. The *Media Rights Monitor* had noted in its January 2001 issue that the dominance of males in the coverage of women's issues could mean that such issues are presented from the male perspective. Thus male voices could be projected over female voices (Anyanwu, 2001). That being the case, and as evidenced in later studies (e.g. Kim & Yoon, 2009; McCauley, Blake, Meissner, & Viswanath, 2013), the dominance of male journalists from the sampled

newspapers may have tilted the perspectives evident in the overall projections of MCH issues covered. However, participants in the IDI denied the possibility that the choice of sources quoted may be informed by the reporter's gender.

The second research question examines the dominant gender amongst sources quoted in MCH stories. This study found that the sources quoted in the analysed items were predominantly men. However, it was observed that factors such as patriarchy, cultural norms, newsroom routines, and the general reluctance of women to grant interviews may have contributed to the greater use of male sources in MCH-related stories. This study found that reporters do not specifically seek out women or men when considering sources for MCH-related stories, although it has been speculated that gender may limit the accessibility of male journalists to news sources as female individuals having MCH issues may not feel comfortable in sharing their experiences with males.

Men appear to be the key players in the coverage of MCH issues; noticeably women appear as sources mainly when consulted as affected individuals. As evidenced in previous studies (e.g. Akanni, 2015; Jimoh, 2015), the dominant use of expert male sources is a common phenomenon in the coverage of various issues in Nigerian newspapers. The dominance of male voices in the coverage of MCH issues should be a matter for concern, considering the significance and relevance of this issue to women. However, participants in the IDI are of the opinion that journalists rarely seek out male sources when reporting MCH issues though some prevailing circumstances, particularly culture, sometimes restrict females from speaking up in public. Also, this study attests to the need to consider the willingness and competence of the available sources when deciding on the sources to use when reporting such issues, with the often limited time constraints challenging reporters (as rooted in journalistic norms and routines). Studies in other climes have found an increasing tendency for the feminine voice to be included in women's health issues over the years. This has culminated in women's voices becoming more dominant (e.g. Kruvand, 2012a).

The greater percentage of male sources quoted in the analysed stories could be considered as yet another reflection of the prevailing patriarchal culture in the Nigerian society. The medical experts and authority figures whom respondents noted as their primary sources of health information are dominated by men (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018) thus increasing the possibility of journalists to quote male sources. For instance, obstetricians and gynaecologists who "are the highest cadre of manpower for maternal health" are disproportionately dominated by men with less than 13 percent female obstetricians and gynaecologists in Nigeria (Agboghoroma &

Gharoro, 2015). Hence, journalists seeking out experts in maternal health care would be more likely to use males than females as news sources.

Besides, as noted by respondents in the study, reporters' reliance on available and willing "media friendly" sources convenient for news routine of health journalists, could also lead to the use of sources outside their scope of expertise (Kruvand, 2012b). This becomes an issue of concern since the "backgrounds, religions, views, and biases" of the expert sources "may have an indelible impact on stories in which they are quoted, and on media discourses (Kruvand, 2012b, p. 585). Health journalists should, therefore, strive to ensure that sources used in reporting specific health issues are truly grounded in the issue and are not merely selected on the basis of their accessibility and availability. Male-dominated sources in such feminine-related health issues suggests the need for continual reflection on the suppression of women by men, the latter often having the authority and economic control over the former. Such a prevailing culture of subjugation of women may have influenced the reported reluctance of women to freely express their views in the media, thus fuelling greater projection of male views in reported MCH stories.

The third research question evaluates the perception of male and female journalists to MCH issues, and the coverage of these in newspapers. Findings from this study suggest that gender may be irrelevant in newspaper coverage of MCH issues as respondents in the study all considered MCH issues important and deserving of media attention irrespective of the gender of the reporters and their resources, with males apparently as passionate as the females on such issues. It was found that both males and female journalists rarely consider gender when seeking sources for their stories. They are generally more concerned about the suitability of interviewees, and their competence, and willingness to speak and react to issues when prompted.

However, as evidenced in this study, the fact that the male and female respondents expressed similar opinions in respect of MCH issues is not necessarily a guarantee that gender does not matter in coverage of these issues (Steiner, 2012). This is because respondents may have simply aimed to provide "normative answers" in order to "conform to professional standards" (Steiner, 2012, pp. 203-204), expected within the prevailing culture of media practice and journalistic norms in a developing country like Nigeria.

Lobo, Silveirinha, da Silva and Subtil (2015) found elements of such tendencies in their analysis of how male and female mass media professionals consider the significance of gender in their news routines. Hence, the greater percentage of respondents who denounce any possibility of gender having influenced their selection of sources may have been entrenched in the dominant "masculinist culture"

of the newsroom (Steiner, 2012, pp. 204) to such an extent that they are unable to truly realise such a tendency in their writing.

## Conclusion

In relative terms, going by the need of media channels to attract audiences and advertisers, it would appear that health issues have limited potential of being newsworthy. Health stories may therefore struggle to make headlines in Nigerian media unless when there is a huge epidemic or disease outbreak with great implication for society at large. Considering the fact that the typical newsroom is male dominated, women's issues may thus be more elusive and the extent to which such issues are likely to be reported would be more limited.

Health news is sometimes considered to be soft news, and there is a tendency for more female journalists to be covering the beat (North, 2016). Yet in spite of these and the high relevance of MCH issues to women, men still dominate this field of reporting. Male dominance manifests both in terms of the gender of the sources, and the reporters covering the issues. The newsroom structure contributes to this as health news is often not the exclusive preserve of health journalists. Despite evidence that specialist health reporters are more likely to write superior quality health stories than general reporters, the latter (often including male reporters) are increasingly being assigned to cover health-related events (Wilson, Robertson, McElduff, Jones & Henry, 2010).

Prevailing journalistic norms have been found to be major determinants in facilitating the dominance of the male voice. Journalists want willing and experienced sources, who can readily react to issues within constraints imposed by newsroom deadlines. Unfortunately, females often fall short of this, and they are often found to be unwilling to react to the media on issues of concern. This tendency needs to be explored further. Why are women less inclined to speak up?

The economic subjugation of women is an identified factor leading to the silencing of women voices in the media. Culture is another factor contributing to the dominance of male voices since some cultures in Nigeria limit the extent to which a woman can express her views about issues and also the type of issues on which she can freely comment on without being scorned in society. Furthermore, to avoid unfair labelling and newsroom conventions which may pigeonhole them, some female journalists may actively avoid writing about feminine issues. They would be more inclined to focus on issues such as politics, and business that are considered to be more broadly relevant to society at large. (Anyanwu, 2001).

*The findings from this study have given greater support to prevailing journalistic norms and newsroom routines as the dominant factors influencing the underrepresentation of women in the newspaper coverage of MCH issues. There is minimal evidence to support the gender bias hypothesis. This suggests that mere increase of the number of women in the newsroom may not necessarily result in a better representation of women and women's views, even in respect of women-related issues.*

*There is a need for sustained effort by the relevant advocacy groups to persuade more women to express their views in the media. Such efforts should involve extensive engagement of media professionals across gender and cadre to promote the need for greater projection of women's views and better representation of women in the news media. Renewed campaigns against societal and cultural limitations hindering women from freely expressing their views should also be staged. The need for the greater empowerment of women, and for the girl-child education in this regard cannot be overemphasised.*

*A major limitation of this study is the lack of comparison between the gender of the reporters and their quoted sources. Though there is evidence of male reporters who are sympathetic to the MCH issues, this study could have delved more into specific influence of gender on story framing, and the slant or bias of reported MCH issues. Future studies could examine the influence of gender through a comparative analysis of the gender of the journalists reporting women-related issues amongst other variables, such as the adopted frames, the gender of quoted sources, and the bias of the stories.*

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