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Newspaper Coverage Of Mental Health Issues In Nigeria: 2016-2020

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ABSTRACT

One of the global health challenges today is the prevalence of mental illness. A mental disorder or mental illness (MI) is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbances in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Newspapers, as part of the mass media, are saddled with the responsibility of covering mental ill-health. This study sought to explore the newspaper coverage of mental health issues in Nigeria. The content analysis technique was used to analyse four national newspapers: *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard* for five years. Code sheet was used as an instrument of data collection and agenda-setting theory and social responsibility theory were used to explain the study. Findings from the research revealed that the frequency coverage on mental illness is 321 with insanity as the most covered mental illness issue by the newspapers. The prominence given to the coverage of mental illness was low. More so, news was found to be the story genre that received the most attention. In terms of the direction of coverage, findings showed that the newspapers covered mental illness positively. The study also revealed that the selected newspapers did not give depth to stories on mental illness. Based on the findings, it is recommended among other things that Newspapers should endeavour to place essence in the interpretation and analysis of news reports on mental health issues.

Keywords: Mental Health, Mental Illness, Newspaper, Coverage, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

One of the important components of the development functions of the mass media is health communication. The mass media-print, television, radio, and internet-have an unparalleled reach as a communication mechanism (Okpoko & Aniwada, 2017)¹. There is a consensus among media scholars, researchers, and practitioners that the media are significant sources of health-related information and very influential sources in shaping the way people think about and discuss health issues (Coleman, Thorson, & Wilkins, 2011)². According to Hodgetts, Otilie, Kerry, Alan, Linda, Eci, and Shiloh (2008), the media are central in the construction of public narratives of health. In other words, the media present a huge array of health stories for public consumption, both reflecting and informing public discourse. The media also play a big part in informing and mobilising an audience as citizens with rights who need to be informed of issues affecting their lives and health, and who need to participate in civic processes to address socio-economic inequalities (Hodgetts et al., 2008)³.

Thus, Hodgetts et al. (2008)³ posits that how the media covers health issues is crucial for ensuring a vibrant public debate and engagement on health. The media mediate and partially construct people's understandings of health and health-related issues. The media are primary sources of understanding health concerns and are central to the definitions of social issues and legitimation of specific approaches to addressing these issues (Hodgetts, & Chamberlain, 2006)⁴. Hence, among other cultural institutions, the media play a significant part in narrowing or widening public debate about health (Karpf, 1988)⁵. According to Hodgetts and Chamberlain (2006, p.318)⁴, "the media provide a shared understanding of notions of health, illness, and disease. Specifically, the media can reaffirm society's trust or distrust of health professionals and highlight developments in, and uncertainties about, healthcare access and treatment". Media can also dramatically affect people's ideas about the relative health risks, which could lead them to become unnecessarily concerned about low-risk diseases while underestimating the risks of serious and preventable diseases (Gardner, 2008)⁶.

Furthermore, many people rely on the news media for their health-related information. Policymakers also obtain a considerable amount of information from the media. Bryant and Thompson (2002)⁷ have suggested that news coverage of health matters takes on a considerable significance that has the potential to shape the impression of average citizens and powerful policymakers alike.

Newspaper as one of the mass media has been described as courtrooms, where judgments are passed against societal ills through editorials (Bello, 2014)⁸. Newspapers also provide an essential forum for public discussion and debates, thereby guiding society (Copeland, 2003)⁹. In fulfilling these basic functions in society, newspapers, like other channels of mass

communication, have always devoted attention to the coverage of various aspects of human health conditions. These include, but are not limited to, Malaria, Tuberculosis, Tetanus, HIV/AIDS, Cholera, Chicken Pox, Diarrhoea, Polio, Measles, Diabetes, and Typhoid, mental health among others.

Mental health is an integral part of an individual's capacity to live a life of fulfillment, including the ability to maintain social relationships and to make day-to-day decisions (World Health Organisation, 2005)¹⁰. According to WHO in African polling institute and EpiAFRIC (2020), mental health is an important and essential component of health, a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This definition implies that mental health is critical to a person's ability to think, operate, emote, interact with his environment, earn a living, and enjoy life. However, mental illness explains the disorder generally characterized by deregulation of mood, and behaviour of either male or female.

Mental health has gotten to an alarming rate globally. Approximately, 500 million people have a mental illness globally with the majority living in developing countries (World Health Organisation, 2013)¹¹. World Health Organisation reported that 25 to 38 million people had schizophrenia and epilepsy respectively, over 90 million people suffered from drug and alcohol problems and over 150 million persons had depression at any point in time, and around one million persons commit suicide annually (World Health Organisation, 2013)¹¹. This figure is projected to increase by 15 percent in the year 2030 (World Health Organisation, 2013)¹¹. However, the prevalence rate of mental illness in Nigeria is 20-30 percent that is more than 20 million Nigerians (African Polling Institute & EpiAFRIC, 2020)¹². The high prevalence of mental illness has a significant emotional burden on individuals, families, and society (Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Programme, 2012)¹³. Mental illness encompasses short and long-term conditions which include anxiety disorder, affective or mood disorders (depression), and substance use disorder (hard drugs, marijuana, Indian hemp, and alcohol dependence).

Communicating information on health and health-related topics through newspapers is increasingly used to educate and prevent non-communicable diseases. Gupta and Sinha (2010)¹⁵, avers that many people rely on the news media for their health-related information. Health topics can be in form of news, editorials, and features. Newspaper, as part of mass media, has a role to play in combating mental ill-health in Nigeria. Therefore, the nature of newspaper coverage of important issues like mental ill-health is a subject of interest to researchers. This study thus will investigate Nigerian newspapers coverage of mental health issues: 2016-2020.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, mental health is the most neglected component of health (Olawande, 2017)¹⁷. Mental illness presents lots of challenges in developing countries. Such problems include stigma and lack of information about mental health in society. Despite the encumbrance of dysfunctional behaviour and the resulting level of anguish for persons suffering from mental illness, efforts to address it continue to be disappointing. This poor effort is because of low budgetary resources, inadequate psychiatric professionals, the existence of competing and conflicting mental healthcare system needs, and the stigma involved in seeking psychiatric assistance (Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Programme, 2012)¹³.

In Nigeria, an estimated 20%–30% of our population are believed to suffer from mental disorders (Spring, 2019)¹⁸. This is a very significant number considering Nigeria has an estimated population of over 200 million. Unfortunately, the attention given to mental health disorders in Nigeria is at best, fleeting; the level of awareness of the Nigerian public on mental health issues is also understandably poor, and the misconceptions regarding mental health have continued to flourish (Suleiman, 2016)¹⁹.

The media on the other hand have a responsibility to create awareness on all health-related issues. Kreuter and McClure (2004)¹⁶ observe that a rise in awareness of health issues and their root causes drive policy or practice changes, this is one of the fundamental ways the mass media can combat disease and educate the public on the appropriate health behaviour that can make them adopt preventive measures. Newspapers are channels of communication through which the public can receive information about their health orientation and general health behaviours.

Considerable research has concluded that the media is the public's most significant source of information about mental illness (Chen, & Lawrie, 2017)²⁰. Broadcast media has helped in enlightening the general public on the issues surrounding mental illness and the possible ways stigma against sufferers can be eliminated in society. For example, *Drug Dangers* aired on ETV, Enugu and the *Health Watch* on Coal City FM are the programmes used by the broadcast media to enlighten the public and fight against mental ill-health. But how has the print media complemented this effort from the broadcast media?

This raises a lot of arguments about the frequency of coverage, the level of prominence; the story genre that received more attention, the direction of stories in the coverage of mental health, and the treatment of stories on mental health in terms of depth by the selected newspapers in Nigeria. Consequently, this study is reclined to unravel how Nigerian newspapers cover mental health given the different intricacies afore-stated.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this paper is to determine Nigerian newspaper coverage of mental health. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following:

1. Determine the frequency of selected newspapers coverage of mental health in Nigeria
2. Determine the level of prominence given to mental health stories in the selected newspapers
3. Examine the direction of stories on mental health in the selected newspapers
4. Examine the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of mental health in the selected newspapers
5. Assess the treatment of stories on mental health in terms of depth in the selected newspapers

Research Questions

The following questions have been formulated to guide this paper:

1. What is the frequency of selected newspapers' coverage of mental health in Nigeria?
2. What is the level of prominence given to mental health stories in the selected newspapers?
3. What is the direction of stories on mental health in the selected newspapers?
4. What is the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of mental health in the selected newspapers?
5. What is the treatment of stories on mental health in terms of depth in the selected newspapers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental Illness in Nigeria

Mental health disorders are not uncommon, and the global burden of mental health disorders is projected to reach 15% by the year 2020 (Suleiman, 2016)¹⁹. By this time, it is estimated that common mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse-related disorders, will disable more people than complications arising from AIDS, heart disease, accidents, and wars combined (Ngui, Khasakhala, Ndeti, & Roberts, 2010)²¹. This is an astonishing statistic and poses serious questions as to why mental health disorders are not given much more attention than it currently receives.

In Nigeria, an estimated 20%–30% of our population are believed to be suffering from one form of mental disorder or the other (African polling institute & EpiAFRIC, 2020)¹². This figure is very high considering the current population of Nigeria. The attention paid to the mental health system in Nigeria is low since independence not minding the large number of individuals suffering from various mental ailments across the country. The 2006 WHO-AIMS¹⁴ report on the mental health system in Nigeria made some telling revelations. It reports

that: “There is considerable neglect of mental health issues in the country. The existing Mental Health Policy document in Nigeria was formulated in 1991. Since its formulation, no revision has taken place and no formal assessment of how much it has been implemented has been conducted. No desk exists in the ministries at any level for mental health issues and only four percent of government expenditures on health is earmarked for mental health” (p.34)

It also unearthed other issues related to mental health. These include unavailability of essential medicines at health centres, unavailability of physicians to run primary health care centres, and the lack or restrictions to the prescription of psychotropic medications. It also identified that there are only a few non-governmental organisations involved in individual assistance activities such as counselling, housing, or support groups. It concluded that:

“In general terms, several countries in Africa are better resourced regarding mental health personnel. Countries such as South Africa, Egypt, and Kenya have more psychiatrists per 100,000 persons and also have higher proportions of psychiatric beds. Also, many countries in Africa give better official attention to mental health issues” (p.45)

The above statistics are damning and in the light of the recent suicidal episodes recorded in some parts of Nigeria (which are the tip of the iceberg), it forces a rethink in our general attitudes to mental health and questions our current maintenance of the status quo. Considering the current economic situation in the country, it is pertinent to also look at the economic burden of mental health disorders (Suleiman, 2016)¹⁹. Explaining the global burden of mental ill-health, he states that in the U.S., it is estimated that about 79 billion dollars represent the indirect costs associated with these disorders; of these, 63 billion dollars reflects the loss of productivity due to illness.

In Canada, the economic burden of mental illness in 2003 was estimated to be about \$34 billion (\$1056 per capita), with depression and schizophrenia accounting for about \$5 billion and \$2.7 billion annually, respectively (Ngui, et al., 2010)²¹. The WHO in 2005 estimated that mental health conditions cost between 3% and 4% of the gross national product in European Union member countries (Ngui, et al., 2010).

In terms of the policy, there is at least some evidence that there is currently some change going on in the country. The New National Health Policy (2016) notes the increasing numbers of persons with mental health issues and the need to address mental health. Furthermore, a policy for mental health services delivery was developed in 2013 even though several key provisions of the policy, including establishing a body at the Federal Ministry of Health to be focused on mental health, are yet to be implemented (Suleiman, 2016)¹⁹.

Suleiman (2016) concluded that a national strategy to address mental health problems in Nigeria by the government at all levels is needed, one which should lay emphasis on

prevention. He believes that if the above pronouncements are backed up with the required action, the country can develop and implement both a policy and legal framework to addressing mental health issues.

Mass Media and Mental Illness

According to Edney (2004)²², a substantial amount of research has been conducted to determine the effect of the mass media on the public's belief systems. These studies according to her, have concluded that the media's power to influence public perception and the degree to which people are exposed to media representations combine to make the mass media one of the most significant influences in developed societies. In 2001, the Australian government published a large-scale literature review examining portrayals of mental health in the media (Francis, Pirkis, Dunt, & Blood, 2001 in Edney, 2004)²².

Considerable research has concluded that the media are the public's most significant source of information about mental illness (Borinstein, 1992 in Coverdale, Nairn, & Claasen, 2002)²³. Fiske (1987) cited in Rose (1998) posits that television is the most powerful medium for framing public consciousness. Cutcliffe and Hannigan (2001)²⁴ further state that rarely does a week goes by without a reference to mental illness in the mass media.

In 1997, the National Mental Health Association in the United States published a study titled "Stigma Matters: Assessing the Media's Impact on Public Perceptions of Mental Illness" Hottentot (2000) in Edney, 2004²² enumerates the following results from that study, showing where-within various media classifications-the researchers found that the public gathers its information about mentally ill people and mental illness. Stories about or references to people with mental health issues are rarely out of the headlines in news stories or plotlines in film and television, yet research indicates that media portrayals of mental illness are often both false and negative.

Researchers at George Mason University in Virginia conducted a study of 300 articles containing references to mental illness that were taken from six different 1999 U.S. newspapers. Few of these stories presented positive images of people with mental illness or depicted people with mental illness as productive. This study and others like it have led researchers to conclude that the public, based on what they see in the news media, are likely to presume that people with mental illnesses are primarily burdening to society and incapable of contributing in positive ways to their communities (Wahl, 2001 in Edney, 2004)²².

Cutcliffe and Hannigan (2001)²⁴ in Edney (2004)²² cited a 1993 Glasgow University study that conducted a content analysis of 562 newspaper items containing representations of mental health and illness identified within local and national media over one month. The study concluded that 62% of those stories focused on violence toward others about a person

with a mental illness. Stories that garner the most media attention appear to be those that link mental illness to crime and violence.

According to Diefenbach's 1997²⁶ content analysis of television programming, depictions of people with inferred psychiatric conditions or stated psychiatric diagnoses were highly correlated with the portrayal of violent crime. Signorielli (1989) cited in Diefenbach (1997)²⁶ found that 72.1% of adult characters depicted as mentally ill in prime-time television drama injured or killed others. Characters with a mental illness were almost 10 times more violent than the general population of other television characters, and 10 to 20 times more violent during a two-week programming sample than real individuals with psychiatric diagnoses in the U.S. population were over an entire year.

However, one study found that 95-97% of violent episodes in the United States are committed by people with *no* mental illness (Monahan, 1996 in Edney, 2004). Despite what is portrayed in the mass media, there is simply no reliable evidence to support the claim that mental illness alone (without substance abuse) is a significant risk factor for violence (Arboleda-Flórez, Holley, & Crisanti, 1996 in Edney, 2004). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there has been no empirical study to find out how Nigeria's mass media portray mental health issues. This is the gap that this present study tends to fill.

Empirical Review

For studies on newspaper coverage of health issues, the following studies were considered. A study by McGinty, Kennedy-Hendricks, Choksy, and Barry (2016)²⁷ titled *Trends in news media coverage of mental illness in the United States: 1995–2014* assessed the volume and content of a random sample of 400 news stories about mental illness from the period 1995–2014. They compared the news stories in the first and second decade of the study period and discovered that those in the second decade were more likely to mention mass shootings by people with mental illnesses.

The most frequently mentioned topic across the study period was violence (55 percent overall) divided into categories of interpersonal violence or self-directed (suicide) violence, followed by stories about any type of treatment for mental illness (47 percent). Fewer news stories, only 14 percent, described successful treatment for or recovery from mental illness. The news media's continued emphasis on interpersonal violence is highly disproportionate to actual rates of violence among those with mental illnesses. They suggested that this focus may exacerbate social stigma and decrease support for public policies that benefit people with mental illnesses.

Chen and Lawrie (2017)²⁰ in their study titled *Newspaper depictions of mental and physical health* evaluated the impact of mental health reporting over time. They repeated an analysis

they carried out 15 years back using the same methods. Nine UK daily newspapers were analysed over four weeks and coded with a schema to analyse the reporting of mental health compared with physical health. They discovered a total of 963 articles-200 on mental health and 763 on physical health. Over half of the articles on mental health were negative in tone: 18.5 indicated an association with violence compared with 0.3% of articles on physical health.

However, there were more quotes from patients with mental disorders than physical disorders (22.5 vs. 19.7%) and an equal mention of treatment and rehabilitation. They conclude that mental health in print media remains tainted by themes of violence, however, some improvement in reporting in recent years is evident, in particular by providing a voice with mental illness.

Onyeizu and Binta (2014)²⁸ in a study on ‘Newspaper coverage of health issues in Nigeria: A study of the *Guardian* and the *Punch* newspapers from January 2010 to December 2011 sought to establish the extent to which the media are working to set public agenda for the health sector so that it can mobilize both the government and the governed towards achieving a healthy state. The research methodology used was content analysis and the purposive sampling technique was adopted. The *Guardian* and The *Punch* newspapers were chosen based on AMPS 2010 newspaper readership data. The research covered 24 months. A total of 554 health reports were found and analysed on the selected health issues.

The researchers reported that the single disease that garnered the most media attention was HIV/AIDS, and the most reported genre was a straight news story. The researchers however paid little or no attention to newspaper coverage of mental health issues. The current study will address this.

In a study of “newspaper coverage of poliomyelitis in Nigeria, a content analytic study of *The Nation* and *The Sun* Newspapers”, Agbana and Usman (2014)²⁹ found out that the newspapers did not give prominence to polio issues in Nigeria in 2012. “It was also discovered that majority of the stories published on the health issue were in news form which means the newspapers did not give in-depth analysis on polio”. They assert that “presenting polio issues in prominent positions and with maximum coverage will expand the knowledge of the public on the issue of polio the media indeed, has enormous power to influence the public and to determine what they think is more important based on the placement, space and size of the page given to polio issues”.

Abana (2017)³⁰, with the theme “Press coverage of maternal health issues in selected Nigerian newspapers” examined Nigerian Press coverage of Maternal Health issues as the fifth goal of the Millennium Development of Goals (MDGs). The work examined and

analysed 282 editions of *The Guardian, New Nigerian, This Day, and Daily Trust* newspapers from 2001-2007 to measure their contributions in terms of coverage towards the achievement of the MGDs.

The findings revealed that the selected newspapers reported issues of Maternal Health. However, the coverage was significantly low with 206 reports recorded by the 4 selected publications for 7 years. Also, that abortion is the most frequently reported issue by the Nigerian press, prominence was not given to the coverage of Maternal Health issues and most reports carried were negative stories which may explain why the Maternal Health goal was not achieved in 2015 as planned. The MDGs final report (2015) identified gaps in the achievement of the MDGs in general and the Maternal Health goal in particular and has forged to include it in a bold vision of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030.

This study, therefore, recommends that the press should partner with national development goals and give consistent coverage of Maternal Health issues to facilitate its achievement. Prominence should also be given to its coverage, and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) as a professional body should re-orient and charge its members on the importance of development news reporting and reporting the Maternal Health to contribute to curbing the menace of maternal mortality and morbidity in Nigeria.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there has been no empirical study to find out how Nigeria's mass media portray mental health issues. This is the gap that this present study tends to fill.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory

According to Baran and Davis (2006)³¹, "Agenda setting implies that the media do not tell people what to think but what to think about. The media sets the agenda of what their publics are supposed to think about" p.319. Folarin (2002)³² further states that "Agenda setting means that the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. Agenda setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we think, but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about" P. 68.

Wimmer and Dommick (2011)³⁴ opined that the theory on agenda-setting by the media proposes that the public agenda or what kinds of things people discuss, think, and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise. Cohen (1963) in Wogu (2008)³⁵, corroborated this stance when he stated that "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time

in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p. 140). In this light, if news media chooses to give most time and space to reporting mental health disorders in Nigeria, it will become the most important thing on the audiences’ minds.

The theory is relevant in this research because it helps to explain the function of the media in attaching importance to mental health issues in the country. This, the media can do by giving prominence to the issue, giving the issue sustained coverage which will help set the agenda for public discourse and aid policymakers to make working policies that will help stem reduce the effects on the masses. This means the more the media project the issue of mental health, the more importance the public will attach to it, and probably the faster policymakers will attend to the issue.

Social Responsibility

The social responsibility theory is an outcome of a commission of communication gurus known as the Hutchins Commission of inquiry of 1947. The commission gave birth to the notion of social responsibility and pointed out the key journalistic standards that the press should seek to maintain.

According to the tenets of the theory, freedom carries with it a corresponding responsibility which the media must not compromise. This theory gives an insight into why the mass media must continue to set agenda on mental health in Nigeria.

Nigerian newspapers owe it a responsibility to the Nigerian public to cover mental health in a manner that will help in creating public awareness and educate people on it. It, therefore, requires that the media be more proactive and careful, that is, being socially responsible enough to promote positive issues that can impact positively on society such as enlightenment and proper coverage of health-related issues as mental disorders. The media also uses its platform to provide issues (information) for members of the public who then process such information.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

To ensure an effective study, the researchers used content analysis. Kerlinger (2000), cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2011)³⁴, defined content analysis as a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure variables. To increase accuracy, the quantitative and qualitative methods of analysing content were adopted for this study. While the quantitative analysis was in form of tabular presentation of data, the qualitative analysis was in form of textual analysis of content. This

method was considered appropriate for the study because the study focused on the examination of stories in the selected newspapers.

Population of the Study

For this study, the population was limited to all issues published by the four selected national dailies: *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard* newspapers within the period of the study (2016-2020). These papers were chosen based on their national reach and on the assumption that national papers have a higher readership. The population for the study is 3700 issues of the selected newspapers within the period of the study.

Sample Size

Eight hundred editions of the four selected newspapers formed the sample size of this study. This sample size is approximately estimated at 22 percent of the entire population, which is adequate to make a representative judgments for the entire population. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011)³⁴, a sample size between 10 percent to 25 percent is recommended as acceptable when determining sample size in content analysis. The procedure for arriving at this sample size is explained in the sampling technique below.

Sampling Technique

In defining the sample size, this research made use of the multi-stage sampling technique whereby varying techniques were involved at different stages in the selection process like both probability and non-probability sampling techniques (Sedgwick, 2015)³³. Using the purposive sampling technique, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Sun*, and *The Nation* newspapers were selected for this study.

The study is a five-year study. Due to the inability of the researchers to study the whole months' understudy, six months were randomly selected from each year to be studied. This made the population be 3700. The daily editions of the publications were used (weekly editions: Monday-Friday). Weekend publications were eliminated as they are special publications with separate editorial staff. In determining the appropriate sample size for the study, in each of the weeks of the months studied, two issues were chosen randomly for the four newspapers used for the study.

The choice to study two issues within the weeks for each newspaper was based on a stratified sampling technique where the days were picked to stand in for the rest of the days that could not be studied since it would have been unwieldy to study all the editions of the four newspapers within the period under study.

Table 1: Sample Size of the Population

Months	Daily Sun	The Guardian	The Nation	Vanguard
March	40	40	40	40
May	40	40	40	40

June	40	40	40	40
August	40	40	40	40
October	40	40	40	40
December	40	40	40	40
Total	200	200	200	200
	800			

Instrument of Data Collection

The code sheet will be used as an instrument of data collection. It is the most appropriate tool for analysing recorded messages and information.

Content Categories

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011)³⁴, the precise makeup of content categories varies with the topic under study. The content categories used for this paper include:

1. **Insanity:** These are mental health stories from the insanity category
2. **Substance abuse:** These are mental health stories from the substance abuse category.
3. **Suicide:** These are mental health stories from the suicide category.
4. **Depression:** These are mental health stories from the depression category
5. **Schizophrenia:** These are mental health stories from the schizophrenia features category.

Units of Measurement

Wimmer and Dominick (2011)³⁴ stated that “unit of measurement is the smallest element of a content analysis but also the most important. It might be a single word or symbol, a theme or an entire article or story” (p.165). The units of analysis for this study include news stories, editorials, letters-to-the-editor, features, pictures, photographs, cartoons, charts and graphs, and opinion articles. The units of measurement were coded into categories which will serve as a guide for the study. Thus:

FREQUENCY

This indicates the number of times the issue appeared in the publications within the study period. Here, it is concerned with how many times the newspapers under study covered stories relating to mental health.

A (1) Insanity: These are mental health stories from the insanity category

A (2) Substance abuse: These are mental health stories from the substance abuse category.

A (3) Suicide: These are mental health stories from the suicide category.

A (4) Depression: These are mental health stories from the depression category

A (5) Schizophrenia: These are mental health stories from the schizophrenia features category.

PROMINENCE

It refers to the priority given to mental health stories in the newspapers. The parameters for measuring prominence in this work are based on the story placements and illustrations.

Placement: Placement is the position that a particular story appeared in the selected newspapers.

B (1) Front Page: This shows all the mental health stories that were placed/displayed on the front page of the selected newspapers.

B (2) Back Page: This entails all the mental health stories that were placed on the last page of the selected newspapers.

B (3) Centre Spread: This includes all the mental health stories that were published in the middle of the selected newspapers.

B (4) Inside Page: This includes all the mental health stories that were placed on the inside pages of the selected newspapers. Inside page stories are not considered as prominent as the ones on the centre spread.

ILLUSTRATIONS

This shows mental health stories that were illustrated with either photograph, cartoons, charts including the ones that were not illustrated.

C (1) Photographs: These are mental health stories that have a picture(s) attached to them.

C (2) Cartoons: These are pictorial sketches used for making caricatures of any issue on mental health.

C (3) Charts: These are information in the form of a diagram or list of figures on mental health.

C (4) Graphs: These are planned drawings comprising line(s), showing two or more sets of numbers are related to each other.

C (5) Not Illustrated: These includes mental health stories that were not reported with photographs, charts, cartoons, or graphs.

DIRECTION OF COVERAGE

This is the slant of newspaper coverage of mental health in Nigeria. It checks whether it is positive, negative, or neutral.

D (1) Positive: These are stories that showcased mental health in a good light.

D (2) Negative: These include reports that portrayed mental health in a bad light.

D (3) Neutral: These are stories that reflect neither positive nor negative conditions of mental health.

STORY GENRE

This refers to the format each story took in the coverage of mental health by the selected newspapers.

E (1) News: These are mental health stories that answered the 5Ws (When, Where, Who, What, and Why) and H (How) questions. They normally appear in straight news format without any opinion.

E (2) Features: These are mental health stories that relate to people, events, and places that are written with styles and embellishments.

E (3) Editorials: These include the opinion of the selected newspapers on any topical issue of great importance and are seen on the editorial page of a newspaper.

E (4) Letters to the Editor: These are opinions of the public written by individuals to the editor of the selected newspapers concerning issues of critical importance on mental health.

E (05) Opinion Articles: These are the viewpoint of a writer on any issue about mental health.

DEPTH (LENGTH OF COVERAGE)

This shows the amount of space allotted to mental health stories in the selected newspapers. It is measured by the number of column inches each story fits into.

F (1) 1 -5 Inches: These are mental health stories whose storylines ran from 1-6 inches.

F (2) 6 - 10 Inches: These include mental health stories whose storylines ran from 6–10 inches.

F (3) 11 - 5 Inches: These are mental health stories whose storylines ran from 11–15 inches.

F (4) 16 Inches and above: These are mental health stories whose storylines ran from 16 inches and above.

Reliability and Validity

The validity of the instrument was determined by the course lecturer and two other communication experts. They were asked to examine the correctness of the code sheet about the research objectives. They were asked to look at the instructions given to coders with particular attention to clarity.

To arrive at the reliability, two coders were trained to code. They judged a sample of 26 units and they agreed 23. To calculate the inter-coder reliability, the formula was used to get the percentage of agreement between the coders:

The Holsti's inter-coder reliability test was coded thus:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

Where:

M= the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree.

N1=number of coding decisions by the first coder.

N2= number of coding decisions by the second coder.

$$= \frac{2(23)}{(26+26)}$$

$$= \frac{2 \times 23}{52}$$

$$= \frac{46}{52}$$

$$= 0.88$$

$$= 0.88 \times 100$$

$$= 88\%$$

The inter coder reliability results is 0.88; which means that the instrument is reliable and valid.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research question one:

What is the frequency of selected newspapers coverage of mental health in Nigeria?

Table 2: The Frequency of Coverage

Content Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Insanity	126	39%
Substance abuse	98	31%
Suicide	51	16%
Schizophrenia	13	4%
Depression	33	10%
Total	321	100%

Research Question Two: What is the level of prominence given to mental health stories in the selected newspapers?

Table 3: Placement of Stories

	Content Categories					Total	Percentage
	Insanity	Substance abuse	Suicide	Schizophrenia	Depression		
Front Page	3	-	-	-	2	5	1%
Back Page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Centre Spread	9	-	-	-	-	9	3%
Inside Page	114	98	51	13	31	307	96%
Total	126	98	51	13	33	321	100%

Table 4: Illustration of Stories

	Content Categories					Total	Percentage
	Insanity	Substance abuse	Suicide	Schizophrenia	Depression		
Photographs	12	5	-	-	6	23	7%
Cartoons	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Charts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Graphs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not illustrated	114	93	51	13	27	298	93%
Total	126	98	51	13	33	321	100%

Research Question three: What is the direction of stories on mental illness in the selected newspapers?

Table 5: Direction of Reportage

	Content Categories						Total	Percentage
	Insanity	Substance abuse	Suicide	Schizophrenia	Depression			
Positive	67	53	25	4	19	168	52%	
Negative	36	33	18	4	6	97	30%	
Neutral	23	12	8	5	8	56	18%	
Total	126	98	51	13	33	321	100%	

Research Question four: What is the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of mental illness in the selected newspapers?

Table 6: Story Genre

	Content Categories						Total	Percentage
	Insanity	Substance abuse	Suicide	Schizophrenia	Depression			
News	99	76	39	13	19	246	77%	
Features	13	8	4	-	9	34	11%	
Editorials	5	-	5	-	-	10	3%	
Letters to the Editor	5	10	-	-	2	17	5%	
Opinion Articles	4	4	3	-	3	14	4%	
Total	126	98	51	13	33	321	100%	

Research Question five: What is the treatment of stories on mental illness in terms of depth in the selected newspapers?

Table 7: Depth of Reportage

	Content Categories						Total	Percentage
	Insanity	Substance abuse	Suicide	Schizophrenia	Depression			
Inches 1-5	104	82	39	13	21	259	81%	
Inches 6-10	12	8	8	-	12	40	12%	
Inches 11-15	6	5	4	-	-	15	5%	
Inches 16 and above	4	3	-	-	-	7	2%	
Total	126	98	51	13	33	321	100%	

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one: What is the frequency of selected newspapers coverage of mental health in Nigeria? The frequency of coverage was aimed at ascertaining the volume of coverage given to mental health by the newspapers within the period under study. The manifest data from the analysis revealed that there were a total of 321 stories on mental health within the period of the study. The content category they use to report mental health includes insanity, substance abuse, suicide, schizophrenia, and lastly depression. Out of the 321 stories on mental health, the newspapers carried 126 stories (39%) regarding insanity, 98 stories (31%) on substance abuse, and another 51 stories (16%) on suicide, 13 stories (4%) on schizophrenia category and 33 stories (10%) on depression category. This shows that the frequency of coverage is sufficient.

The above findings revealed that the media reported more on the insanity category and it also indicates that the frequency of coverage is low. This finding is consistent with the finding of Abana (2017)³⁰, who discovered that newspapers' reportage of Maternal Health issues was significantly low with 206 reports recorded by the 4 selected publications for 7 years. This finding implies that newspapers have failed in giving much coverage to the mental health issues, people and even the government stands a great chance of not attaching relevance to the issues bordering on mental health.

This is corroborated by the agenda-setting theory which states that “audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it” (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, as cited in Ojabor, 2002, p. 21)³⁶. Therefore, as less emphasis is attached to the coverage of mental ill-health, it will directly play on the relevance people and government attach to what is happening in mental health.

Research question two sought to ascertain the level of prominence given to mental health by the newspapers. To answer this research question, the placement of stories and the illustration attached to them by the newspapers were looked into. In the placement of stories, it was found that almost all the stories were placed on the inside pages, 307 (96%), 5(1%) on the front page while only 9 (3%) stories were placed on the centre spread. There were no stories placed on the back pages. This portrays that the prominence attached to the placement of the stories on mental health is very low. Front pages are very strategic in attracting the attention of readers. People easily get to buy newspapers and read them due to the stories they see on the front page.

On the illustration of stories, a majority of 298 (93%) stories were not illustrated while only 23 (7%) stories were illustrated with photographs. None of the stories were illustrated with cartoons, charts, and graphs. It is noteworthy to acknowledge the fact that the number of stories that were not illustrated is approximately more than half of the number of stories that were illustrated. This finding is collaborated by Agbana and Usman (2014)²⁹, they found that the newspapers did not give prominence to polio issues in Nigeria in 2012.

These findings imply that the possibility of people being lured into reading stories on mental health will be very low as not everyone flips through the newspaper to read stories that did not appear on the front page. Bearing in mind that people hold stories that were given front-page treatment in high regard and believe that they are very crucial to society, they may not ascribe such essence to stories on mental health as most of them appear on the inside pages.

Research question three sought to ascertain the direction the reported stories on mental health took. From the presentation in Table 5, it was found that out of the 321 stories analysed, a

majority of 168 (52%) stories were positive. Thus, the direction of the reportage of mental health by the selected newspapers was positive. This was followed by 97 (30%) stories which were negative while 56 (18%) stories tilted towards a neutral direction. This means that reports on mental illness were positioned in a good light.

Thus, the coverage was largely favourable to mental health. Some of the positive reports in the newspapers include the October 11, 2019 edition of *Vanguard*, page 10, which reads-*World Mental Day: Yaba psychiatric hospital launches helpline to curb suicide in Ogun*. June 14th, 2019 edition of *The Nation*, page 28, which reads-*Pirates team up with NDLEA against drug abuse*. 28th May 2019 edition of *Vanguard*, page 38, which Reads-*Rising suicide cases: psychiatrists brainstorm, proffer solutions*.

Examples of negative reports include among others: October 11, 2019 edition of *Vanguard*, page 13, which reads-*drug abuse: 95% of every crime has its root in drugs-MINDS*. 6th December 2018 edition of *Daily Sun*, page 22, which reads-*Mental health disorders rise in Nigeria*, December 18th, 2018 edition of *Vanguard*, page 7, which reads-*lunatic sacks pupils, teachers, takes over Ekiti School*.

This finding implies that the selected newspapers covered mental health in such a way that the reports will serve as a tool towards building goodwill and reducing stigma against those suffering from mental illnesses.

Research question four sought to find the type of story genre that received more attention in the coverage of mental health. In the presentation of data as seen in table 6, the story genre that received more attention out of the 321 stories studied is news 246 (77%). This was followed by 34(11%) stories on features while opinion articles and editorials had 14 (4%) and 10 (3%) respectively. Letters to the editor were 17 (5%). This finding is supported by Agbana and Usman (2014), who discovered that majority of the stories published on the health issue were in news form which means the newspapers did not give in-depth analysis on polio. The coverage of mental health was merely on news reports which only informs people on the happenings in the sector without educating them on the significance, effects, expectations, implications, lessons, consequences among others; inherent in the reports.

Some of the news stories from the newspapers include the October 7, 2019 edition of *Daily Sun*, page 7, which reads-*suicide not answer to challenges-Archbishop*. This finding implies that as less attention was given to interpretation and analysis of the reports on mental health, the reports may not yield fruits in making people understand the varied angles of the information conveyed and in influencing government, organisations, and/or bodies in implementing policies and pursuing actions targeted at making mental health better.

Research question five examined the depth of stories, out of 321 stories examined, 259(81%) was within the range of 1-5 inches. This was followed by 40 (12%) stories within 6-10 inches and 15 (5%) stories within 11-15 inches while 7 (2%) stories were within 16 inches and above. This shows that most stories did not have depth. This is not surprising, as most of the stories were reported as news stories. News reports are always straight to the point without opinions, interpretations, analyses, or explanations. It is evidenced, therefore, that story types such as features, editorials, analysis, columns among others which are platforms through which newspapers can do in-depth coverage recorded low figures.

Thus, it could be inferred that the press, as it relates to mental health issues gave the audience news stories mostly based on the occurrence of events around the issue as can be seen in the result of research question four. It is worthy to mention that straight news stories, unlike opinion articles and editorial, is brief and not in-depth. Since the amount of space or column inches given to a story shows how important such a story or issue is to either the press or government, it then follows that the press does not give enough depth to stories or issues emanating from mental health.

CONCLUSION

The media, as the fourth estate of the realm, are saddled with the social responsibility of reporting every aspect of a given society. In the course of fulfilling this noble task, they champion and set agenda on critical issues that are of the essence to the healthy functioning of the society. The state of Nigerian mental health has been on the downside, for decades. Therefore, to give life to mental health, the media are expected to be at the frontline of the movement by giving adequate coverage, in-depth analysis, and interpretation to issues while proffering workable solutions to challenges facing the sector.

This paper sought to examine Nigerian newspapers' coverage of mental health. Literatures relevant to the study were reviewed conceptually and empirically. Two theories: Agenda setting and social responsibility theory were used as the theoretical framework for the study. To analyse the manifest contents of the selected newspapers, the content analysis research design was employed, with a code sheet as an instrument of data collection. The study was limited to all the editions in *Daily Sun*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard* from 2016 to 2020.

Findings from the research revealed Nigerian newspapers do not give adequate coverage to mental health. The prominence given to the coverage of mental health issues was low. This is based on the premise that the majority of the stories were on the inside pages of the newspapers and most of the stories were not illustrated. More so, the news was found to be the story genre that received the most attention. As many of the stories were news, this denied

the newspapers the opportunity to truly drive agenda about mental health through non-news stories. The features, editorials, opinion articles and letters to the editor found were generally minimal. In terms of the direction of coverage, findings showed that the newspapers covered mental health positively. Finally, minimal depth was attached to the coverage of mental health. Put in another way, most stories did not have depth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of this research, the following recommendations are given:

1. Newspapers should endeavour to place essence in the interpretation and analysis of news reports on mental health. This would make the government and people understand the different shades of meanings, causes, effects, significance, implications, etc of the stories making round in mental health. Also, this would serve as a guide for the initiation and execution of proper policies that yield good fruits for mental health in Nigeria.
2. Newspaper editors should strive to devote more days of the week to the publication of stories from mental health. This is predicated on the fact that all the newspapers did devote, mostly, one day in a week, to the publication of mental health issues.
3. Newspapers should use more pictures in their coverage of mental health. There should be more injection of appropriate photographs to depict and explain reports. The use of information graphics in terms of charts, graphs, etc. should be used to capture issues on mental health.
4. Newspaper editors should expedite effort in placing mental health stories on the front page of their newspapers. This would help attach importance to what is happening in mental illness and spirit the attention of the government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and well-meaning individuals to come to its aid where necessary.

Authors' Contributions

ADU, AFO, EIG sourced and wrote the literature in addition to analysing the data. ADU, AFO, EIG and EEP sourced and harmonized the data for analysis. While ADU and AFO coded the data. EEP and EIG helped in putting the content analysis in perspective as well as editing the final draft. This research work is an original work of the authors. The authors also declare that the work is not been considered for publication elsewhere.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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