CREATING A SPIRAL OF SILENCE?
PRINT MEDIA REPORTAGE AND AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF RAPE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Some past studies on rape coverage not only signposted the media reinforcement of negative female stereotypes but also construction of rape myths among receivers, especially the male gender. With few of such studies domesticated in Nigeria and given that media coverage of issues have great potential to shape public opinion, this work employs a mix of survey and content analysis to interrogate the extent the print media rape coverage in Nigeria is laden with myths that reinforce rape culture; And how this representation influence the audience reception. The survey population consists of all male and female citizens from 18 years and above residing in the urban cities of the three south eastern states of Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu. The population for the content analysis also consists of all Nigerian (nationally circulated) daily newspapers published during the period of the study (January – August 2014). The study found that 62% of the respondents accept that media rape reports are laden with myths which affect their perception, wherein they mainly blame the victims.- an indication that the print media use of rape myths impacts negatively on audience perception of rape victims. It was also realized that the dominant cause of rape is willful act against the victims (40%), aside the act of waywardness (30%) and indecent Dressing (30%). As per the Content Analysis, sample editions of the newspapers studied reported 104 stories on rape, with majority being straight news (87%) aside the few other contents: features (1.9%), opinion (1.9%) interviews (1.9%) editorials (3.8%) and columns (3.8%). Apart from this low frequency of reportage of rape cases, all the 104 issues published by the three newspapers within the period, were all buried inside pages which were mainly centered on victim-blame. The three Newspapers each, contained the seven rape myths categorized by Burt, (1980). Therefore, the media should often campaign against myths and stereotypes aassociated with rape and sexual violence, to help dispel myths about rape.

Keywords: Rape, Rape Cases, Rape Myths, Perception, Reports,

Introduction
Crimes of violence such as rape cases though they generate high ratings for the media have continued to attract wide and contrasting opinions regarding media coverage and framing of such stories. A case in point is the Nigerian media coverage of the rape and subsequent demise of Ms Cynthia Osokogu, the daughter of a retired Nigerian Army General in, Lagos State. This case is among the few rape cases that had gained wide media coverage and high level of criticism, from the Nigerian audience. Anecdotal evidence suggests two major reasons for the audience criticisms -the level of salience as well as its framing
and priming by the media and the belief that the coverage was selective perhaps due to the social status of the General, given that similar cases within the Nigerian context hardly gained such attention.

This case study substantiates arguments from literature regarding, media coverage of rape cases and audience reactions and points to the need for further research especially for Nigeria. Some critics (Brownmiller, 1975; Epstein & Langenbaum, 1994; Reidy, 2004; O’Hara; 2012) for example, have argued that media coverage of rape cases unlike other crimes encompasses stereotypical views of the roles of women and their sexuality. While some (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams; 1989; Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress & Vandello; 2008) have suggested that media depiction of rape cases tend to be biased and laden with rape myths. Others have also argued that majority of rape cases go unreported (Koss,1992; Myers; 1997; Reid & Finchilescu; 1995; Dexter, Penrod, Linz & Saunders; 1997). Cuklanz, more than two decades ago (1996) contends that the fragmented nature of news (p.50) perpetuates traditional stereotypical views of sexual assault by discussing many elements out of context. First, victim-blame themes are common in newspaper account of sexual assault cases. And the depth of coverage in these cases seems to focus more attention on the reputation of the victim than the perpetrator. As suggested from literature, media coverage of rape cases poses a great deal of concern because they may serve to indirectly perpetuate sexual violence through creating beliefs and attitudes about sexual assaults that distort the definition of sexual assaults and shift the blame to the victims (Malhotra & Sood 2000; p. 257-258), influence our perception of sexual assaults and may further perpetuate rape culture in the society (Kellner 1995; p.24). Media treatment of rape not only serve to prime and reinforce rape myths in those who already hold them but may construct these thoughts for those who do not already have them pointing to the need to determine effect of these coverage on audience.

At times, the extensive media attention given to a rape investigation inevitably focuses on the victim as well. The media allows the public to learn intimate details about the victim's life, including information about the victim's family, sexual life and background (Sacco 1995; p.142). Part of this research is also to ascertain the extent Nigerian media provided such extensive coverage as argued in literature. Since there are few research in this area in Nigeria despite the continued increase of rape cases in the country, this study interrogates the extent and nature of media coverage of rape cases in Nigerian print media. The goal of this study is to add to existing literature by assessing the extent to which stereotypes and misconceptions are used when discussing sexual assault in print journalism in Nigeria. Since we understand that the media framing and priming of issues affects people's perception and reaction, the second goal of this work is to appraise the impact sexual assault depiction in print journalism can have on people's opinions about rape cases.

**CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY**

Rape is a common sordid phenomenon in Nigeria, (Okoro & Obozokhai, 2005) and some observers have blamed laws and societal attitude which tend to heap blames on victims rather than on perpetrators, as partly responsible for the upsurge and the contempt with which perpetrators view their conducts. The emerging trend in Nigeria according to Women Aids Collective (2008 edition) has shown that soldiers and policemen are not the only perpetrators of rape of women and even minors, men who are placed in positions of trust also perpetuate this act.

In recent times, the rape of children appears to be on the increase (CLEEN Foundation Report, 2005) in the country. The Nation newspaper reported that a 12-year old girl was raped by a teacher in Bauchi State. The perpetrator was a man living with HIV. He was said to have consciously infected the 12 year old girl with HIV in order to cure his infection. The accused unfortunately was left off the hook by the state police command and the law court. Rights groups have also accused the police of treating cases of rape with kid gloves. A teacher in Kwara State told The Nation how on reporting an incident of rape in a police station, the investigating police officer IPO asked her if she had living witnesses.

In Anambra State (South East Nigeria), the Daily Post reported how a 12-year-old girl was raped by a pastor. The story captioned: “Pastor lures 12yr old girl to a hotel, rapes her all night in Anambra State” According to the story, a 12-year-old girl, was allegedly raped by the pastor of her church, who lured her to a hotel under the guise of conducting deliverance on her but ended up raping her. (Daily Post September 11, 2013).

The story is the same in Ebonyi State, (South East Nigeria), The chairman Family Law Centre of the state disclosed that the state had recorded not less than 699 reported cases of rape within the last one year (Daily Independent July 31, 2014). In a story titled: Rape of two sisters: Ebonyi police arrests alleged
mastermind. The Vanguard newspaper reported that two daughters of one of the Councilors for Ndiagu Echara Ward I in Ikwu Local Government Area, were raped at gun point (Vanguard September 3, 2013). In Enugu State(South East, Nigeria), reports confirmed that in 2011, the story of the rape of women between 70 and 80 years in Opi, Nsukka local government area of the state spread like wild fire throughout the country, raising eyebrows on the motive for such inhuman and barbaric act by especially the youths of the community. The same local government area also witnessed series of rape by masquerades. In a story titled: Abomination: Masquerade rapes undergraduate nursing mother. The story narrated how a female student, was raped by a masquerade in the community. The masquerade accused her of insulting them and insisted on taking her to a bigger masquerade which will compel the victim’s clan in bringing a cow as a sacrifice. The victim’s pleas fell on deaf ears as the masquerade perpetrated the gruesome act (Vanguard May 30, 2012).

Despite these accounts of rape cases cited above, the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) Foundation, a non-governmental organization that promotes public safety, security and justice, in a nationwide survey undertaken in 2005, found out that only 18.1% (less than one in five of some 10,000 respondents who had been raped had reported to the police. The report also showed that in 1999 there were 2,241 cases of rape and indecent assault. In 2000, 1,500 cases were reported; in 2001, 2284, in 2002, 2,084 cases were reported. In 2003, there were 2,250 cases; in 2004, 1,626; and in 2005 1,835 cases were all reported. (CLEEN Foundation research, 2005).The Punch newspaper in 2005 also reported that only one in fifty rape cases were actually reported (Punch January 12, 2005). Okoro & Obozokhai, (2005; p. 118-127) found a high prevalence of sexual assault in a study done in Benin-city. However, despite this high prevalence rates, the incidences of rape appear not to be adequately covered by the media. (Malhotra &, Sood  2000; p.71).

Although the vast majority of sexual assaults never get any publicity (Meyers, 1997), the ones that do get publicity serve an important role in shaping and maintaining our perceptions of sexual assault. That is why media coverage and portrayal of sexual assault is a major issue of concern. Sexual assault is viewed in Nigerian society as a heinous and punishable offence. However, the stigmatization associated with rape may account for the seeming low media coverage and failure of most rape victims to report such cases. Brinson (1992) noted that sexual assault contradicts our culture’s values of personal integrity and justice. As a culture, Nigeria prides herself on respecting one’s personal Integrity and in punishing those who violate such integrity. Sexual assault is a serious violation of the victim’s personal integrity, and demands that we severely punish those who violate this cultural norm.

The employment of rape myths may explain why judges and juries are not harshly punishing this crime that they would otherwise view as very serious (Brinson, 1992). Although rape myths appear to feature often in media coverage of rape in developed countries. The extent of its appearance in developing countries such as Nigeria is still under researched.

Today, the role that journalists play in reporting rape is an imperative one. Given how rapidly social media is evolving and the accelerated pace at which news stories are delivered, shared and read, the media has the power to persuade and/or influence audience disposition to social issues. It has been widely acknowledged that news stories influence public perceptions of social reality, reflect public interest, and play a large role in how people understand certain societal problems, especially crime (Curran, Gurevitch, & Woollacott; 1979), and rape is no exception.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

Studies have shown a high prevalence of rape incidences in Nigeria with only a small fragment of victims reporting these sexual assault cases. This contradiction necessitates an empirical inquiry to decode possible inferences associated with this development. Some studies have also shown that media reports of sexual assaults are laden with myths which seem endorsed by a significant portion of the population, especially the male gender (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). It is within these contexts that this work seeks to interrogate the representation of sexual crime against women in Nigerian print media. This research, using content analysis of selected newspapers in Nigeria and survey of selected Nigerian audience from the south east investigates the nature and extent of print media coverage of rape cases in Nigeria as well as the audience reactions to these reports. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of audience exposure to rape cases in print media?
2. What is the extent and nature of Nigerian print media coverage of rape cases?
3. How do the Nigerian print media represent myths in their coverage of rape cases?
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholars have recently found that relative distribution of rape cases covered by the media does not match reality (see Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vandello 2008); which can perpetuate patriarchy that sustains the existing social order (Buftin & Eschholz 2000, p. 1321). For example, media coverage of rape can reinforce views that both deny and excuse male sexual violence against women (Franiuk, Seefelt & Vandello; 2008, p. 798 Jimenez & Abreu'; 2003, p. 252). Part of the reason for this mismatch may be cultural influence, prominence of the victims and male dominance of media. On the other hand it may be media’s way of been socially responsible by exercising restraint and sensitivity in the coverage of such cases. This may as well account for the dangerous fatigue setting in around reporting of crime and sexual assault cases. In analyzing media reportage of rape cases, the central issues seem to be the following: frequency of coverage; whether through the amount of coverage given to such cases the media became selectively silent in order to exercise restraint, ignore or downplay certain aspects of the case so as not to whip up sentiments. Nature of the coverage; which means the extent to which the report is fact-based versus more emotionally presented. Do the media create disproportionate sensationalism around rape cases or are they factual reports of the event? The nature of coverage will further expose the theme-; victim-blame theme versus perpetrator-blame theme, and the use of rape myths in the coverage. Rape stories may be over dramatized and adhered to a particular news frame, thus distorting the reality of the actual incidence (Chibnall, 1977). These constructions of rape stories are distorted and laden with rape myths as widely argued. Rape myths are generalized and widely held beliefs about sexual assault that serve to trivialize the sexual assault or suggest that a sexual assault did not actually occur (Franiuk et al 2008). According to Burt,(1980) rape myths are summarized into seven categories which include: She is lying; she asked for it; she wanted it; rape is trivial; he didn't mean to; he is not the kind of guy who will do this; it only happen to 'certain' women. Recent literature explain that rape myths also include placing blame on the victim, claiming that the victim was asking for it based on the clothing the victim was wearing at the time, level of intoxication and the myth of a 'sociopathic rapist', or a rapist that is referred to as a type of monster and not recognized with the same amount of blameworthiness as a human being, similar to not blaming an animal for being an animal (O'Hara, 2012; p.10). Ultimately, part of this study's focus is to discover the extent print media coverage in Nigeria is laden with myths that reinforce rape culture. There is the tendency for reporters to structure rape stories solely around the forensic details of the case and report only the immediate situation, disregarding the fact that the audience look up to the accurate portrayal of such stories. This can account for the reasons why feminists’ and victim rights activists continual struggle against gender based violence, remain futile. This paper therefore argues that the use of rape myths tend to be the default reaction of many and supports sexual violence and the perpetuation of patriarchy by reinforcing rape myths among individuals who already hold them and others who do not. This is because the media, having been considered to have a role in developing and maintaining social ideologies may ultimately through the nature and extent of coverage, unintentionally, condone rape and in this way encourage sexual violence against women. As Carl(2003, p. 144) explains “the media not only reflect what is occurring in society but also reinforce stereotypes of how women are viewed....”.

However, several other studies have shown that rape myths are widely endorsed and more accepted by men than women (see Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994); and People who endorse rape myths are less likely to label a scenario as sexual assault, even when it meets the legal criteria (Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988; Norris & Cubbins, 1992). Endorsement of rape myths leads people to be less likely to blame the man for an assault (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989; Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988). This rape myth acceptance has been shown to lead to greater victim blame, lower conviction rates and shorter sentences for convicted rapists by juries (see Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). It follows that rape myths may lead a sexual assault victim away from pressing charges, and lawmakers to doubt the legitimacy of victim’s claim, or enacting appropriate legislation and these rape myths serve to indirectly perpetuate sexual violence through creating beliefs and attitudes about sexual assault that distort the definition of sexual assault and shift the blame to the victim (Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vandello (2008). Away from these deductions from literature, rape myths have great potential to shape public opinion about sexual assault in general.
Although the vast majority of sexual assaults never get publicity (Meyers, 1997), the few salient ones serve an important role in shaping audience views of sexual assault, as these constructions tend to reinforce the stigma associated with rape which may account for the failure of most rape victims to report their cases. This can be attributed to the victim’s acceptance of rape myths to protect them from disturbing thoughts that they have been victims of or have committed sexual assault (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Looking at the cyclic motion of effect of media’s coverage of sexual assault and possible consequence on victims as well as others, the tendency is to suggest a case of symbiotic relationship between media’s frequency and nature of coverage of sexual assault and audience reaction, with each feeding into the other and also reinforcing one another.

Therefore, using rape myths to explain away the majority of sexual assaults that occur should be revisited, as sexual assault is a severe violation that should be handled as such. This shows that rape coverage in the media has many effects in society and can shape the way the audience perceive the victims, rapists and the accusers. For instance in Nigeria, women are often blamed for being victims in most rape cases; as was the case of Cynthia were the Nigeria media went at length to expose the life history of the victim even though she was dead. It was as if Cynthia and not the perpetrators were on trial. Media conceptualization of rape stories serve as an important vehicle for public understanding and reaction to rape cases. That is why we explored the prevalence of rape myths in print journalism in Nigeria and the effects of the exposure to rape myths on people’s beliefs about sexual assault.

**REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

In 1998 Caringella-MacDonald, studied “The Relative Visibility of Rape Cases in National Popular Magazines” to ascertain the extent negative print media coverage of rape stories acts as a constraint to audience perception and then found that exposure to negative media coverage on women differently affect males and females and more adversely affecting the females. The researcher however noted that such reports blame women victims for not adhering to safety measures to protect themselves from the prospective rapists. Worthington (2000) similarly found that framing can limit how much information a news source can use; because those constraints may lead a reader to a perception unintended. The problem is that reporters miss the point of the event, thereby reinforcing stereotypes and public misunderstanding (Byerly 1999). The beliefs become accepted rape myths, where “a victim is blamed more for her victimization when she has had previous sexual experiences, which seems related to the stereotype that certain types of women ‘ask for it’ by being promiscuous,” (Buddie & Authur, 2000). These false beliefs are significant because receivers can perceive the victim inaccurately.

Franiuk, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vandello (2008) examined the prevalence and effects of rape myths in the print media covering of a real-life case of alleged sexual assault. Their first study was an archival study of 156 sources from around the country. Articles about the Kobe Bryant case were coded for instances of rape myths, among other variables. Of the articles, 65 mentioned at least one rape myth (with “she’s lying” being the single most common myth perpetuated). Their second study assessed participants’ (N = 62) prior knowledge of the Bryant case and exposed them to a myth-endorsing or myth-challenging article about the case. Those exposed to the myth-endorsing article were more likely to believe that Bryant was not guilty and the alleged victim was lying.

Fountain (2008) study of “It’s All in the Words: Determining the Relationship between Newspaper Portrayal of Rape Victims and Reader Responses” employed experimental survey design to assess newspaper coverage and framing of rape cases and how it affects reader response. She noted that being able to understand how the framing of a story causes the response will help to more accurately describe a story without misplacing fault, and thus accurate and unbiased stories are more effective because they engage readers to prompt for more information before making blanket judgments on the situation. Findings reinforce the audience perception that the perpetrators are at fault, but the portrayal or news frame change the degree of their decision. This underscores that media approach to coverage of rape stories plays a significant role in audience perception and reaction.

Bonnes (2010) conducted a research on “Gender and Racial Stereotyping in Rape Coverage: An Analysis of Rape Coverage in Grocott’s Mail”. The study examined 16 rape incidents in Graham’s town Grocott’s Mail between October 14th 2008 and October 29th 2009 and discovered also that rape myths were used extensively in rape coverage. Findings showed that print media coverage reinforce patriarchy by placing blame on the victim and removing same from the perpetrator. The research which employed critical discourse analysis concludes that only a small minority of rape cases are reported in the media, compared to their occurrences. However, this work failed to critically examine how audience exposure, perception
and reaction to these reports affect the victims of rape which is what the study is trying to bring to limelight.

Similarly, Turkewitz (2010) in a study titled “All the News that’s Fit to Print: A Content Analysis of Newspapers’ Portrayal of Rape and Sexual Assault” revealed that newspapers do indeed systematically reflect cultural biases in their coverage of the crime of rape, thus newspapers do not present all instances of rape in the same way. The type of rape and the personality involved determines its line of discourses. The researcher employed Grounded Theory method by closely examining a large number of articles from American newspapers on rape and sexual assault. She identified the themes and patterns that emerged from this data (such as whether or not an article evoked fear, dehumanizes the perpetrator, or expressed sympathy for the victim). The study which used both quantitative and qualitative method concluded that there were indeed certain types of rapes that emerged as high visibility narratives and that there were certain problematic themes, such as conceptualizing rape as primarily a sexual experience, dehumanizing the perpetrator, and questioning of the victim’s credibility, which were important and recurrent parts of the discourse of rape in the news. The need therefore exists to ascertain the extent these biases as evident in media coverage of rape cases exemplified in various studies from other parts of the world are obtainable in covering rape cases in Nigeria; and then the audience perception and responses to these coverage.

Similar findings were observed by Dube (2013) when he examined the topic “She Probably Asked for it: A Preliminary Study into Zimbabwean Societal Perception of Rape”. He discovered that the society’s perceptions and responsiveness to addressing cases of rape depends greatly on how the media reports them. The findings reinforced the standpoint of the current study by examining the relationship between media rate of reportage and conceptualization of rape cases to audience perception of sexual assault and rape victims.

Looking at the plethora of empirical data on media coverage of rape cases what becomes evident is the possibility that media construction of rape stories are framed in such a way that reinforces instead of challenging misconceptions about such cases. In constructing these stories the ‘who’ and ‘how’ of media report are not context neutral but laden with media’s agenda that often serve to perpetuate the dominant hegemony. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. This field of meaning can have an effect on the audience’s beliefs, attitudes and behaviours by connecting a particular meaning or interpretation on an issue. Therefore, Frames connote interpretive devices that people use when making sense of the world around them and helps in making the difficult task of processing complex and often cumbersome information about our social world much simpler, by focusing our attention only on certain features that we feel are important. Following the occurrence of the murder case involving Cynthia Osokogu in September 2012, the mass media were awash with stories of how she was allegedly killed after being drugged and raped and news on the investigation procedure. The media coverage of this story was not only detailed but also extensively concentrated on the victim’s life history. At the end of the day anecdotal evidence suggested that the victim probably asked for it, while the audience reaction was ‘it was her fault’. Since media coverage of issues are oftentimes the only source of evidence for the audience, audience behavior will not only be influenced by the frequency of reporting but also by the importance ascribed to the case.

Although framing provides shorthand filtering of essential information, it also can generate conflicts through differing interpretations of an issue, and disagreements over the importance of its component parts. How the media frames a story can create a spiral of silence of effects on the audience or amplification effect. Hence, when the frame mainly centers on a negative description of the victim, the more likely the readers’ perception will be jeopardized or vice versa, thereby showing the extent to which the audience either accept or refuse the story so presented.

METHODOLOGY
This work employs a mix of survey and content analysis to assess the audience cognitions and then newspapers coverage of rape cases. The survey population consists of all male and female citizens from 18 years and above residing in the urban cities of the three south eastern states of Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu. Perhaps, due to high population density in each state, only the urban cities were randomly selected because audiences in those cities are mainly elites who can access and read newspapers. However, a total of 450 respondents were picked from the study population with 5% error significance using the formulaespoused by Taro Yamane. The population for the content analysis also consists of all Nigerian (nationally circulated) daily newspapers published during the period of the study (January – August 2014), from which three newspapers were randomly selected viz- Vanguard, Punch and Daily Sun. All the issues of the three newspapers published between January to August, 2014 formed the working population. This
implies the selection of a total of 258 editions (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) of each of the three newspapers resulting in a total of 2064 editions. The scope of the study covered an eight month period, from January to August, 2014. The purposive sampling technique was also employed to select alternate editions of the three newspapers for the period of study. The days were purposively selected so as to couch only the stories published during the beginning, middle and end of the week. Weekend editions (Saturdays and Sundays) were excluded because they are mostly centered on entertainment and sports.

Table 1: States and Selected Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Senatorial District</th>
<th>Local Government Areas</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Communities Selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anambra</td>
<td>Anambra Central</td>
<td>Awka South</td>
<td>189,654</td>
<td>96,902</td>
<td>92,752</td>
<td>Awka Amawbia Ezinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebonyi</td>
<td>Ebonyi North</td>
<td>Abakiliki</td>
<td>149,683</td>
<td>72,518</td>
<td>77,165</td>
<td>Abakaliki Nkaleke Ndo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enugu</td>
<td>Enugu East</td>
<td>Enugu East</td>
<td>277,119</td>
<td>131,214</td>
<td>145,905</td>
<td>Abakpa Trans-Ekulu Emene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2006 National Population Commission Census

The multistage sampling procedure was used for this study. In the first stage, the states were clustered according to their senatorial districts from which only one senatorial district was randomly selected. The selected ones are: Anambra Central, Ebonyi North and Enugu East. In the second stage, local government areas from each senatorial district were randomly selected, viz: Awka South, Abakaliki and Enugu East. In the third stage, one urban area from each state was randomly selected. They include: Awka urban, (Anambra Central), Abakaliki urban (Ebonyi North) and Enugu East urban (Enugu East). In the fourth stage, three communities were selected from the urban areas. In all 150 respondents each were selected from each state with fifty (50) respondents drawn from each community. The instrument used for the data collection for the survey was questionnaire while the coding sheet was used to code the newspapers. The content categories for this study include name of newspaper, type of news story, nature/theme/focus of story, types of rape cases, myths, and coverage of victims, frequency of reports and depth of coverage. The units of analysis includes all the stories and pictures etc concerning rape which were reported by the newspapers.

DATA PRESENTATION

THE SURVEY DATA

Table 2: Exposure to rape stories in newspaper and Frequency of Newspapers Readership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to rape stories in newspaper</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Frequency of Newspapers Readership</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>89% (N=402)</td>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>45% (N=203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11% (N=48)</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>30% (N=134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N=450)</td>
<td>Hardly</td>
<td>25% (N=113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N=450)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table presents the respondents’ frequency of newspaper readership. It shows that majority of the respondents read the newspapers very often (45%) and sometimes (30%), compared to those who read it occasionally (25%). The table also shows that 89% of the respondents have read rape stories in newspapers, thereby justifying their wide exposure to rape cases in Nigerian dailies

Table 3: Audience Perception of rape and Ratings of the newspaper coverage of rape cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of rape as the victim’s fault?</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Rating the newspaper coverage of rape cases</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15% (N=65)</td>
<td>Accurately</td>
<td>24% (N=107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>85% (N=375)</td>
<td>Objectively</td>
<td>16% (N=71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N=440)</td>
<td>Casually</td>
<td>60% (N=272)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 also shows that majority of the respondents (85%) believe rape is not the victim's fault. And points to respondents' rejection of the myth that the victim actually wanted or deserved to be raped. While 24% and 16% of the total respondents respectively are of the view that the media accurately and objectively report rape stories. Greater number of them (60%) however, maintains that rape cases are merely casually reported. This indicates that audience perceive media coverage of rape as insufficient.

Table 4: Causes of rape, How myths in rape coverage affect audience perception and Audience attribution of the most offenders of rape in south eastern Nigeria?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of rape</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
<th>How myths in rape coverage of rape stories affect audience perception</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Audience attribution of the most offenders</th>
<th>Total Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willful Act against victims</td>
<td>40% (N=172)</td>
<td>A. Blaming the Victim</td>
<td>62% (N=261)</td>
<td>A. Close family relatives</td>
<td>42% (N=190)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waywardness</td>
<td>30% (N=129)</td>
<td>B. Sympathizing with the victim</td>
<td>12% (N=51)</td>
<td>B. Home Neighbours</td>
<td>24% (N=110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecent Dressing</td>
<td>30% (N=129)</td>
<td>C. Supporting the victim to get Justice</td>
<td>10% (N=42)</td>
<td>C. Strangers</td>
<td>20% (N=88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N=420)</td>
<td>D. Excusing the rapist</td>
<td>16% (N=66)</td>
<td>D. House help / Nannies</td>
<td>14% (N=62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N=450)</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N=450)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audience perception of cause of rape from the table shows a dominance of questioning victim’s credibility. For instance, (40%), see it as a willful act against the victims while more than half see it as an act of waywardness (30%) and indecent dressing (30%). 62% of the total respondents accept that use of rape myths by the print media cause audience perception, to mainly blame the victim, while 22% sympathize with victim and 16% excuse the rapist. When we aggregate this data, what comes clear is that majority of audience perception as influence by media coverage is tilted negatively towards the victim. Data presented in this table also show that majority of the entire respondents (42%) accept that close family relatives are the most offenders of rape in south eastern Nigeria. This further authenticates the finding in content analysis whereby acquaintance rape cases recorded the highest number of coverage with 50% coverage. However these acquaintances also include the victim’s close relatives and care-givers.

**CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THREE NEWSPAPERS**

Table 5: Newspaper Coverage of Rape cases for the period of January – August, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Number of Stories reported on rape</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Type of Stories</th>
<th>Vanguard n %</th>
<th>Punch n %</th>
<th>Daily Sun n %</th>
<th>Total N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January-August, 2014</td>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>News Reports</td>
<td>34(85%)</td>
<td>28 (93.3%)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punch</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Features</td>
<td>02 (5%)</td>
<td>00 (00%)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>02 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily Sun</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>00 (00%)</td>
<td>00 (00%)</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>00 (00%)</td>
<td>00 (00%)</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>02 (5%)</td>
<td>00 (00%)</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Column</td>
<td>02 (5%)</td>
<td>02 (6.7%)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>04 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this table, the sample editions of the newspapers studied reported 104 stories on rape. Vanguard reported 40 stories (38%) out of the total number of stories reported on rape by the three newspapers. The Punch had a total of 30 stories (29%) while Daily Sun had 34 stories (33%). It is also worthy to note that the Vanguard reported the highest number of stories (38%).

This table also shows that out of the 104 rape stories generated by the three selected newspapers, 87% were news stories, 1.9% each were features, opinion and interviews; and 3.8% were editorials and columns respectively. Data presented are indicative of the fact that most stories of sexual assaults reported in Nigeria news print are reported as straight news and underreported.

Table 6: Placement of the Rape Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Vanguard</th>
<th>Punch</th>
<th>Daily Sun</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headline</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Page</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Page</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Page</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td>34 (100%)</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from the low frequency of reportage of rape cases by the Nigerian Media, the data presented above shows that all the 104 issues published by the three newspapers within the period, were all buried inside pages. Since sexual assault stories failed to make it as frontline and Headline stories in Nigerian print media, the implication is obvious low prominence and importance attached to such cases in the Nigerian news media agenda.

Table 7: Table Nature/theme/focus of Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature/Theme/ Focus of Stories</th>
<th>Vanguard n %</th>
<th>Punch n %</th>
<th>Daily Sun n %</th>
<th>Total n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim Blaming</td>
<td>20 (50%)</td>
<td>16 (53%)</td>
<td>16 (47%)</td>
<td>52 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator Blaming</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>8 (24%)</td>
<td>20 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensationalized Account of rape</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>10 (34%)</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
<td>32 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td>34 (100%)</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from this table is telling as it goes to expose the dominant themes in relation to newspaper nature of coverage of sexual assault cases. As seen in this table, 52% of all the stories from these newspapers were centered on victim blame themes, and 32% on sensationalized account while only 20% was perpetrators blame theme. Clearly the table supports the dominance of misconceptions of rape cases by the Nigerian news media as exemplified in studies found in literature in other countries. Therefore in reporting these stories the print media constructs these news reports from a stereotyped lens that are gendered and tend to reinforce patriarchy.
Table 8: Types of Rape Cases published Rape Myths found in the reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rape Cases</th>
<th>Vanguard n %</th>
<th>Punch n %</th>
<th>Daily Sun n %</th>
<th>Total n (%)</th>
<th>Rape Myths Reported</th>
<th>Vanguard n %</th>
<th>Punch n %</th>
<th>Daily Sun n %</th>
<th>Total n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stranger Rape Cases</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>8 (24%)</td>
<td>20 (19%)</td>
<td>She’s Lying</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>4 (11.7%)</td>
<td>12 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusual Rape Cases</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>10 (33%)</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
<td>32 (31%)</td>
<td>She asked for it</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (11.7%)</td>
<td>16 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance Rape Cases</td>
<td>20 (50%)</td>
<td>16 (54%)</td>
<td>16 (47%)</td>
<td>52 (50%)</td>
<td>She wanted it</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>6 (17.6%)</td>
<td>16 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td>34 (100%)</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
<td>Rape is trivial</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>8 (27%)</td>
<td>10 (29.4%)</td>
<td>30 (29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table reveals that stranger rape case recorded 19% of the total news stories published within the period. This was followed by Unusual rape cases with 31% reportage. Interestingly, acquaintance rape cases had the highest frequency with 50% coverage. This suggests that most of the acts of rape are perpetrated by acquaintances, who encompasses the victim’s close relatives, neighbours, care-givers and all others. This table shows that rape myths are prevalent in the rape cases reported by the print media within the period. The study revealed that the three Newspapers each, contained the seven rape myths categorized by Burt, (1980). These include “she’s lying (12%), she asked for it (15%), she wanted it (15%), rape is trivial (29%), he didn’t mean to (12%), he is not the kind of guy who would do this (9%), it only happens to “certain women” (7%). These show that most media rape cases are biased and laden with myths which may account for the stigma likely associated with rape victims and possibly for the low reportage and the victim’s unwillingness to disclose their rape experiences.

Table 9: Manner of Coverage of Rape Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage of Victims</th>
<th>Vanguard</th>
<th>Punch</th>
<th>Daily Sun</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim Personal Information revealed</td>
<td>20 (50%)</td>
<td>16 (53.3%)</td>
<td>16 (47.1%)</td>
<td>52 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Sexual History revealed</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (13.3%)</td>
<td>8 (23.5%)</td>
<td>20 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims’ Blames</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
<td>10 (29.4%)</td>
<td>32 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td>34 (100%)</td>
<td>104 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in the above table also show that Nigerian print media mainly reveal personal information of the victims (50%), some (19%) reveal the past sexual life of the victim while many others (32%) blame the victims in the reports. These show that media framing of such issues in these directions can affect the audience cognitions as they present the stories out of context by infringing on the victim’s private lives and human rights.
DISCUSSION
The data analyzed in this study was obtained from 450 respondents spread across the urban areas of the three eastern states; and data from three Nigerian newspapers (Vanguard, Punch and Daily Sun) from January to August, 2014. The study found that majority of the respondents readership of the selected newspapers were high as (45%) and (30%) attest to reading newspapers often and occasionally. Findings from the study also show that 89% of the respondents have read rape stories in newspapers, thereby justifying their wide exposure to rape cases in Nigerian dailies. Dominant in the findings is also audience perception to the low coverage and prominence given to rape stories. The content analysis justifies audience view since no rape story was found either as front page story or as headline news. Interestingly, a greater percentage of the respondents 85%, believe that it is not the victim’s fault, which confirms the respondents’ rejection of the myth that the victim actually wanted or deserved to be raped and may support the view that rape is a dehumanizing sexual assault that should be punished.

Despite audience view that rape is not the victims fault, more than half of the respondents 62%, accept that use of rape myths by the print media negatively affect their perception of rape cases by casting the blame off the perpetrator to the victim. This substantiates evidence from literature on media’s power to affect and shape public opinion and perception on issues of importance through media framing and reporting of such issues. Related to this view is audience perception that the dominant cause of rape rests on victim; ----- the act of waywardness (30%) and indecent Dressing (30%). By implication audience perception of rape cases are distorted by media biased and stereotypical construction of these cases. Another interesting finding that supports data from literature is that majority of the entire respondents (42%) accept that close family relatives are the most offenders of rape in south eastern Nigeria. This further authenticates the finding in content analysis whereby acquaintance rape cases recorded the highest number of coverage with 50% coverage. This suggests that most of the acts of rape are perpetrated by acquaintances, who encompasses the victim’s close relatives, neighbours, care-givers and all others.

With regards to the Content Analysis, the sample editions of the newspapers studied reported 104 stories on rape. Vanguard reported the highest with 40 stories (38%) out of the total number of stories reported on rape by the three newspapers. In terms of the unit of Analysis, out of the 104 rape stories generated by the three selected newspapers, majority were straight news (87%).

Apart from this low frequency of reportage of rape cases by the Nigerian Media, all the 104 issues published by the three newspapers within the period, were all buried inside pages. This shows the level of triviality attached to the stories by the media and lack of prominence accorded to these stories.

In terms of nature and theme of coverage, we found a high rate of victim-blame themes (52%), and a substantial account of the theme of sensationalized account of rape (32%) while a mere 20% was on perpetrators blame theme. Clearly as found in literature (see, Cuklanz, 1996;) Nigerian print news media perpetrates traditional stereotypical views of sexual assault by discussing many elements out of context. With a dominance of victim-blame themes in newspaper account of sexual assault cases. As suggested from literature, such coverage may serve to indirectly perpetuate sexual violence through creating beliefs and attitudes about sexual assaults that distort the definition of sexual assaults and shift the blame to the victims (Malhotra & Sood 2000; p. 257-258).

The study further revealed that the three Newspapers each, contained the seven rape myths categorized by Burt, (1980). These show that most media rape cases are biased and laden with myths as shown in literature (Hirsch, 1994; p. 1027) which may account for the stigma likely associated with rape victims and possibly for the low reportage and the victim’s unwillingness to disclose their rape experiences. The idea been that victims of rape will shy away from reporting the crime after considering the stigma and the assumed public negative beliefs. The study also reveals that Nigerian print media largely reveal personal information of the victims (50%), some (19%) reveal the past sexual life of the victim while many others (32%) blame the victims in the reports. Hence, giving out rape victim’s name and disclosing some personal information will add to the social stigma associated with rape. This study also gathered that framing helps the audience to think about rape in a stereotypical and victim-blaming manner that depicts the victim as deserving rape.

CONCLUSION
While there are no doubt some examples of well-informed and sensitive reporting of sexual violence in the media, the overall picture from the study, poses a great deal of concern regarding Nigerian press media construction and insufficient coverage of sexual assault cases. The study correlates with and substantiates findings from previous studies in other countries regarding media coverage and audience reactions to rape
cases. This goes to suggest that media treatment of sexual assault against women and audience reaction to it, has a global resonance that may be accounted for in male dominance of the media and cultures of different societies. The reinforcement of rape myths by the media creates a spiral of silence in that it biases the victim’s minds, affects their willingness to report their rape experiences and further excuses the perpetrators from blame and limit others against crusading for the protection of the rights of women. Findings from the study uphold most of what was found in literature further detailing the commonality of the media in shaping people’s views and attitudes concerning societal issues. Rape coverage in the media has many effects in society as seen from the study that; rape myths reportage by the Newspapers can simultaneously convey and perpetuate rape myths to receivers. Furthermore, media coverage of rape can also perpetuate patriarchy when the coverage helps to sustain the existing social order by portraying rape in particular ways (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1321; Worthington 2008:344). For example, media coverage of rape can reinforce views that both deny and excuse male sexual violence against women (Franiuk, Seefelt & Vandello; 2008;798 Jimenez & Abreu”; 2003:252). It often shapes the way in which people think about rape, as well as how they receive rape victims, rapists and those accused of rape. Thus, the media coverage of crime against women especially rape is an important area of interest that calls for continuous empirical inquiry.

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