



## MEDIA FRAMING OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT IN PLATEAU STATE

Moven Tahna'an Rosemary, J.S. Kente, PhD &  
A. Ogande, PhD

Department Of Mass Communication, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

[solomonoduma@gmail.com](mailto:solomonoduma@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Media framing of children affected by conflict is crucial in shaping public perceptions and guiding policy responses. This study investigates how media in Plateau State, Nigeria, frames children impacted by ongoing violence characterized by ethno-religious and resource-based conflicts. Despite the severe vulnerabilities these children face, such as displacement, trauma, and educational disruption, media coverage often presents either sensationalized or marginalized perspectives through a qualitative analysis. The findings reveal that children are commonly framed as passive victims or sensationalized in relation to extreme violence, with their long-term needs and systemic challenges frequently underreported. This selective framing has significant implications for public understanding and policy responses, typically resulting in short-term humanitarian measures rather than addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability. The study underscores the necessity for more nuanced and comprehensive media reporting. It recommends enhancing media literacy and training, establishing ethical reporting guidelines, promoting responsible journalistic practices, increasing public awareness, and supporting further research on media impact.*

**Keywords:** Media Framing, Children, Framing theory, Conflict, Plateau State

### Introduction

The mass media play a significant role in providing the public with information and awareness about emerging issues and novel concerns (Lee, 2022). Media coverage of lesser-known issues can impact the level of public concern for these matters, leading to increased attention from the public (Hong & Kim, 2020). Furthermore, the media can influence the problems that the public perceives as important. The way news is presented can shape how readers or viewers perceive and form specific values and opinions. For over two decades, Plateau State has experienced episodic violent conflicts, which began in 1991 and intensified over the years, especially from 2001 onwards. The violence has been persistent and increasingly severe, exacting a heavy toll on the state's socioeconomic development. While precise data on the total number of casualties is lacking, conservative estimates suggest that over 7,000 lives have been lost. In addition to the human cost, the conflict has caused widespread destruction of properties, livelihoods, and homes, resulting in a pervasive atmosphere of fear, mutual suspicion, and intolerance among different ethno-religious and communal groups (Plateau Peace Building Agency, 2018; Cinjel & Ugwoke, 2019). The impact of the conflict extends beyond the immediate physical violence, as it has led to mass displacement and exacerbated economic and social vulnerabilities, particularly for women and children (Taft, Blyth & Murphy, 2016). Communities in the state have become segregated along ethno-religious lines, with many living in constant fear of attacks, reprisal violence, and other



forms of criminality (Abbass, 2012; Chidozie, 2016). The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the Plateau State government have undertaken numerous initiatives to address the ongoing conflicts. These efforts include the establishment of commissions of inquiry and the deployment of security forces to affected areas (Plateau Peace Building Agency, 2018). Despite these interventions, violent conflict continues to be a recurring issue in the state. Additionally, there is a growing distrust of the government at all levels among the state's citizens. Scholars and policymakers have also made various attempts to analyze the causes and dynamics of the conflict. Some studies attribute the violence to competition over resources (Danfulani, 2005; Taft, Blyth & Murphy, 2016; Akinyetun, 2016), while others point to ethno-religious tensions, intercommunal violence, and sectarian disputes. Despite these efforts, the conflicts remain complex, as many communities continue to face severe and often unreported attacks. According to anecdotal evidence, numerous incidents occur without media coverage or public awareness, leaving them unaccounted for. Similar patterns of conflict have persisted for over two decades in other Nigerian states such as Benue and Kaduna. The evolving nature of these conflicts has been challenging to comprehend, as there are differing views on their causes, motivations, and characteristics. This divergence in perspectives complicates efforts by both state and non-state actors to develop a unified approach to conflict resolution, thereby rendering the violence intractable.

One of the most profound consequences of conflict is the psychological trauma inflicted on children. Exposure to violence, displacement, and the loss of loved ones can lead to long-term mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. According to studies, children who experience violence often exhibit emotional instability, aggression, and a sense of hopelessness (Onyemelukwe, 2016). In Plateau State, many children have witnessed acts of brutality, been forced to flee their homes, and have lost family members. Such experiences can affect their emotional development, hinder their education, and limit their ability to lead productive lives.

Conflict in Plateau State has led to large-scale displacement, with many communities being uprooted and resettled in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Displacement not only separates children from their homes but also disrupts their access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Many children in these camps grow up in environments of uncertainty and instability, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and disconnection from their cultural identities. The loss of identity is another significant social impact on children. In conflict settings, children often lose the sense of community and belonging that comes from growing up in stable environments. According to a report by UNICEF, displaced children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, including child labor and recruitment into armed groups (UNICEF, 2018). In Plateau State, the erosion of social structures and the breakdown of traditional family systems further exacerbate these challenges. The economic toll of conflict is particularly devastating for children. In Plateau State, conflict has disrupted agricultural activities, which are the mainstay of the local economy. Families who rely on farming for their livelihoods have been displaced, leaving them without access to land or the means to provide for their children. As a result, children often suffer from malnutrition and lack access to adequate healthcare (Olga & Krapivnaja, 2016).



Furthermore, conflict has a significant impact on education. Schools are often targets in violent clashes, leading to closures and destruction of educational infrastructure. In many cases, children are unable to attend school due to safety concerns or because their families can no longer afford to prioritize education in the face of economic hardship. The lack of education perpetuates a cycle of poverty and leaves children without the skills needed to improve their future prospects. Research has shown that children who miss out on education are more likely to fall into poverty, which makes them vulnerable to further exploitation (Bello, 2020). The long-term consequences of conflict on children in Plateau State are alarming. Many children grow up with limited access to education and economic opportunities, which hinders their ability to escape the cycle of poverty. The trauma of conflict also shapes their worldviews, making them more susceptible to radicalization or involvement in future conflicts. Without adequate intervention, the impact of conflict on children can reverberate for generations, weakening the overall resilience and stability of communities. Various efforts have been made to mitigate the impact of conflict on children in Plateau State. Government agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Search for Common Ground have focused on providing humanitarian aid, including food, healthcare, and educational services to affected children. UNICEF, for instance, has been instrumental in creating child-friendly spaces within IDP camps, where children can receive psychological support and continue their education (UNICEF, 2018). However, much more needs to be done to ensure that these children are protected and allowed to recover from the trauma of conflict. Additionally, peacebuilding efforts that focus on community reconciliation and conflict resolution are essential to reducing the risk of future violence. Empowering local leaders, fostering dialogue between conflicting groups, and addressing the underlying causes of conflict, such as resource allocation and political marginalization, are crucial steps in promoting long-term peace and stability in Plateau State (Adamu & Ben, 2018). The impact of conflict on communities in Plateau State, particularly on children, is severe and long-lasting. Children bear the brunt of the psychological, social, and economic consequences of violence. They are deprived of their education, displaced from their homes, and subjected to trauma that can shape their futures in profound ways. To address these challenges, concerted efforts must be made to provide immediate relief and long-term support to children affected by conflict. Only through sustained peacebuilding and targeted interventions can the cycle of violence be broken, allowing future generations to thrive in a more stable and peaceful Plateau State.

Media exposure and consumption play a significant role in shaping individuals' views, attitudes, and behaviors. The frequency with which individuals encounter media content, as well as the extent to which they retain that information, is referred to as media exposure (Coyne, Ward, Kroff, Davis, Holmgren, Jensen & Essig, 2019). Media serves as a powerful tool in influencing perceptions and behaviors by disseminating information, raising awareness, and providing education. It facilitates communication among individuals, offering insights into a range of global, social, and environmental issues (Huang, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study by Adeniran, Suleiman, Ajaga and Kayode (2015) states that Nigerian children face various challenges during their journey through life. The country ranks among the worst nations



in many children-related world ranking indices ranging from child health, out-of-school children, to child labour, child development index, among others. Several children-related issues abound requiring urgent attention of stakeholders within and outside the country if the country must redeem its image as one that caters for the need and protects the innocence of its children. The media provide a unique avenue through which such children related issues could be brought to the fore of public discourse. In Plateau State, existing studies on conflict and media coverage have primarily focused on ethno-religious tensions, intercommunal violence, and political instability (Anjide & Amaechi, 2022). However, there is a paucity of research specifically examining how the media frames children affected by conflict, despite the crucial role that media representation plays in shaping societal responses. Moreover, the prevailing frames whether they portray children as passive victims or resilient agents may either contribute to greater empathy and action or reinforce stereotypes that hinder effective intervention. Within this contextual context, several studies examined how conflict have affected economic, educational and other aspect of human existence in Plateau state. However, a knowledge gap exist in the area of identified by this study was the framing of the effects of conflict on children who are usually soft targets during this conflicts, children given birth to during this conflict period are mostly left in trauma. This paper intends to use literature to identify ways the media can positively frame stories on children affected by conflict in Plateau State.

### **Objectives of the Paper**

- Explore how the media frames children affected by conflict in Plateau State.
- Analyze the implications of these frames for public perception and intervention efforts.

### **Empirical Review**

In Rabi'u's (2019) study, "Interrogating the Nexus between Framing and News Writing in Journalism Practice," the role of the mass media in shaping public understanding of current events is critically examined. Millions of individuals turn to the media daily to satisfy their curiosity about ongoing issues, and it is well-established that the media not only serve as a major source of information but also function as a platform for the exchange of ideas within society (Agee, Ault & Emery, 2002; Devito, 2001; Baran & Davies, 2007). A key mechanism through which the media influence public opinion is by framing events and issues in specific ways. As Entman (1991) suggests, frames in the news can significantly affect how people learn about, interpret, and evaluate the matters being reported. Framing plays a crucial role in determining the content of news and subsequently influences the perceptions and understanding of audiences, whether they are readers, viewers, or listeners. This, in turn, has profound implications for shaping public opinion. Moreover, the subtle, often unconscious manner in which frames guide the public's beliefs or activate certain information for future evaluations underscores the significant power of framing. Frames are integral to human cognition, influencing how people form attitudes about the world and their interactions with others. Given the pivotal role that framing plays in shaping perceptions of political, economic, and social issues, a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the concept is essential. As such, framing cannot be overlooked in the practice of journalism, as it is fundamental to how information is communicated and received in society. This framing influences how the public, government, and international organizations understand the plight of these children,





potentially shaping policy and social actions. For instance, if the media frames the children as vulnerable victims, there may be a call for increased humanitarian aid. Conversely, framing them as symbols of conflict may emphasize security measures over child welfare. The difference in both studies is that local media in Plateau State might frame the children with a stronger focus on communal ties and cultural contexts, while international media might frame them within a broader narrative of human rights or global conflict. Depending on the media outlet, the framing might emphasize different aspects of the conflict, such as ethnic tensions, religious divides, or political instability, which influences how the children are portrayed—either as collateral damage or central figures in a larger conflict narrative. Some media might frame the children affected by conflict with a more emotional or humanitarian angle, focusing on their suffering and need for help, while others may adopt a more analytical frame, linking the children's plight to broader political or economic instability in the region.

In their study titled, *The Intractability of Violent Conflict in Nigeria: A Study of Plateau State*, Anjide and Amaechi (2022) examine the persistent violent conflicts in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Plateau State. Previous studies have attributed the conflict to ethno-religious crises, violent intercommunal clashes, sectarian disputes, and resource-based conflicts. However, understanding and addressing the complexity of the conflict remains a formidable challenge. This study seeks to unravel this complexity by exploring the factors contributing to the intractability of violent conflict in Plateau State. Utilizing a case study approach, the research draws on a wide range of data sources, including Key Informant Interviews (KII), observations, and secondary materials such as academic journals, books, and official reports. The findings suggest that the conflict in Plateau State has evolved through five distinct phases, driven by competing claims among citizens, mutual perceptions of victimization, and the actions of violent entrepreneurs. The study identifies several key actors in the conflict, including the media, ethnic groups, political actors, youth organizations, arms dealers, security forces, and government agencies. These actors are primarily motivated by identity politics, unmet human needs, and profiteering interests. The study concludes by recommending a multi-stakeholder approach to conflict resolution, emphasizing the need for short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to address the crisis in Plateau State effectively. The link lies in the recognition that the media is not just a passive observer but an active agent that can shape narratives, influence public opinion, and potentially contribute to either escalating or de-escalating conflicts. By framing the experiences of children affected by conflict, the media can direct attention to the humanitarian crisis, evoke empathy, and possibly influence peacebuilding efforts. However, if the media portrays children through biased or sensationalized frames, it can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce divisions. The topic of media framing of children focuses specifically on how the media represents children who are affected by the conflict, examining the emotional, psychological, and physical impacts on this vulnerable group. In contrast, Anjide and Amaechi's study explores the broader dynamics of the conflict, focusing on the key actors, phases of conflict, and the reasons for its persistence in Plateau State. Children are not the primary focus but are part of the larger community affected by the violence.

In their study, *Representation of Children in the Nigerian News Media*, Adeniran, Suleiman, Ajaga, and Kayode (2015) explores the challenges faced by Nigerian children and the extent to



which these issues are reflected in the media. Nigeria ranks poorly in various child-related global indices, including child health, education, and labor. Given the significant challenges confronting Nigerian children, the study examines the coverage provided to child-related issues in the Nigerian mass media. Employing a content analysis research design, the authors analyzed selected national newspapers and magazines to determine the predominant child-related problems reported and the coverage's direction, function, and prominence. The study is grounded in agenda-setting and framing theories, which provide a framework for understanding how the media shapes public perceptions of children. The findings reveal that issues concerning children are generally underreported in the Nigerian press. However, when children are involved in crime-related incidents, the media tends to provide them with "adequate" coverage. The study recommends a more responsible and cautious approach to reporting children and child-related issues to ensure balanced and ethical media portrayals. Both the study and the topic point out that children, especially those facing challenges, tend to receive limited media attention. Adeniran et al. (2015) found that Nigerian children's issues are generally underreported, except when linked to crime, while the topic of media framing in Plateau State highlights a specific context children affected by violent conflict—where underreporting or biased reporting can obscure the full impact of conflict on this vulnerable group. Both the study and the topic utilize framing theory. Adeniran et al. (2015) explain how the Nigerian media frames child-related issues and the subsequent public perception, which is similar to how the media in Plateau State may frame children caught in conflict. These frames influence how audiences perceive the severity of children's situations, whether as victims of violence or as part of broader social issues. Both topics highlight the media's power to shape societal attitudes. The study shows how Nigerian media highlights crime-related stories involving children, potentially distorting public perceptions of childhood in crisis. Similarly, in the Plateau State context, the framing of children affected by conflict can either evoke empathy and draw attention to their suffering or sensationalize their victimhood, leading to skewed narratives about the conflict. In Adeniran et al.'s (2015) study, the reporting on children occurs within a range of everyday societal issues, from health crises to education and labor concerns, whereas the Plateau State topic is concerned with children in an active conflict setting, where the trauma, displacement, and physical harm caused by violence are central issues. Another difference was the adopting of content analysis and also agenda setting-theory.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Media Framing Theory**

Framing theory has dual origins in the work of Goffman and Fillmore. Goffman, a sociologist, and Fillmore, a linguist, independently developed theories of frame analysis based on their separate usages of the word "frame" in the 1950s. These approaches became intertwined over time as researchers studied metaphoric framing, factors affecting the communication of frames, and their application to politics and the mass media. One can view framing in communication as positive or negative – depending on the audience and what kind of information is being presented. The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.



An essential element in conflict resolution is understanding how frames influence the development of a conflict. In the context of conflict, frames help individuals comprehend why the conflict exists, identify the key actions related to the conflict, explain the motivations of the parties involved, and guide responses to the situation (Gray, 2003). During a conflict's evolution, frames act as filters through which information is gathered, analyzed, and used to shape positions, determine priorities, and develop solutions. Depending on the context, frames may be used to interpret and conceptualize the conflict or to manipulate and influence perceptions.

These frames play a pivotal role in shaping how the public and policymakers perceive the plight of these children. The media, through its framing choices, decides whether to portray children as helpless victims, resilient survivors, or merely collateral damage in a broader ethno-religious conflict. The way children are represented can significantly impact how their needs are addressed, including how much attention is devoted to their welfare, psychological needs, and long-term support. As frames help determine what is prioritized in public discourse, media depictions may either spotlight the humanitarian crisis or shift focus to the political and ethnic dimensions of the conflict, thereby marginalizing the children's experiences. Buechler (2000) emphasize that framing and reframing are crucial to the negotiation process, linked to information processing, message patterns, and socially constructed meanings. Understanding how the media frames children in conflict settings allows for a deeper analysis of the conflict's development and the stakeholders' responses. By examining these frames, it becomes possible to uncover the societal and political dynamics at play, and with reframing, stakeholders can be encouraged to view the conflict and its victims especially children in new ways that may foster more empathetic and effective responses. In the context of Plateau State, analyzing media frames surrounding children affected by conflict can provide valuable insights into how the issue is perceived and addressed. Through strategic reframing, there is potential to shift public and policy attention toward long-term solutions aimed at protecting and rehabilitating these vulnerable children.

In the case of Plateau State, Nigeria, media framing of children affected by conflict mirrors broader patterns but carries unique implications. Plateau State has endured episodic violence for decades, driven primarily by ethno-religious tensions and resource-based disputes (Anjide & Amaechi, 2022). Within this volatile context, children are particularly vulnerable, suffering from displacement, psychological trauma, family separation, and significant educational disruption. However, how the media frames their experiences profoundly shapes public and policy perceptions of their situation. Research demonstrates that children affected by conflict in Plateau State are often underrepresented in media coverage. Studies such as those by Adeniran, Suleiman, Ajaga, and Kayode (2015) reveal that Nigerian media tends to focus on the political and ethnic aspects of the conflict, paying limited attention to the specific experiences and vulnerabilities of children. When children do appear in media narratives, it is frequently in association with crime or in extreme instances of violence, such as displacement or attacks on schools. This narrow framing reduces children to mere victims or, in some cases, criminalizes their involvement, thus overlooking the broader systemic issues contributing to their suffering.



The portrayal of children in the context of Plateau State's conflict is characterized by either sensationalization or marginalization. Sensationalized portrayals focus on immediate suffering, using images and narratives designed to evoke pity and shock. However, marginalization occurs when the media overlooks the long-term needs of children, such as education, rehabilitation, and mental health support (Taft, Blyth, & Murphy, 2016). This selective framing limits public understanding of the complex challenges these children face and diminishes the motivation for policymakers to address the root causes of their vulnerability. The media's framing of children in conflict zones, such as those in Plateau State, holds significant implications for policy and humanitarian interventions. When children are predominantly framed as passive victims, the initial response is often an outpouring of sympathy and short-term humanitarian assistance. However, these responses frequently fail to address the structural issues that perpetuate their vulnerability, such as limited access to education, healthcare, or family reunification services. Furthermore, when the media neglects these structural issues, it can lead to policy interventions that are reactive rather than proactive (Iyengar, 1991). In the context of Plateau State, the media's emphasis on the political and ethnic dimensions of the conflict has overshadowed the specific needs of children. As a result, there has been a lack of long-term investment in child-centered programs, such as trauma recovery initiatives, education for displaced children, and reintegration support for those separated from their families. Putnam and Holmer (1996) assert that framing and reframing are integral to the conflict resolution process, and shifting media narratives towards a more comprehensive portrayal of children's experiences can help stakeholders develop more effective, sustainable solutions. Media framing is critical in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy responses toward vulnerable groups, especially children, in conflict situations. In Plateau State, Nigerian media has frequently marginalized the experiences of children, prioritizing the political and ethnic aspects of the conflict. When children are portrayed, they are often framed as passive victims or in connection to criminal activity, limiting the public's understanding of their multifaceted needs. This approach reduces the likelihood of long-term, child-focused interventions. By shifting media framing to address both the immediate and structural challenges children face in conflict, stakeholders can adopt more holistic approaches to conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance.

## **Literature review**

### **Media Framing and Children's Privacy**

Asian media has often been seen violating children's privacy by putting their sensitive information in front of mass people (Maharani, 2018). South Asian countries reveal the actual situation of unethical reporting of child news (Goonasekera, 2001). According to theories, sensational news mostly gets coverage in the media (Naylor and Lecturer, 2001). Thilakarathne (2016) found Sri Lankan media violating privacy rules of abused children. Over the years, Sri Lanka portrayed an insufficient level of interest in reporting children's issues on mainstream media (Amarakoon, 2003). Gunasekera, Abeysekara and Weerasinghe, (2021) acclaimed that majority of the society depends on only media to get insights into child sex crime. But while reporting, generally media did not protect the victim's privacy. Media coverage of child sex crimes disclosed the victim's name, family background, age, gender, religion, race, photos, video, audio, etc. A report of UNICEF found Bangladeshi media representing victims of sexually and physically abused girls





within framing that discloses their privacy (UNICEF, 2018). The media purposefully frames child abuse issues in people's consciousness (Nair, 2019). Media often creates this awareness by setting political and social agendas with sensational content. During sensitization media often release child abuse victims' sensitive information including the victim's family details. Saint-Jacques, Villeneuve, Turcotte, Drapeau and Ivers (2012) identified that no matter how much the media pretends to be concerned about child protection, they do not publish as many articles as it needs to influence child protection services.

Lonne and Parton (2014) disclosed that newspapers often carry unnecessary information which causes a violation of victims' privacy. Though the media played an important role in creating public concern over the child abuse issue at the same time media fabricated and politicized this news. Most of the reports ignored emotional abuse while prioritizing physical abuse. Niner, Ahmad & Cuthbert (2013) provided an overview of the Malaysian print media's tendency of revealing victims' identities in child abuse reports. According to the study, the media frames child abuse news more episodically than thematically way. Episodic framing disclosed the victim's identity and influenced readers' opinions more than thematically framed articles. Thailand's media were found to reveal children's identities who were mostly victims (UNICEF, 2018). Weathered (2017) studied individual and societal media frames of child sexual abuse in the context of constructing public opinion. Episodic framing prioritizes the individual approach whereas thematic framing focuses on the societal approach. News framing of two significant scandals: Catholic Church and Pennsylvania State University have been examined along with a decade of newspaper contents in this paper. The study found a notable shift in the framing approach from societal-level solutions to the individual level over the decade. US newspapers frame child abuse cases more from a thematic perspective rather than an episodic one (Thomas, Hye-Jin, Thomas & Richard, 2013). The study found that treatment of child abuse news depended on the types of the abuse. All together these thematically framed articles mostly protected privacy and focused on societal causes and solutions. Kunkel, Smith, Suding and Biely (2006) revealed a consistent pattern of media framing of child-related articles. The paper studied television and newspaper coverage of children and found the media preferred child's crime and violence-related stories more than others. Singh, Parsekar and Nair (2014) expressed concerns over the limited coverage of juvenile crime and his study found girls facing more cases of media maltreatment than boys. Same gender-based media victimization was echoed in the studies of Haque, Janson, Moniruzzaman, Fazlur Rahman, Islam and Mashreky (2020) and Merchant (2010). Also, studies from western countries found that newspapers prioritize cases of childhood abuse and their participation in crime more than the promotion of their rights.

### **Guidelines for Media Representation**

In 1924 the League of Nations for the first time declared 5 articles promoting child rights (Humanium, 2015). Convention on the Rights of the Child instructs mass media to ensure that regardless of their ethnic identity every child will receive a similar level of access to information and media will promote their rights. International Federation of Journalists (International Federation of Journalists, 1998) published a set of guidelines instructing the media to be cautious regarding child protection and not to violate their rights. It forbids the media to practice sensational



representation of children and violating their privacy. In 2002, it updated its guidelines with the tagline “Putting Children in the Right”, the guidebook advocates for children’s privacy, rights, and respect in the media (International Federation of Journalists, 2002). Terre des Hommes International Federation stands on zero tolerance for child maltreatment in media (Terre des Hommes International Federation, 2014). Their principles include using fair and straightforward methods of collecting children’s information and pictures. The second edition of the guideline also echoed almost the same principles. The principles further include guarding children’s privacy in the media on controversial issues. The media needs to give thought to the consequences of the child’s information before publication to minimize the harm (Terre des Hommes International Federation, 2016).

In 2005, UNICEF released a handbook on Media and Children’s rights. The guidelines were made thinking of the challenges the media face in children's representation. It encourages the media to preserve children’s rights and to include maximum children's views (UNICEF, 2018). UNICEF 2018 came up with a set of recommendations for media professionals regarding children’s representation, interview, and reporting style. “Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on children” included six principles for media reporting on children (UNICEF, 2018). In the constitution of Bangladesh, article 28 sub-section four made sure that the legislation has the authority to enact special provisions for the betterment of children and women (The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). The Children Act, 2013 from Bangladesh also instructs media not to disclose children’s privacy on controversial issues. Section 81 describes, that any photograph or information relating to a child’s case which is under proceedings in the court shall not be published in the media as it violates the child's privacy (The Children Act, 2013). This act protects both victims’ and juvenile offenders' privacy.

## **Methodology**

The study adopts qualitative research, specifically, unstructured interview. Qualitative research serves as an essential method for examining complex social phenomena and gaining insights into individuals' lived experiences within their real-life contexts. Its focus on flexibility, depth of inquiry, and contextual understanding makes it particularly effective for generating novel theories, informing policy decisions, and addressing issues related to social justice (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2018). This methodological approach allows for a nuanced exploration of human behavior, fostering a deeper comprehension of the intricacies of social life. An unstructured interview is a qualitative data collection technique characterized by the absence of a predetermined set of questions. Rather than adhering to a rigid structure, the interview adopts a conversational flow, offering greater flexibility and openness. This approach allows the interviewer to delve deeply into topics and pursue emerging points of interest, making it especially valuable for gaining a comprehensive understanding of an individual's experiences, thoughts, or perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The study population are 11 broadcast media houses located in Plateau state. In 2023, according to the World Population Review, the population of Jos (970,129). The sampling procedure employed in this study is purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used to deliberately select individuals or groups based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This method is particularly advantageous when the study population is



limited in size, difficult to access, or highly heterogeneous. Purposive sampling is deemed appropriate for this research as it allows for the focused and efficient selection of media outlets most pertinent to the research question, thereby ensuring that the study's objectives are met effectively and that the results are both credible and comprehensive. This technique was specifically applied to the selection of broadcast media stations in Plateau State. Data collection primarily involved semi-structured interviews, complemented by the use of secondary data sources.

### Thematic analysis

- **Objective one:** Explore how the media frames children affected by conflict in Plateau State. Media coverage of children in conflict zones often marginalizes their experiences by focusing primarily on short-term crises, thereby underreporting the deeper issues that demand long-term policy interventions. In Plateau State, for example, the media's predominant focus on political and ethnic violence has led to the sidelining of children's voices in public discourse. Taft, Blyth, and Murphy (2016) emphasize that children affected by conflict are frequently portrayed as peripheral figures, with their essential needs—such as psychological rehabilitation, education, and reintegration—receiving insufficient attention. The study by Anjide and Amaechi (2022) on the persistent violent conflict in Plateau State underscores how the media's emphasis on ethno-religious narratives has overshadowed the specific challenges faced by children. This lack of visibility not only limits public understanding of the comprehensive impact of conflict on children but also diminishes the urgency with which policymakers address child-centered interventions. As a result, vital programs such as trauma recovery or educational initiatives for displaced children are often neglected. The framing of children in the media directly shapes public perceptions and, consequently, policy responses. When children are framed primarily as passive victims or, in some cases, as perpetrators (such as child soldiers), the narrative becomes confined to immediate humanitarian relief efforts. This narrow perspective overlooks the structural factors—such as poverty, lack of access to education, and social displacement—that exacerbate children's vulnerability in conflict zones like Plateau State (Iyengar, 1991). As Putnam and Holmer (1996) assert, framing and reframing are essential in conflict resolution processes. In Plateau State, reframing media narratives to address both the immediate and long-term needs of children could shift the focus of humanitarian and policy interventions. By adopting a more comprehensive approach to media framing—one that considers the structural challenges faced by children—policymakers could implement more sustainable solutions aimed at recovery, resilience, and reintegration. Media framing significantly influences public perceptions of children affected by conflict, particularly in conflict-prone regions such as Plateau State, Nigeria. The portrayal of these children in media narratives is often sensationalized, focusing primarily on their victimhood and immediate suffering. This narrow framing fails to address the broader systemic issues that contribute to their continued vulnerability, such as lack of access to education, mental health support, and long-term rehabilitation. Consequently, this skewed representation diminishes the potential for meaningful, child-



centered policy interventions. According to framing theory, media coverage that offers a more balanced and nuanced depiction of these children's experiences could prompt stakeholders to adopt more holistic strategies for conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance in Plateau State. This shift would ensure that the long-term needs of children are prioritized, facilitating more sustainable support and recovery efforts.

- **Objective two:** Analyze the implications of these frames for public perception and intervention efforts. The media's framing of vulnerable groups, particularly children in conflict zones like Plateau State, significantly impacts both public perception and intervention strategies. Media frames not only shape how the public understands these issues but also influence the responses from policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and the international community. The dominant narratives constructed by the media can lead to skewed perceptions of the conflict's nature and, consequently, affect the types of solutions that are implemented. Entman (1993) argues that media frames are pivotal in determining which aspects of an issue become salient to the audience. In conflict zones, the media's focus on dramatic or sensational events often overshadows the underlying causes of the conflict and the broader experiences of vulnerable groups such as children. This framing can result in a narrow public understanding of the complexities involved.

For instance, when media frames children in Plateau State primarily as passive victims or, conversely, criminalizes their involvement in violence, it limits the public's grasp of their complex needs. This framing can lead the public to view these children either as helpless victims deserving pity or as potential threats, depending on the media portrayal (Iyengar, 1991). Such simplified narratives reduce the issue's depth and fail to generate the sustained empathy required for effective long-term support. Kitzinger (2004) notes that media representations of children in distress often evoke immediate emotional responses, leading to short-term humanitarian actions but failing to address the structural issues perpetuating their suffering. In Plateau State, while media coverage of displaced children or attacks on schools might prompt temporary aid, it does not necessarily lead to sustained pressure on policymakers to address the systemic causes of vulnerability, such as disrupted education, trauma, and displacement. Anjide and Amaechi (2022) observe that media emphasis on immediate crises often results in reactive interventions. For instance, if the media highlights the displacement of children, humanitarian organizations might provide temporary shelters or food aid. However, this approach can neglect proactive measures needed to address the root causes of the conflict, such as improving education for displaced children or offering mental health services. Conversely, more nuanced and comprehensive media narratives can foster proactive policy approaches. By emphasizing the long-term educational and psychological needs of children in conflict zones, the media can encourage policymakers and international actors to invest in rebuilding schools, training counselors, and providing ongoing educational support (Iyengar, 1991). Such proactive interventions are essential for addressing the systemic vulnerabilities faced by children in conflict-affected areas like Plateau State.

## Conclusion

The media framing of children affected by conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria, offers profound insights into how these portrayals influence public perception and shape intervention strategies.





The media's portrayal of these children frequently highlighting their victimization or sensationalizing their involvement in violence has significant implications for both public understanding and the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. When the media predominantly frames children as passive victims, it tends to evoke immediate emotional reactions that drive short-term humanitarian aid. However, this approach often neglects the broader, systemic issues that contribute to their prolonged suffering, such as disruptions in education, inadequate mental health support, and challenges related to social reintegration. Such a narrow focus results in reactive policy measures that address only the most visible aspects of distress while overlooking the need for sustainable, long-term solutions.

Moreover, the marginalization and underreporting of children's specific needs in media coverage further impede the implementation of effective interventions. When media narratives emphasize political and ethnic dimensions of the conflict, the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by children such as trauma recovery, educational disruption, and family separation—are often overshadowed. This selective reporting not only diminishes public awareness but also reduces the impetus for policymakers to address the structural causes of children's vulnerability.

To advance a more comprehensive understanding and foster more effective policy responses, a shift in media framing towards a more nuanced portrayal of children in conflict is essential. By highlighting both the immediate and long-term needs of affected children, media coverage can facilitate more holistic and proactive intervention strategies. Such an approach would enhance public empathy and ensure that humanitarian efforts address the root causes of vulnerability, thereby supporting more sustainable solutions for children in conflict-affected regions like Plateau State. In summary, media framing plays a critical role in shaping how children affected by conflict are perceived and supported. A transition towards more detailed and balanced reporting is crucial for improving public understanding, influencing policy, and leading to more effective and comprehensive responses to the challenges faced by these vulnerable populations.

### Recommendation

The following recommendations were made:

1. Station managers should create and disseminate comprehensive guidelines for media reporting on children affected by conflict.
2. Station managers should provide media literacy and training programs for journalists and media practitioners on the ethical reporting of conflict-affected children.

### References

- Abbass, M. I. (2012). No retreat no surrender: Conflict for survival between Fulani Pastoralists and Farmers in Northern Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 8 (1), 331-346.
- Adamu, A. & Ben, C. (2018). Peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Nigeria: The case of Plateau State. *African Journal of Political Science*, 12(3), 29-45.
- Adeniran, R., Suleiman, H., Ajaga, M. & Kayode, J. (2015). Representation of Children in the Nigerian News Media. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication* 12, (1); 160-183.



- Akinyetun, T. S. (2016). Staff to gun: Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 4 (8).
- Amarakoon, L. (2003). Children in media: current situation in Sri Lanka. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273831528\\_Children\\_in\\_media\\_current\\_situation\\_in\\_Sri\\_Lanka](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273831528_Children_in_media_current_situation_in_Sri_Lanka).
- Anjide, E. A., & Amaechi, A. (2022). The intractability of violent conflict in Nigeria: A study of Plateau State. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 23(1), 45-67.
- Bello, T. (2020). The effect of conflict on education: A case study of Plateau State, Nigeria. *Journal of African Development Studies*, 18(2), 101-116.
- Buechler, S., (2000). *Social movements in advanced Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chidozie, E. U. (2016). Revisiting indigene and settler conflict in Plateau State (Jos): The paradox of citizenship in Nigeria. Retrieved on 26th January, 2022 from [www.google.com](http://www.google.com).
- Cinjel, N. D. & Ugwoke, C. J. (2019). Can two wrongs make a right? Herders and farmers conflicts on the Plateau: The study of Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, 2001-2018. *Journal of Social Service and Welfare*, 1(3): 21-32.
- Coyne, S.M., Ward, L.M., Kroff, S.L., Davis, E.J., Holmgren, H.G., Jensen A.C., & Essig L.W. (2019). Contributions of mainstream sexual media exposure to sexual attitudes, perceived peer norms, and sexual behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Adolescent. Health.* ; 64:430–436. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.11.016.
- Danfulani, U. (2005). The Jos peace conference and the indigene/settler question in Nigerian politics. University of Jos, Nigeria.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Goonasekera, A. (2001). *Children in the News: reporting of children's issues in television and the press in Asia*. Asian Media Communication and Information Centre.
- Gray, B., (2003). Framing of environmental disputes. In R. Lewicki, B. Gray, & M. Elliott (Eds.), *Making sense of intractable environmental conflicts: Concepts and cases* (pp. 11-34), Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Gunasekera H. D. E., Abeysekara T. B., & Weerasinghe, T. (2021). A study on the legal applicability of methods used by the Sri Lankan media in reporting child sex offenses. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 5(5), 461–466.
- Haque, A., Janson, S., Moniruzzaman, S., Fazlur Rahman, A. K. M., Islam, S. S., & Mashreky, S. R. (2020). Child maltreatment portrayed in Bangladeshi newspapers. *Child Abuse Review*, 29(5), 448–462.
- Hong Y., & Kim S. (2020). Influence of presumed media influence for health prevention: How mass media indirectly promote health prevention behaviors through descriptive norms. *Health Communication*; 35:1800–1810. doi: 10.1080/10410236.2019.1663585.
- Huang H. (2016). Media use, environmental beliefs, self-efficacy, and pro-environmental behavior. *J. Bus. Res*; 69:2206–2212.



- Humanium (2015). Children rights and international protection. Available at: Children's Rights and International Protection - Humanium.
- International Federation of Journalists (1998). Guidelines and principles for reporting on issues involving children. Available at: Children's Rights and Media: Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children | CRIN.
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kunkel, D., Smith, S., Suding, P., & Biely, E. (2006). Informative or not? Media coverage of child social policy issues. In A. Ben-Arieh, R. M. Goerge (eds.), *Indicators of Children's Well Being*. Social Indicators Research Series, volume 27. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Lee Y.C. (2022). News consumption and green habits on the use of circular packaging in online shopping in Taiwan: An extension of the theory of planned behavior. *Front. Psychol.* 2022;13:1025747. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1025747.
- Lonne, B., & Parton, N. (2014). Portrayals of child abuse scandals in the media in Australia and England: impacts on practice, policy, and systems: most media coverage distorts the public understandings of the nature of child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(5), 822–836.
- Maharani, P. (2018). Portraying the multitudes: representation of identities of sexual minorities on Indonesia-based feminist web magazine Magdalene.co. *Journal of Southeast Asian Human Rights*, 2(2), 358–388.
- Merchant, R. (2010) Who are abusing our children? An exploratory study on reflections on child abuse by media commentators. *Doctoral Dissertation. Massey University*.
- Nair, P. (2019). Child sexual abuse and media: coverage, representation and advocacy. *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond*, 6(1), 38–45.
- Naylor, B., Lecturer, S. (2001). Reporting violence in the British print media: gendered stories. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 40(2), 180–194.
- Niner, S., Ahmad, Y., & Cuthbert, D. (2013). The 'social tsunami': media coverage of child abuse in Malaysia's English-language newspapers in 2010. *Media, Culture and Society*, 35(4), 435–453.
- Olga, P., & Krapivnaja E. (2016). Socio-legal issues of UNICEF activities in protecting children's rights in Russia. *Int. Sci. Re*;2:152–155.
- Onyemelukwe, C. (2016). Mental health consequences of conflict in Nigeria: A focus on children. *Nigerian Journal of Psychiatry*, 10(1), 22-35.
- Plateau Peace Building Agency (2018). *Plateau State road map to peace. PPBA Strategic Action Plan (2018 – 2022)*. A publication of the Plateau State Government.
- Putnam, L. L., & Holmer, M. (1996). Framing, reframing, and issue development. In J. A. Folger & T. S. Jones (Eds.), *New directions in mediation: Communication research and perspectives* (pp. 128-147). Sage.
- Taft, P., Blyth, R., & Murphy, C. (2016). Children and conflict in Nigeria. *International Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 17(3), 21-33.
- Taft, P., Blyth, H. & Murphy, C. (2016). Impacts of conflict, violence on women and girls in Plateau.



- Terre des Hommes International Federation (2014). Child safeguarding guidance for journalists. 1st Edition. Available at: KCSjournalismguidance\_low.pdf (terredeshommes. org).
- The Children Act (2013). Ministry of Law. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Available at: Bangladesh – Children's Act, 2013 (Act No. 24 of 2013). (ilo.org).
- Thilakarathne, N. (2016). The impact of media reporting on child abuse and neglect in Sri Lanka. In 17th Conference on Postgraduate Research, International Postgraduate Research Conference, Faculty of Graduate Studies. University of Kelaniya: Sri Lanka, 2016.
- Thomas, H., Hye-Jin, P., Thomas, I. & Richard, T. C. (2013) Newspaper portrayals of child abuse: frequency of coverage and frames of the issue. *Mass Communication and Society*, 16(1), 89–108.
- Saint-Jacques, M.-C., Villeneuve, P., Turcotte, D., Drapeau, S., & Ivers, H. (2012). The role of media in reporting child abuse. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 38(3): 292–304.
- Singh, M. M., Parsekar, S. S., & Nair, S. N. (2014). An epidemiological overview of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 3(4), 430–435.
- UNICEF. (2018). *Children displaced by conflict in Nigeria: A report on the situation in Plateau State*. United Nations Children's Fund.
- Weatherred, J. (2015). Child sexual abuse and the media: a literature review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24(1), 16–34.