



## Cultural Practices against Women in Nigeria: The Media Frames and the Challenges

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**ABSTRACT:** This study set out to investigate the patterns of framing of cultural practices against women by the media in Nigeria; as well as the challenges of framing the practices in South East Nigeria. The major objectives were to determine the frequency of coverage, the framing patterns and the constraints to media coverage. The survey method was employed to study a sample of 276 journalists in South East Nigeria using the questionnaire as instrument for data collection to determine their opinions about the challenges of media coverage of the practices. Also, content analysis method was employed to study the frequency of coverage of the practices in select radio, television and newspaper contents; as well as to determine framing patterns. In the end, it was found that both radio and television stations gave adequate coverage to the practices while the newspapers' level of coverage was low. It was also found that the patterns of framing ranges from condemnatory stance to revealing the consequences on the societal development and to clamouring for review, amendment and eradication of the practices. However, challenges of coverage were lack of enabling laws, family and religious link to practices, sacredness and secrecy of the practices, etc. It is, therefore, recommended that the media, policy makers, NGOs, community leaders, etc should find ways of ameliorating the identified hitches so as to enable hitch-free coverage of cultural practices so that analysis would be pragmatic.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Practices, Challenges, Framing, Media, Women.

### INTRODUCTION

Cultural practices against women are those culture-based activities that demean womanhood or make women to be seen by observers as less human. Nigerian women have suffered various forms of gender-induced violence and discriminatory cultural practices from pre-colonial, through the colonial era and afterwards. Not even civilisation and Western education has changed most men's perception of the Nigerian woman. Here, women are still regarded as a variety of humanity inferior to the menfolk and are therefore treated in manners undeserving of human beings (Nwaolikpe, 2018).

In Nigeria and Africa generally, women are considered as tools to be used by men. They are regarded as objects to be used for pleasure, temptation and elimination (Nsereka & Enyinda, 2018). The recent statement credited to President Buhari that women belong to the kitchen and "the other room" buttresses this point. In Nigeria, a man will beat his wife and nothing will happen, instead they will expect her to go on her knees and beg him.

Cultural practices against women is evident in many forms, including domestic, verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, early and forced marriages, incest and female genital cutting. In most societies, physical abuse is often considered an acceptable behaviour, and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting men to engage in it (Odimegwu, 2001).

Against the above scenario, media coverage of the activities associated with practices against women becomes an important aspect of media functions. It would create the necessary awareness needed by society to be abreast of the goings-on that may hinder development. To do this, it is also pertinent that such coverage comes with framed reports. Framing, thus, would direct the perception of the audience such as taking condemnatory stances against such practices that demean women in the society. Previous studies have focused on one aspect of culture or limited geographical span, including Ihechu, Okugo, Amah and Afulike (2017): the practices in Rivers State; Obaji (2018): violence against women; Nsereka and Enyinda (2018): portrayal of women in movies; and Odimegwu (2001): domestic violence in Benue State only.

This study set the stage to fill the various gaps by ascertaining the framing of different practices against women by the media in the entire South Eastern part of Nigeria. In so doing, the framing patterns and the problems associated with the coverage of the practices would be ascertained albeit focusing on the enormous potentials and responsibilities of the media as agents of social change.



## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There have been clamours, through humanitarian programmes, for a retreat from these cultural practices that demean the personality and position of women in the society. However, these programmes may be hampered without a well planned involvement of the mass media which will result in mass awareness creation thereby fostering a good understanding of harmfulness of these practices and erase erroneous perceptions or impressions towards certain practices against women, and the underlying cultural underpinning of the practices.

Moreover, cultural practices against women have been described as relational vices that are endemic across all societies within and outside the continent of Africa. The United Nations recent declaration stressed the need for all hands to be on deck to eradicate these practices across Africa and world over. Similarly, a review of the extant literature reveals that cultural practices against women have not received much attention with respect to the role to be played or being played by the mass media. This study therefore considers the potency of media coverage of an issue in bringing such issue to limelight, fostering and instigating as well as setting agenda on such issues. To do this, the level of media coverage of cultural practices against women in south East Nigeria needs to be determined vis a vis the framing patterns. To what extent, therefore, have the media framed the issues of cultural practices against women in Nigeria? The answer to this poser would aid the solving of the problem of this study.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. determine the frequency of coverage of cultural practices against women in the media in Nigerian;
- ii. ascertain the framing patterns of cultural practices against women in the Nigerian media; and
- iii. determine the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women in the Nigerian.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Cultural Practices at a Glance

Nigeria like any other countries of the world (especially, those in Africa) is characterised by rich cultural heritage, which in turn has given birth to several cultural practices, that have invariably, impacted both positively and negatively on her people. Some of these cultural practices include extended family practice, adequate care for new mothers, forty days after delivery, prolonged breast feeding, respect for elders, among others. Despite these understandably welcome cultural observations, other cultural practices/customs as emphasised by Omonubi-MC-Donnel (2003) in Nwammuo (2015) ignite the concerns about their import in a modern society. They include:

- i. Customs that permit early marriage;
- ii. Customs that permit older man in their 50s and 70s to marry 14 year-olds and those that allow girls to be kept out of school and be used as domestic and cultivation assistants;
- iii. Customs that condone child abuse and child molestation;
- iv. Customs that control women's bodies and their products;
- v. Customs that encourage female genital mutilation;
- vi. Customs that reduce the worth of educate wives;
- vii. Overburden and relegate women to the background;
- viii. Customs that encourage harmful widowhood rites;
- ix. Etc.

### The Role of the Media

Today, using popular art forms with the available modern media has helped strengthen the national bonds that Africans desire to forge ahead. This cultural and communication hybridisation has also encouraged the African resolve to accept what is good whilst perfecting one's own cultural dimensions. After decades of existence, the various African media have given rise to a number of issues; questions abound as to whether they are playing a significant role in new development strategies and how they are meeting their goals. In African societies, the social function of the media is coupled with a political-ideological dimension in order to create a consensus in favour of a national ideology. This explains, and in many ways justifies, the subsequent function of African media and above all, their role as instruments of political power. In addition to their political function, other aspects of the development



process have been assigned by society to the various national media according to major socio-economic development priorities: adult literacy, increased agricultural productivity, promotion of social welfare, and health among the population (Nigerian Tribune, 2016).

Media today, from traditional legacy media to online media, still hugely influence our perceptions and ideas about the role of girls and women in society. What we have unfortunately seen until now is that media tend to perpetuate gender inequality. Research shows that from a young age, children are influenced by the gendered stereotypes that media present to them. It has also been found that exposure to stereotypical gender portrayals and clear gender segregation correlates with:

- a. preferences for 'gender appropriate' media contents and activities;
- b. traditional perceptions of gender roles, occupations and personality traits; as well as
- c. attitudes towards expectations and aspirations for future trajectories of life.

There is strong belief in the transformative role that media can play in achieving gender equality in societies. This can be achieved by creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes; and by challenging traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions both in content and in the media houses. There is also need to show women in leadership roles and as experts on a diversity of topics on a daily basis, not as an exception. Without information women do not know about and cannot exert their rights to education, to property, etc.; and they cannot challenge existing norms and stereotypes. This makes it impossible to achieve inclusive societies as we aim to achieve through the Global Development Agenda. Access to information empowers women to claim their rights and make better decisions (Nwamuo, 2015).

The media industry needs to be encouraged to produce gender-transformative content and to develop self-regulatory equality policies, including access to decision-making positions. The safety of women has in recent years developed into a serious concern, as it creates another obstacle to gender equality within the society. The majority of female women experience gender specific harassment both inside their homes, outside of them, and more increasingly within culturally controlled organisations. Gender-based violence (GBV) pose a threat to freedom of expression and access to information. Silencing women's opinions constitutes an attack on democracy itself as it leads to self-censorship: women retreating from the public sphere because of the harassment. The nature of the treatment meted to women in the society requires media intervention to enhance the eradication of certain cultural practices against women in Nigeria and Africa. It is based on this that Brown (2018) recommends as follows:

1. The mass media should recognise the crucial role of media in achieving discrimination-free cultural practices in all domains by creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes as forms of frames in form of initiatives to enlighten the public about human rights
2. Media should lead the way towards promoting human rights advocacy against such practices that annihilate the sanctity of women in the society. For this to happen, there is need for coherent policies, rules, and mechanisms on all levels, starting with national media policies and media industry self-regulation.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Framing Theory served as the framework for this study. The concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. Framing is an important topic since it can have a big influence and therefore the concept of framing expanded to organisations as well. Framing techniques according to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) entails:

- i. **Metaphor:** To frame a conceptual idea through comparison to something else.
- ii. **Stories (myths, legends):** To frame a topic via narrative in a vivid and memorable way.
- iii. **Tradition (rituals, ceremonies):** Cultural mores that imbue significance in the mundane, closely tied to artefacts.
- iv. **Slogan, jargon, and catchphrase:** To frame an object with a catchy phrase to make it more memorable and relate-able.
- v. **Artefact:** Objects with intrinsic symbolic value – a visual/cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the object itself.
- vi. **Contrast:** To describe an object in terms of what it is not.
- vii. **Spin:** To present a concept in such a ways as to convey a value judgment (positive or negative) that might not be immediately apparent; to create an inherent bias by definition.



Framing is the way a communication source defines and constructs any piece of communicated information. Framing is an unavoidable part of human communication – we all bring our own frames to our communications. In relation to this study, we focused on the frames in the coverage of cultural practices against women in the Nigerian media and the patterns of the frames in line with Fairhurst and Sarr's (1996) techniques to determine the focus of the frames either for or against such as education about the practices, exposition of ills of the practices, condemnatory, advocacy for eradication or neutral stance as well as promoting the practices.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed methods approach involving the triangulation of the survey design and content analysis. Ohaja (2003) cited in Ihechu and Ukaegbu (2018) states that whenever the major source of opinions of members of the public on any particular group is through search for views, then, survey is most appropriate. Thus the opinions of journalists in South East Nigeria were surveyed to determine the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women in South East Nigeria.

For content analysis, Baran (2010) in Ihechu and Ukaegbu (2018) states that content analysis is the most appropriate to present a platform for objective, systematic and quantitative description of the contents of communication. Thus the content analysis provided the opportunity to evaluate the slant of stories about cultural practices against women in select media. The two methods were triangulated to juxtapose findings from both to enhance quality of results for generalisation.

There were three populations for this study. The first population was 900 consisting of all the programme schedules of the 10 radio and TV stations for January, February and March 2019 (i.e. 90 days each station). The stations studied were those owned by the five South East states of Abia (BCA-Radio and BCA-TV, Umuahia), Anambra (ABS Radio and ABS TV, Awka), Ebonyi (EBBC Radio and EBBC TV, Abakiliki), Enugu (EBS Radio and EBS TV, Enugu) and Imo (IBC Radio and IBC TV, Owerri). The second population was 270 and included all the editions of the three newspapers for the months of January, February and March, 2019 (i.e. 90 editions each of *Thisday*, *Punch* and *Daily Sun*). The third population was 974 and was made up of reporters, editors and journalists in the five South Eastern states of Abia (205), Anambra (158), Ebonyi (144), Enugu (227) and Imo (240). These figures were gotten from the Nigerian Union of Journalists in each of the states. Here, the sample size was 276 which was calculated using the online sample size calculator at [surveysystem.com](http://surveysystem.com) (at 0.05 confidence interval and 95% confidence level). The systematic random sampling technique was used to select the sample units from the state NUJ registers which presented the sampling frames after proportionately allocating sample units to each state chapter of NUJ.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

For the rating scales, the modified 5-point Likert scale was used as follows: Strongly Agreed: SD = 5; Agreed: A = 4; Fairly Agreed: FA = 3; Disagreed: D = 2; strongly Disagreed: SD = 1. To determine the mean scores, the formula,  $\bar{x} = \sum fx / \sum f$  employed where:  $\bar{x}$  = mean score;  $f$  = frequency of the scores and  $x$  = scores on the scale. In the end, mean scores that are 3.0 and above (i.e.  $\geq 3.0$ ) were considered significant and therefore accepted for generalisation while score below 3.0 were considered insignificant and thus, were rejected. Out of 276 copies of questionnaire administered to journalists, 265 copies were valid for analysis. For the contents, simple percentage determination was used to ascertain the presence/absence of the units of analysis in the media contents studied which involved descriptive analysis.

## Research Question One: What is the frequency of the coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigerian media?

The frequency of coverage of cultural practices against women was determined through content analysis of the programmes of the state-government-owned radio and TV stations in South East Nigeria, as well as the three newspapers under study. The data generated from the contents of broadcast media under study are presented in Table 1 below.



**Table 1:** Broadcast Media Framing of Culture Practices against Women

Broadcast Media	Total number of Programme Genres (Gn) and number of Times Cultural Practices Against Women are Frame (Fn)											
	News		Drama/ Soap		Commentary/ Documentary		Discussion/ Interview		Religion		All Content	
	Gn	Fn	Gn	Fn	Gn	Fn	Gn	Fn	Gn	Fn	Gn	Fn
ABS-Radio Awka	478	86	124	42	62	11	186	40	155	52	1,005	231
ABS-TV AWKA	219	67	212	63	98	18	220	48	182	64	931	260
EBBC-Radio Abakiliki	496	99	106	34	65	13	194	43	164	48	1027	237
EBBC- TV Abakiliki	224	71	198	66	110	29	242	24	191	51	965	241
ESBS-Radio Enugu	522	104	133	51	104	22	215	32	182	68	1156	277
ESBS-TV Enugu	238	78	246	72	122	37	237	28	211	39	1054	254
BCA-Radio Umuahia	508	102	127	48	64	15	192	32	184	55	1075	252
BCA-TV Umuahia	227	82	234	67	92	17	228	42	222	47	1003	255
IBC-Radio Owerri	546	133	108	35	102	20	209	52	173	53	1138	293
IBC-TV Owerri	242	85	232	69	118	24	241	35	195	39	1028	252
<b>Total</b>	<b>3700</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>1,720</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>2164</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>10385</b>	<b>2552</b>
Percent (%)	100	25	100	32	100	22	100	17	100	28	100	25

Table 1 contains the data generated from the frequency of radio and TV programmes genres (Gn) in relation to the frequency of the frames of the cultural practices against women (Fn). Thus, out of 3,700 news presentations, 907 had frames that dwelt on the practices under study; indicating that 25% of the observed news items had contents that concerned issues of cultural practices against women.

Also, out of 1,720 drama/soap opera presentations, 547 had contents that touched on practices against women culture-wise. This implied that 32% of the drama/soap programmes framed aspects of the cultures that are considered to be against women. For commentary and documentary presentations, 206 of the programmes framed cultural issues that affect women out of a total of 937; thereby indicating 22% coverage of the issues under study through commentaries and documentaries.

Furthermore, out of 2,164 discussion and interview programmes, 376 captured issues relating to cultural practices against women. This presupposes that 17% of those presentations framed the issues under study. Finally, 516 religion programmes framed the cultural issues out of 1,861 of such programmes. By implication, 28% of the religion programmes framed cultural issues against women in Nigeria.

In all, there were 10,385 programmes cutting across genres out of which 2,552 framed issues relating to cultural practices against women. Therefore, 25% of the programme airings in both radio and TV stations in South East Nigeria had something to do with cultural practices against women. This frequency was considered significant considering numerous topical issues covered by the media nowadays. This result could have been as a result of the high level of journalists’ awareness of the cultural issues and practices that affect women in the society.

**Table 2:** Newspaper Framing of Cultural Practices against Women

Newspapers	Newspaper Contents (Cn) and the number of Times Cultural Practices against Women are Framed (Fn)											
	News		Columns		Editorials		Comments/ Features		Cartoons/Pics		All Contents	
	Cn	Fn	Cn	Fn	Cn	Fn	Cn	Fn	Cn	Fn	Cn	Fn
<b>Thisday</b>	3111	103	304	18	108	7	282	14	205	15	4010	157
<b>Punch</b>	3124	98	222	21	108	3	316	16	189	10	3959	148



Daily Sun	3013	101	237	19	108	5	304	13	252	19	3912	157
Total	9248	302	763	58	324	15	902	43	646	44	11881	462
(%)	100	3.3	100	7.6	100	4.6	100	4.7	100	6.8	100	3.9

Table 2 contains the data from the three national newspapers in relation to the frequency of contents (Cn) and the frequency of framed cultural practices against women (Fn). Out of 9,248 news stories, only 302 (3.3%) stories framed issues relating to cultural practices against women. Contents from columnists were 763 out of which 58 (7.6%) framed the issues under study. Further, 324 editorials were analysed with 15 (4.6%) of them referencing the issues under study. Comments and feature stories were 902 out of which 43 (4.7%) framed issues concerning cultural practices against women in Nigeria. Finally, 646 cartoons and photographs were studied from which 44(6.8%) were found to frame the cultural practices against women. In all, out of a total of 11,881 contents in the three newspapers within the period under study, only 462 had frames that pertain to cultural practices against women. This implied that only 3.9% of the entire newspaper contents considered cultural practices against women worthy of being brought to the attention of readers.

Comparatively, the broadcast media had more contents that framed the cultural practices against women (Gn =10,385; Fn = 2552 (25%) than the newspapers (Cn = 11,881; Fn 462 (3.9%). In relation to the first research question, there was ample coverage of cultural practices against women by the radio and TV stations; whereas, the coverage by the newspapers would be said to be extremely low considering the established high level of awareness of the practices and their implications for the society.

**Research Question Two: What are the patterns of framing cultural practices against women in the Nigerian media?**

The patterns of frames in the Nigerian media were determined by looking at the slant of frames in identified cultural practice categories as exhibited in the contents of the studied radio and TV programmes as well as the newspaper contents. The data are displayed in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Patterns of Frames about Cultural Practices against Women

Categories of Cultural Practices	Patterns of Frames							Total (%)
	Education about cultural practices	Exposing ills of the practices	Condemnatory stance	Neutral stance	Advocacy for change in practice and beliefs	Promoting sustenance of practices		
Exclusion from Inheritance	74	79	92	63	89	27	424 (14)	
Male child preference syndrome	84	64	109	57	85	32	431 (14)	
Widowhood practices	93	66	71	82	101	51	464 (15)	
Domestic abuses	90	81	77	55	75	43	421 (14)	
Exclusion from family and community decision process	68	88	74	52	81	45	408 (13)	
Wife inheritance	53	67	83	20	53	20	291 (9)	
Female genital mutilation	63	65	69	50	101	31	379 (12)	
Early/betrothed marriage	55	59	68	32	54	23	291 (9)	
Total (%)	580 (19)	569 (18)	643 (21)	411 (13)	639 (20)	272 (9)	3114 (100)	



Table 3 above contains the identified patterns of frames about cultural practices against women in the 10 broadcast stations and the three newspapers studied. The categories of cultural practices were framed in radio, television and newspapers. As such, exclusion of women from inheriting properties was framed 424 times making up 14% of the total number of frames. Also, the syndrome of preferring male children by Nigerian/African families was framed 431 times (14%); while widowhood cultural practices was framed 464 times (15%). Cultural practices that could lead to domestic abuses of women were framed 421 times (14%); practices pertaining to exclusion of women from family and, or community decision making processes were framed 408 times (13%). Further, the practices that give men the right to inherit late brother’s or other relation’s wives were framed 291 times (9%); while practices relating to female female genital mutilation were framed 379 times (12%). Finally, practices relating to child, early or betrothed marriages were framed 291 times (9%). Cumulatively, all the cultural practices against women in South East Nigeria were framed 3,114 times in the media outlets studied.

In relation to the patterns of frames, the distribution of the data in Table 4 above shows that 634 or 21% of the frames condemned the cultural practices against women in South East Nigeria; while 639 or 20% advocated for the practices and beliefs to be amended or eradicated. However 580 or 19% frames focused on educating the public about cultural practices against women; while 569 (18%) dwelt on revealing the ills and negative implications of the cultural practices against women in the society. Nevertheless, 411 or 13% of the frames were neutral about the cultural practices; while 272 (9%) of them tilted towards promoting the practices.

In view of the second research question there were six framing patterns about cultural practices against women. However, the results show that the media under study engaged in framing cultural practices against women in four ways that promoted human rights enlightenment in the following order:

- i. Condemning the practices;
- ii. Clamouring for reviewing, amending or eradicating the practices
- iii. Enlightening the populace about the practices; and
- iv. Exposing the evils in the practices.

The results also show that:

- i. one pattern of frame neither promoted no demoted the practices by maintaining neutral stance about the practices; and
- ii. the last pattern demoted enlightenment by promoting and encouraging the sustenance (albeit subtly) of the cultural practices that demean the value of women and impinge on their human rights in the society.

**Research Question Three: What are the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria?**

To ascertain the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices in Nigeria, the journalist were made to rate five indices of measurement. The data from their responses are as presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4:** Constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria

Indices	Rating	SA	A	FA	D	SD	Total	Xi
	X	5	4	3	2	1	N=5	
There are no enabling laws to back up media inquisition into cultural practices.	F	88	98	53	21	5	265	3.91>3.0 significant 78%
	Fx	440	392	159	42	5	1,038	
	%	33	37	20	8	2	100	
Most of the cultural practices are linked to family beliefs and religions	F	117	72	45	26	5	265	4.00>3.0 significant 80%
	Fx	585	288	135	52	2	1,062	
	%	44	27	17	10	2	100	
Most of the cultural practices are considered sacred by the communities and are observed in secrecy	F	98	74	53	29	11	265	3.82>3.0 significant 76%
	Fx	490	296	159	58	11	1,014	
	%	37	28	20	11	4	100	



Some members of the communities still hold tight to such practices because they benefit from them	<i>F</i>	119	69	48	16	13	265	4.0>3.0 significant 80%
	<i>F<sub>x</sub></i>	595	276	144	32	13	1,060	
	%	45	26	18	6	5	100	
Infrastructural enablers such as access roads, electricity, high cost of living, finance and manpower are near non-existent in the rural areas	<i>F</i>	74	101	69	13	8	265	3.83>3.0 significant 76%
	<i>F<sub>x</sub></i>	370	404	207	26	8	1,015	
	%	28	38	26	5	3	100	
Cumulative Average Score, $x_{ii} = (3.91+4.0+3.82+4.0+3.83)/5 = 19.56/5 = 3.91>3.0$ ; Significant; 78%								

The respondents were subjected to rate five assumptions that served as measurement indices for determining the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria. The first index with a mean score,  $x_i$  of 3.91>3.0 (sig.@78%) affirmed the assumption that enabling laws to back up media inquiry into cultural practices are lacking and thus, affect adequate coverage of the practices. The second index with a mean score,  $x_i$  of 4.0>3.0 (sig.@80%) showed an agreement by journalists that most cultural practices are linked to family beliefs and religions; and thus hindered coverage.

Further, the third index had a mean score,  $x_i$  of 3.82>3.0; sig.@76% and indicated that the journalists agreed that the sacredness and secrecy surrounding most of the cultural practices was a challenge to adequate coverage. Also, with a mean score,  $x_i$  of 4.0>3.0 (sig.@80%), the assumption of the fourth index was confirmed by the journalists. The cultural practices against women in Nigeria are of benefit for some members of the communities. Hence, they do not support the abolition of such practices. Finally, the fifth index with a mean score ( $x_i$ ) of 3.83>3.0; sig.@76% affirmed the assumption that the absence of infrastructures in the rural areas pose a hindrance to the adequate coverage of the cultural practices against women in Nigeria.

In relation to the third research question, the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women are:

- i. Lack of enabling laws;
- ii. Family and religious link to practices;
- iii. Sacredness and secrecy of the practices;
- iv. The benefits some community members derive from the practices; and
- v. Lack of enabling infrastructure to access rural areas.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings from this study are discussed in relation to the research questions as well as in consideration of the scholarly positions in the reviewed literature.

**Research Question One: What is the frequency of coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria media?**

The findings from Tables 1 showed that there was enough coverage of cultural practices against women by the radio and television stations studied. This was made possible through drama/soap programmes, religious programmes, news programmes, commentary/documentary programmes and Discussion/Interview programmes. The nature of the broadcast media warrants them to reproduce realities of the society through their contents (Ihechu, Dike & Afulike (2018). That was why they were able to bring issues concerning cultural practices against women to bear on their content creations. Thus, through programming, the various societal issues are covered and repackaged in such a way they are beamed to the public with the aim of fostering enlightenments.

This finding corroborates the position of Ihechu (2019) that the features of the broadcast media enable them to serve as veritable tools for enlightening the populace about development issues in the society. Earlier, Akpau and Ihechu (2012) had submitted that the demonstrativeness of television medium enhances cultural reproduction and transmission. The advantageous disposition of radio and television could be said to be responsible for the recorded ample coverage of the cultural practices against women by the broadcast media.

However, the newspapers through columns, cartoon/pictures, comments/features, editorials and news gave coverage to the cultural practices against women (Table 2). But the level of coverage recorded by newspapers was very low. But one would argue that the newspapers struggle every day to compete with each other which invariably make them to concentrate on issues of the





moment so as to flow with current discourses (Ihechu, Afulike & Ubani, 2017). Also, Ihechu *et al* (2017) had early adduced reasons for low coverage of issues such as cultural practices against women. As they put it; “we live in a society overtly taken over by preponderance of political and economic issues. These issues take the media’s ‘front burner’ and such are given almost all media attention and focus (p.70).

It is also worthy to note that the citizen participation in mainstream media is regulated. Therefore, the ideological orientation of a medium such as newspaper affects what makes it to the pages of the newspapers. But the broadcast media allows more room for participatory communication because there are opportunities of members of the public to contribute to programmes, through phones, text messages and social media handles of the broadcasting outlets (Akpan & Ihechu, 2010). That is why it is usually said that broadcasting media are closer to the people because of their ability to penetrate the rural areas where majority of the practices exist (Ihechu *et al*, 2017) and where majority of women in Nigeria stay (Nwamuo, 2015). Corollary to the above, it would, therefore, be apt to say that the newspapers are far from the rural dwellers; which could be attributed to lack of basic infrastructure that impeded journalists’ access to the areas (Brown, 2018).

## **Research Question Two: What are the Partners of Framing Cultural Practices Against Women in the Nigeria Media**

Table 3 showed the different patterns that the media adopted to frame cultural practices against women. The analyses of the contents of the media indicated that the practices revolving around widowhood rites were framed, the most. These were closed followed by the framing of practices relating to the exclusion of women from inheritance, male preference over females and domestic abuse in the families. Further, the exclusion of women from inheritance, female genital mutilation, inheritance of women from deceased brother and early or betrothed marriage were framed.

Also, Table 3 contains the distribution of how these categories of cultural practices against women were framed. Thus, majority of the frames were patterned to reflect condemnatory stance of the media. This presupposes that the journalists and producers’ awareness of the practices as well as the attendant consequences on the society would have enabled the condemnatory approach to coverage. This result is in tandem with the recommendation of Ihechu *et al* (2017) that the media should present contents that would promote the understanding of the negative implication of practices against women.

Condemning the practices would enable the public to appreciate their hindering effects on human, community and national development. Therefore, noting that the human rights of women in the society is paramount for there to be changes in the positive direction (Ihechu, 2019). That was why, the media, through various presentations paid attention to the practices that are against women. This refocusing served as a form of enlightenment for the public (Brown 2018).

Another pattern of frame had to do with education about the cultural practices against women. In other words the media presented content that were geared towards educating the public about the need to expunge such practices from the society; or amend them to suit the present civilised expectations. This result strengthens the position of Okeke, Anyachie & Ezenyeaku (2012) that the media seem to be the only option for defeating the barriers of negative practices. In fact, the primary function of the media is to educate (Ihechu, 2021). That is why, there are many educative and interactive contents (especially, in the broadcast media) as to veritably set the agenda for public discussions.

In addition to the above frames, the study revealed frames that exposed ills of the practices. This, also, is an extension of the education frame, and by implication an enlightenment initiative to sensitise the masses (Ihechu, Afulike & Ubani, 2017). The ills of the practices revolved around the dehumanisation of women and girls through such practices as trauma-filled child marriage, inheriting of widows against their wishes as well as culture-supported violence against the women folk. By exposing the indulgence in the acts which are most time enveloped in secrecy (Nwaolikpe, 2018), the media bring the practices to open public discussion. The discussions hence enforce the knowledge ability of the public. In the end, contributing to ways the evils of the practices could be eradicated aids the proclamation to end such acts (De Bruyn, 2012) for the good of the society.

The frame that advocated for change in some practices and belief system was strikingly a welcome development from the media. This finding further strengthened human rights advocacy role of the media (Nigeria Tribune, 2016). The advocacy focuses on an inclusive society; where women are neither dehumanised nor disenfranchised from partaking in family affairs (Egbuo, 2005). Therefore, advocacy for the changes in such negative practices invariably promotes equal opportunities in education, religion, wealth as well as abhors inhuman treatment on anybody whether male or female. By implication, the human rights advocacy for the promotion of human dignity as enshrined in section 34 (1) (a) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that everyone is entitled to the dignity of his person. Person, here, refers to every citizen of Nigeria.



However, some of the media contents remained neutral on the issues surrounding cultural practices against women. This implied that they neither condemned nor promoted the practices. Though on the low side (13%), the result marked reluctance on the part of the media to play adequate role in influencing the eradication or amendment of the practices for a better society.

Nevertheless, some media contents minutely (9%) and inadvertently promoted the sustenance of the cultural practices against women. Thus, when the public got exposed to re-created versions of these practices without counter-contents, it would be assumed that such contents suggested sustenance. This is therefore, a misnomer on the part of the media that should be promoting human rights of the citizens

### **Research Question Three: What are the constraints to media coverage of cultural practices against women in Nigeria?**

The findings as represented by the data in Table 4 summarise the indices of constraints impinging on the adequate coverage of cultural practices against women by the Nigeria media. The constraints are, but not limited to, the five revealed by this study. First there is lack of enabling laws to back up media inquisition into some of these practices. For instance some communities see it as an intrusion when strangers inquire about their traditional practices (Nwamuo, 2015). Again the privacy laws, the right to religious practices, etc. limit the efforts of the journalists; especially when some of the women being discriminated against do not see anything wrong with the practices. It therefore, becomes a problem for the journalists to pry more than the existing laws could accommodate.

Another factor impinging on the coverage is the link between the cultural practices and the family cum religious beliefs. Some of the cultural practices in Africa function as belief system or religion (Ihechu *et al*, 2017). The people are inclined to observe the practices as family and, or, religious rites. Therefore, they become adamant to issues concerning change to the practice and as well would not be willing to divulge information relation to such practices which they hold dear and personal to themselves.

Again, the sacredness of the practices is an impediment to coverage. In most communities, it is sacrilegious for people not concerned with certain cultural engagements to witness it (Ihechu & Uchechukwu, 2018). That is why most of the rituals are carried out in secrecy and during the wee hours of the night. It, therefore, becomes almost impossible for journalists to access the practices for coverage. These practices sometimes involved cultic performances that only the initiated would either witness or partake in (Okeke *et al*, 2012). Under this scenario, the journalists become handicapped since they would not have the opportunity to get firsthand information as witnesses or be given information by the participants who consider such journalists as unqualified to be privy of the information they seek.

Another factor that impinges on coverage of cultural practices against women arises from the benefits some members of the communities get from the practices. It is important to note that some members of the communities cling to the cultural practices based on pecuniary motives. Despite understanding the retrogressive implication of such practices, they still promote them because of month watering accruals (Odimegwu, 2001). To this category of people, no matter the level of sensitisation, they keep blind eyes and turn deaf ears to positive contributions for reversing the modus operandi. In other words, they avoid contact with change initiatives and as such, journalists find it difficult to convince such people to divulge information during coverage of the practices.

The lack of basic infrastructure becomes a hindrance to media coverage of the practices in the area under study. Studies have shown that the rural areas in Nigeria lack basic infrastructure (Ihechu, 2019; Obaji, 2018). It has also been observed that most of the cultural practices against women in the country take place in the rural areas (Nwamuo, 2015). The deficiency of access roads, electricity, financial constraints as well as man power willing to travel or dwell in the rural areas set the media back in the attempt to cover and showcase cultural practices against women. It has to be noted that coverage does not take place in absentia; thus, without good roads to travel on, there is a tendency of ignoring some happenings in the affected areas (Ihechu & Okereke, 2012). Even, when there are available transport systems, they are usually costly which may be beyond the budgetary sphere of the media outfit. Nevertheless, according to Ihechu and Okereke (2012), epileptic power supply via electricity has become a recurring decimal in recent times. As at 2021, the power problem in Nigeria has deteriorated drastically (Ajaja, 2022; Udegbumam, 2022). It is, therefore, a problem for journalists and media producers to inhabit the rural areas to be able to monitor the practices. Even when they manage to stay, managing and maintaining tools become problematic because of the lack of adequate power supply impinging on them and invariably, the coverage suffers.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigerian women have suffered various forms of gender-induced violence and discriminatory cultural practices from pre-colonial, through the colonial era and afterwards. Most of these practices are obvious breeches to human rights of the women who have become victims over the years. Basically, most communities hold strongly to the practices because they fortify one form of cultural cum religious belief or the other.

In this modern age, it became paramount to enlighten the public on human rights implication of these bizarre practices and the media come handy. Understandably, the journalists in south East Nigeria are very much aware of these practices and this awareness spurred ample coverage of the practices in the different communities. The coming of the social media has given the coverage a wider reception because most of the members of the public can identify with the frames and the pattern of frames about the cultural practices against women. From the foregoing, the researchers conclude that despite some identified problems, there are ample positive frames in the media that enhance public knowledge of the negative aspects of some cultural phenomena that reduce the dignity of women in South East Nigeria

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend as follows:

- i. While radio and TV maintains adequate coverage of the practices, newspapers should increase the level of attention given to the practices so as to make the advocacy against such practices become popular among the elites in the society.
- ii. The media should remain resolute in condemning cultural practices that infringe on human rights and as such avoid frames that are neutral as well as frames that promote such practices directly or indirectly.
- iii. Policy makers, NGOs and community leaders should find ways of ameliorating the identified hitches so as to enable hitch-free coverage of cultural practices so that analysis would be pragmatic.

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