

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parents and Guardians Assessment of the Role of Conventional Media in Preventing Child Neglect in Cameroon

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Abstract

Over the years, little attention has been given to child neglect in the media. The neglect of children by their parents and caregivers is a troubling and complex social issue which has been given less importance; but, has enormous short and long term effects. With the current information superhighway, mass media - print, electronic, and online hold more substance than ever. They are expected to be at the forefront of educating the masses on what constitutes neglect, including negative effects of child neglect. Three specific objectives guide this study: to ascertain if the mass media raise awareness of child rights and responsibilities; to determine if mass media are active in reporting child neglect cases; and to establish the effects of mass media messages on child neglect on parents and guardians. Two theories are used: Agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and Framing (Goffman, 1974). The specific method of inquiry is survey. It involves 207 parents and guardians in the Buea metropolis, Cameroon. The questionnaire was constructed using concepts and constructs from the literature/theoretical framework. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (.813). Analysis incorporates descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS, with p-value significant at $p \leq 0.05$. Findings show a significant relationship ($p=0.000$) between mass media coverage and parents/guardians knowledge on children's rights and responsibilities, and that such messages have effects in terms of creating awareness and educating parents and guardians on child neglect ($p=0.000$). The study signals that mass media can serve as veritable tools to transform the cycle of child neglect. By so doing, society will learn, as UNICEF prescribes, that child care and protection are cornerstones for human progress.

Keywords: Mass Media, Conventional Media, Child Neglect, Child Care / Protection.

1. Introduction

The authors of this article attended the end of term ceremony in a nursery and primary school in Buea, Cameroon on Friday, December 15, 2023, and were taken aback by the following remarks in the head teacher's speech: *"it pains me to realize that for four school months, we still have more than half of the pupil's population without a single textbook from nursery to primary...pupils have been abandoned at the mercy of teachers and themselves...some parents don't yet understand that their children need*

constant follow-up...some learners come to school very dirty and uncombed...some learners absenting from school for no reasons...some parents completely neglecting their children's follow-up by not attending the Parents-Teachers Conference and not showing up even at the request of the administration". We found these remarks timely within the context of the current discourse on child neglect.

Parents' and caregivers' neglect of children is a troubling and complex social issue that has the potential to be misunderstood by individuals and

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misrepresented in the media. Neglect is closely related to child abuse and is often discussed in union with, and in fact eclipsed by, the larger subject of abuse. Neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse are usually combined into the term child maltreatment. These forms of maltreatment have unique causes and effects. As such, neglect is a distinct social issue that deserves its own scholarly pursuits and public awareness efforts (Habib, Ullah, Khanum, & Khan, 2023; McSherry, 2007; Tomison & Poole, 2000).

Arthur (2012) affirms that child neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide for a child's basic needs or protect the child from harm. Similar to, but distinct from child abuse, child neglect is a complex societal issue that receives limited research and media attention. Dubowitz (2013) asserts that neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. Meanwhile, Rosenman and Rodgers (2004) assert that neglect has no universally accepted definition. They also note that the identification of neglect is not a black or white issue. The lack of a standardized definition can make identification difficult and measurement of community incidence and prevalence even more difficult (Shook-Slack, Holl, Altenbernd, McDaniel, & Bush-Stevens, 2003). Gaudin, Polansky, Kilpatrick and Shilton (1996) aver that a lack of definition of what constitutes neglect could also result in children who are neglected and in need of intervention, being misclassified and not receive the services they require. Child neglect negatively affects child learning and development (Smith & Fong, 2004).

With the information superhighway, mass media hold more substance than ever. As a powerful agent of socialization which influences everyone, irrespective of age, sex, and social status, mass media should therefore be at the forefront of educating the masses on what constitutes neglect in society. More so, modernization has converted media into an indispensable part of people's lives. It can bring about desirable changes for people and keep them vigilant and informed about the world. Media as a stimulant satisfies the information needed by the people to widen their horizon. So, the information must be dispersed undiluted, ranging from those factors that result in child maltreatment being hidden in the community (Jackson, 2023; Scott & Higgins, 2011).

Mass media need to play a major role in the promotion of child development and the prevention of child neglect. Media have been playing an essential role of

placing the problem of child abuse in the minds of the public and on the political agenda (Nair, 2019), but little focus has been given to child neglect in particular which is the core of all other forms of abuses (Lonne & Gillespie, 2014). Gaudin, Polansky, Kilpatrick and Shilton (1996) agree that media should spell out what constitutes neglect. The media should define what is "normal" and what is "deviant" in society. This is likely to prevent the negative consequences of child neglect in contemporary society.

Lonne and Gillespie (ibid.) assert that the media are crucial in informing the public about neglect. This information helps build broad support for laws and system developments that enable the state to intervene into private family lives and ensure that children are protected from maltreatment. Mass media coverage sets the daily media agenda and influences public understandings of child neglect and what people believe should be done about it. Hence, media impact on policy agendas should not be underestimated. A study of all Australian newspaper stories covering abuse and neglect matters by Lonne and Gillespie (2014) highlighted that the Australian print media plays a vital role in informing the public about child abuse and neglect, but, mostly from the standpoint of criminal matters involving sexual and physical abuse rather than emotional abuse and neglect, which have the highest incidence.

Child abuse has been covered in news programmes, TV drama, films, call-in shows and soap operas, thereby reaching diverse audiences. In relation to the "rediscovery" of physical abuse in Britain in the 1960s, Parton (1985) argues that the media, far from campaigning in its own right, simply reflected the views and publications of the Battered Child Research Unit. Similarly, in the USA, it was only after the publication of "the Battered-Child Syndrome", that the national media began to take interest in the subject (Myers, 2011). Even though there had been widespread abuse of children in church-run institutions in Ireland and elsewhere throughout the 1950s and 60s, (and even today), this issue was not reported in the media until the 1990s. However, when the media finally became involved in highlighting the issue of abuse, the impact was enormous.

The growth in the number of written media articles on abused children began with two events (Goddard & Saunders, 2000; Johnson, 1995). The first was the 1962 publication in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, of the landmark paper defining

and documenting the concept of the “battered-child syndrome” (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962), the content of which was widely picked up by the newspapers of the time. The second event was one year later when the USA passed the first law dealing specifically with abused children. These two events, largely reported by the media, made the public aware of this phenomenon. Till date, maltreatment is a social problem covered by the media.

Ekwen (2015) notes that Cameroon has various legislative acts and decrees protecting children’s rights and welfare such as Section 1 of Law No. 2005/015 of 29 December 2005. Law No. 97/009 of 10 January 1997 states that torture in Cameroon has to be stopped at all cost and sanctions meted on perpetrators. Section 7 of Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 stipulates that everyone is entitled to education regardless of sex, religion, age, political opinion and social origin.

This study thus contributes conceptually, empirically and theoretically to the debate on mass media’s role in preventing child neglect in Cameroon. Although the issue is addressed gradually, the approach has been passive. Also, much focus has been given to criminal matters involving sexual and physical abuse rather than neglect which is the core of all other child abuse practices. Thus, much attention has not been given to neglect, leading to more practices of the phenomenon because of the lack of knowledge of what it is. This is the research gap that this study addresses.

The decision to conduct this study stems from many drawbacks related to media and the reporting of child neglect cases. Firstly, a small proportion of all child neglect cases receive media attention. The stories reported are often sensational and may involve tragic outcomes such as injuries or even death. Studies by Child Protection Services (CPS) in the USA show that negligence is the most common form of maltreatment. However, these issues are rarely brought up in the media.

Popovic (2018) contends that public knowledge and attitude towards child abuse are shaped through media depictions and coverage. Cohens, Ooms and Hutchins (1995); Korbin and Coulton (1996) on their part affirm that responsibility for children is not entrusted solely to parents or guardians, but to whole communities - the media inclusive. Strategies to optimize experiences of children and young people and to prevent child neglect are required to ascertain

and confront commonly held community attitudes and responses, so as to increase community awareness of issues that may affect children and young people. Prevention of neglect involves changing those individual and community attitudes, beliefs and circumstances which allow neglect to occur. This can be done by the media through awareness campaigns and agenda setting. Also, involvement of the media in raising awareness of issues affecting children is important in that, policy makers become aware and get involved in safeguarding the rights of children because inadequacy of child policy may encourage violation of child rights (Goddard, 1994; Gough, 1996).

More so, there is tremendous potential and need for media and communication to contribute towards the protection of child rights. If media, civil society, children and youth themselves are empowered to provide valid, credible and realistic information that is widely shared with and among citizens, and simultaneously educating people across a society on the rights of children as full and protected members based on international standards, then a society will gain understanding of appropriate standards for treating and protecting its children. Also, pressure will be brought to bear on governments to improve legal protection (both through codification of laws and the implementation of these laws). Parents, teachers, neighbours, children, and society will equally internalize these norms and systems of protection and practice them in daily life, thus improving the protection of human rights of their children.

In the Cameroonian context, the media focus on reporting consequences of child neglect after incidences must have happened. For instance, Serge Atangana’s report over the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) on the teenage form three student who stabbed his mathematics teacher to death in Government Bilingual High School Nkolbisson in Yaounde on January 14, 2020 traced the student to his family home. The student’s mother revealed that he became delinquent because he was neglected by his father who resides in Equatorial Guinea. Due to issues like this, neglect should be top on mass media’s agenda.

The central research question for this study is, what is the role of conventional media in preventing child neglect in the Buea Municipality? Specific questions include:

RQ1. To what extent do the conventional media in

Cameroon raise awareness of children's rights and responsibilities?

RQ2. To what extent do conventional media reports on child neglect influence parents/guardians' decisions on child neglect?

The hypotheses include:

H1. Conventional media reports on children's rights and responsibilities in Cameroon are significantly low.

H2. Conventional media messages on child neglect have a significant positive influence on parents'/guardians' decision towards child neglect.

The overall objective of this research is to provide clarity on the role of conventional media in the prevention of child neglect in Buea. Specifically, the study:

1. Ascertain the degree to which conventional media in Cameroon raise awareness of child rights and responsibilities.
2. Examines whether conventional media messages on child neglect have an influence on parents'/guardians' decisions.

2. Child Neglect as Disturbing Phenomenon

Scott (2014) states that child neglect is often considered being a failure, on the part of a caretaker, to provide adequate supervision, emotional nurturance, appropriate medical care, food, clothing, and shelter for a child. The author further notes that while other forms of maltreatment are acts of commission, neglect is an act of omission. In physical abuse or sexual abuse, a specific action by an individual can be identified. For example, sexual assault or inflicting physical harm on a child through corporal punishment. Neglect on the other hand, is a failure to act and occurs over a period of time, often without an identifiable event, and sometimes lack of clarity as to who should be responsible for such failure. However, while Scott described child neglect as an act of omission which is not easily identified, he missed some forms of neglect which can be easily identified just at a glance. For instance, physical neglect where a child is underdressed in cold weather (wearing shorts and no socks for example) is a clear indication of physical neglect (Arthur, 2012).

To Scott (2014), neglect is the failure of a parent to provide for the development of the child – where the parent is in a position to do so in one or more

of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions. Neglect is distinguished from poverty in that neglect can occur only in cases where reasonable resources are available to the family or caregiver. Child neglect manifests in non-compliance with health care recommendations, failure to seek appropriate health care, deprivation of food resulting in hunger, and the failure of a child physically to thrive. Other concerns include the exposure of children to drugs, inadequate protection from environmental dangers, abandonment, inadequate supervision, poor hygiene and educational deprivation. For Straus and Kantor (2005), "neglectful behaviour is behaviour by a caregiver that constitutes a failure to act in ways that are presumed by the culture of a society to be necessary to meet the developmental needs of a child and which are the responsibility of a caregiver to provide" (p. 20). Children born to young mothers are at a substantial risk for neglect. In 2008, the United States and local Child Protection Services (CPS) received 3.3 million reports of child abuse or neglect; 71% of the children were classified as victims of child neglect.

DePanfilis (2006) discusses three instances of neglect: mild, moderate and severe. Mild neglect usually does not warrant a report to child protection services (CPS) but might necessitate a community-based intervention (for example, a parent failing to put the child in a car safety seat). Moderate neglect occurs when less intrusive measures such as community interventions have failed or some moderate harm to the child has occurred. For example, a child consistently is inappropriately dressed for the weather such as being in shorts and sandals in the middle of winter. Meanwhile, severe neglect occurs when long-term harm has been done to the child. For instance, a child with asthma who has not received appropriate medications over a long period of time and is frequently admitted to the hospital). These neglects affect individuals, communities, and society (Peterson, Joshua, & Feit, 2014).

3. Types of Child Neglect

Dubowitz (2013) classifies child neglect into five categories: physical, educational, medical, emotional and supervisory neglect.

Physical neglect: Physical neglect means abandoning a child or refusing to accept custody; not providing for basic needs like nutrition, hygiene, or appropriate clothing. Scott (2014) complements that physical

neglect is failure of a parent or guardian to provide age appropriate physical necessities like food, clothing and shelter to a child.

Educational neglect: This is the failure to provide education and the necessary tools to participate in an educational system. This may be allowing a child to stay home from school or preventing a child from attending school without reasonable justification (like illness) or having the means to provide books and required tools but failing to purchase them (Dubowitz, 2013)

Medical neglect: Failure to provide appropriate medical care. This could occur through failure to acknowledge the seriousness of an illness or condition when a reasonable parental response would be to seek care, or the deliberate withholding of appropriate care (Arthur, 2012; Dubowitz, 2013).

Emotional neglect: Failure to provide adequate nurturing, affection, encouragement and support for a child (emotional neglect is sometimes referred to as emotional maltreatment, particularly where a caregiver belittles, calls a child names, or actively isolates and demeans a child).

Supervisory neglect: It is characterized by absence or inattention of a parent to a child and can lead to physical harm or injury, sexual abuse or, in an older child, permitting criminal behaviour.

4. Effects of Child Neglect

Generally, more severe and prolonged neglect results in more severe effects which affect the cognitive, emotional and social development of children (Gilbert et al., 2009). The effects of neglect vary according to the form or “subtype” of neglect. For example, a failure to provide adequate supervision may result in unintended injury.

The effect of neglect on children also varies according to the developmental stage in which it occurs. Neglect that occurs in the first 2 years of life has been demonstrated to be associated with childhood aggression. In babies, neglect can affect all areas of cognitive, social, and emotional functioning and can result in an impaired attachment style (Dubowitz, 2013). Strong evidence exists to support links between neglect and delays in cognitive and emotional development (Mayhew, 2011), and impaired levels of feelings of competence (Gaudin et al., 1996). Neglected children often have low self-esteem, poor impulse control, and express more negative and less

positive self-affect. They also have an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (Aldridge, 1994; Jonson-Reid, Drake, & Zhou, 2013).

Compared to adolescents not exposed to neglect in childhood, those who were exposed to neglect are more likely to engage in substance abuse, risky sexual behaviour, and demonstrate aggression and violent behaviours. These behaviours and consequences are likely to flow on to their adult lives. Adults who were neglected as children are more likely to have worse economic outcomes and are more likely to require social service support. This emphasizes the importance of a child protection system capable of an appropriate response to neglect (Habib, Ullah, Khanum, & Khan, 2023). One of the impediments to responding to child neglect is that it is often not related to one specific event, but a long-term developmental issue (McSherry, 2007).

5. Mass Media’s Role in Reporting Child Neglect and Child Abuse

Gamble and Gamble (1999) note that mass communication has the capacity to reach simultaneously many thousands of people. Mass communication simultaneously presents opportunities and limitations, both of which require consideration when planning mass media assisted eradication of social problems such as child abuse and neglect. Wellings and Macdowall (2000), drawing on Tones, Tilford, and Robinson (1990) illustrate that the strength of the mass media lies in helping to put issues on the public agenda, reinforcing local efforts, raising consciousness about issues, and conveying information. The limitations of the mass media are that they are less effective in conveying complex information, in teaching skills, in shifting attitudes and beliefs, and in changing behaviour in the absence of other enabling factors (Gatheru, 2011).

A well-focused mass media campaign and educational programme has the potential to contribute successfully to community education and the prevention of child abuse and neglect. For instance, the Mary Ellen Wilson affair, which occurred in 1874, constitutes one of the main horror stories reported by the press that contributed to the recognition of maltreatment as a social problem in the United States (American Humane Association, 2006; Watkins, 1990). A media campaign can be effective, but it means nothing unless the campaign is integrated into an overall approach dealing with the various aspects of the problem being

addressed. Whatever happens at the mass level must be supported at a grassroots level for behavioural change to occur.

Gatheru (2011) avers that child neglect is not a new phenomenon, nor is public or state concern about it. Nevertheless, fresh attempts to tackle child mistreatment are usually accompanied by the declaration that it is a new and undiscovered problem. Historically, children have been accorded little, if any, status in society. Deprived of rights and perceived as the property of their parents or guardians, children could be treated any way their owners see fit. Such attitude may present people with a means of turning a blind eye to the reality that child abuse is often perpetrated by adults well known to children, in children's own homes, and in other environments. Cycles of awareness followed by suppression have typified society's response to child sexual abuse. Mass media education and prevention campaigns present means of breaking cycles of suppression and denial.

Current abuse and neglect patterns include not only physical, sexual, and emotional, but also poor education and health, hazardous employment, early marriage, and discrimination. Stories about child maltreatment are making the headlines in newspapers because child abuse and neglect has become a recognized social problem whose consequences are being increasingly documented and discussed (Clément & Dufour, 2009; Franklin & Parton, 2001; Gilbert et al., 2009). These researchers consider that reporting of neglected children by the news media not only makes the public more aware of these cases, it also makes them realize the need to report such situations to the proper authorities. Citizens feel emotionally compelled to "do something" and assume no chances when child neglect is suspected (Welch, Heather, & Wilhelm, 2013).

The media may also play a major role in emphasizing certain categories of maltreatment and by changing the public's perceptions and awareness, thereby leading to apparent fluctuations in types of maltreatment (McCormick, 1995). Klein, Campbell, Soler, and Ghez (1997) suggest a community problem should, in some way, be related to people's greater sense of responsibility, thereby affecting attitudes about intervening.

To Hutson and Liddiard (1994), media representations are the primary source of information on social problems for many people. Maley (2000) avows that in social and cultural matters, various media

provide major platforms of debate. Media choices of subjects, participants and opinions shape the content and agenda. Lindsey (1994, p.163) adds that media has a central role in mediating information and forming public opinion. The media casts an eye on events that few of us directly experience and renders remote happenings observable and meaningful. Also, Sanders et al. (2000, pp. 939-940) remark that "media prevention needs to provide information about both the problem behaviour and how to deal with it effectively". Hutson and Liddiard (1994, p.73) add that media representations of social problems are important because of impact on "public attitudes".

6. Role of the Mass Media in Educating Audiences on Child Rights

Ekwen (2015) notes that children have human rights such as the right to education, health and a standard of living and these rights have to be respected and protected. On the contrary, children are often victims of bad treatment, negative social and cultural practices, sexual abuse and all forms of economic hazardous exploitation.

The media play a vital role in reporting on child neglect and the operation of the child protection system. Media coverage raises awareness of this issue of great public interest among victims and parents; it has an important role in prevention and in highlighting new and emerging issues and the media can also hold agencies and policy makers to account when necessary. However, any media scrutiny of a situation involving the death or injury of a child should also respect the rights and dignity of the children and the families involved (Munro, 2011).

It is apparent that the perception of the society and the young people can be reflected and identified through media's conceptualization of children and young people, and its reporting on both physical discipline of children and child abuse. Therefore, it is very much significant in reflecting and defining society's perceptions of children and young people (Franklin & Horwath, 1996), and what is and what is not acceptable behaviour towards children.

Oyero (2010) also proves that the media form and influence people's attitudes and behaviour, thereby increasing society's awareness of, and response to child abuse and neglect. The author notes that news and features aid reporting of child abuse cases, research, and intervention strategies. The study also shows that media attention to child abuse can positively impact

on public opinion, professional and political responses to children's circumstances. The media also bring forth children's issues by allowing children who have been working as domestic servants, on the streets, in factories and mines/quarries and those rehabilitated to participate in media programmes.

Bwire and Wenje (2000) affirm that as the children's issues do not make any worthy news and since their rights rarely "make news", they are going to occupy the inside pages for many years to come. This is why media are often blamed for doing too little to explain to the society what child rights issues are. Hendaus et al. (2020) also confirm that parents' knowledge on child neglect is deficient. This requires urgent intervention from sources like mass media (Habib, Ullah, Khanum, & Khan, 2023).

7. Challenges Faced by Media in Reporting Child Neglect

Informed, sensitive and professional journalism is key in media strategy to improve the quality of reporting concerning human rights and society. The daily challenge to journalists and media organisations is particularly felt in coverage of children and their rights (International Federation of Journalists, 2002).

To Franklin and Parton (1991), media reporting of child neglect is sensational, simplistic and often factually inaccurate. Moreover, the issue has been presented and framed within the parameters prescribed by dominant and traditional social values. Discussions of the rights of children and feminist critiques of patriarchy which seek to go beyond these narrow confines are largely ignored.

Lerner (1958), in his book, *"The passing of the traditional society"*, argues that the mass media can bring about innovative changes by widening the horizons of individuals. He explains the role of media as an educator, trainer, and a change agent of socio-cultural values. Therefore, as the world is mediated through mass media, the role of the media in enhancing and influencing the realization of children's rights through its coverage is paramount.

Some individuals believe that publishing horror stories about children has contributed to the social recognition of maltreatment, the adoption of laws, and the creation of institutions with more efficient mechanisms for detecting and protecting mistreated children (American Humane Association, 2006; Franklin & Parton, 1991; Johnson, 1995; Watkins,

1990). Researchers who have studied variations in reporting to child protection agencies (Jones, Finkelhor, & Halter, 2006; Whitehead, Chiodo, Leschied, & Dermot, 2004) affirm that news media coverage of child maltreatment affects the development of institutions and policy, as well as individual behaviours.

8. Framing Theory (Erving Goffman, 1974)

Use of this theory for the current study is informed by previous research (Arthur, 2012). Framing is used here to analyse how the mass media report issues of child neglect, and the angle at which they anchor the stories. Framing involves not only telling a news story in a way that makes it accessible in the audience's mind, but also making aspects of the story applicable to the larger topic being addressed. Framing helps the audience understand a topic in the short term, and also gives them a way to think about it in the future. To understand how framing works, Druckman (2011) explains that there are frames in thought (that is, how audiences think of an issue) and frames in communication (that is, how a speaker or the media describes an issue). If the frame in communication influences the audience's frame in thought around a particular issue, then there is said to be a framing effect (Druckman, 2011).

The framing effect is important when addressing child neglect, as with many other complex social issues, because the way audiences think about neglect can influence how they understand the causes of neglect, who is responsible for preventing and responding to it, and how they address it in their own lives. A review of frames around child neglect by Aubrun and Grady (2003) examined 120 news articles and several dozen TV news stories to identify key frames used in stories about child abuse and neglect. The frames include:

- Criminal atrocity: A horrible case of child abuse is perpetrated by a monstrous parent with no rational causes
- Failure of child protective services: Bureaucratic organizations and incompetent case workers are unaccountable and cannot be trusted to protect children from abuse
- The confusing line between discipline and abuse: It is difficult to determine if/when a parent has crossed the hard-to-define line of discipline and abuse

- The sanctity of the family: Organizations responding to abuse must find the balance between respecting families’ parenting decisions and protecting children.

Aubrun and Grady (2003) conclude that the way child neglect is discussed in the media limits the audience’s ability to understand the issue because it is not as interesting to talk about the nuanced factors that contribute to abuse or neglect (for instance, parenting knowledge, the family’s social or economic situation), and it is more challenging for reporters to place child neglect within the context of the larger community’s role to prevent and respond to it.

9. Agenda-Setting Theory (Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw, 1972)

This theory asserts that media audiences give more importance to the issues which have significant coverage by the media. Audience viewpoints are dependent on media coverage. This theory is instrumental in understanding child rights agenda in the media. News organizations have the ability to control the public’s agenda by choosing which topics to cover and with what frequency.

Child neglect demands urgent response from society

and the state. Children are vulnerable and require safety and opportunities for development. Media can be instrumental in setting agenda for child development, such as their right to survival, life, protection, and right to participation.

Media contents unarguably have an influence on the public perception of importance of issues. Moreover, the media, through the process of agenda setting, can immensely change attitudes into positive attributes towards children’s rights. Nyamnjoh (1995) remarks that in order to change attitudes and behaviour, an individual needs vast amounts of information and persuasion. The media can play such influential roles.

10. Operational Model for the Research

The operational model suggests that if mass media focus attention on child rights, responsibilities, neglect, care, and protection through media reports, newspaper headlines and stories, the effect will be witnessed in the actions of parents, guardians, and by extension, society. They will be informed, educated, and made aware of the importance of providing for the physical, educational, medical, emotional and supervisory needs of their children.

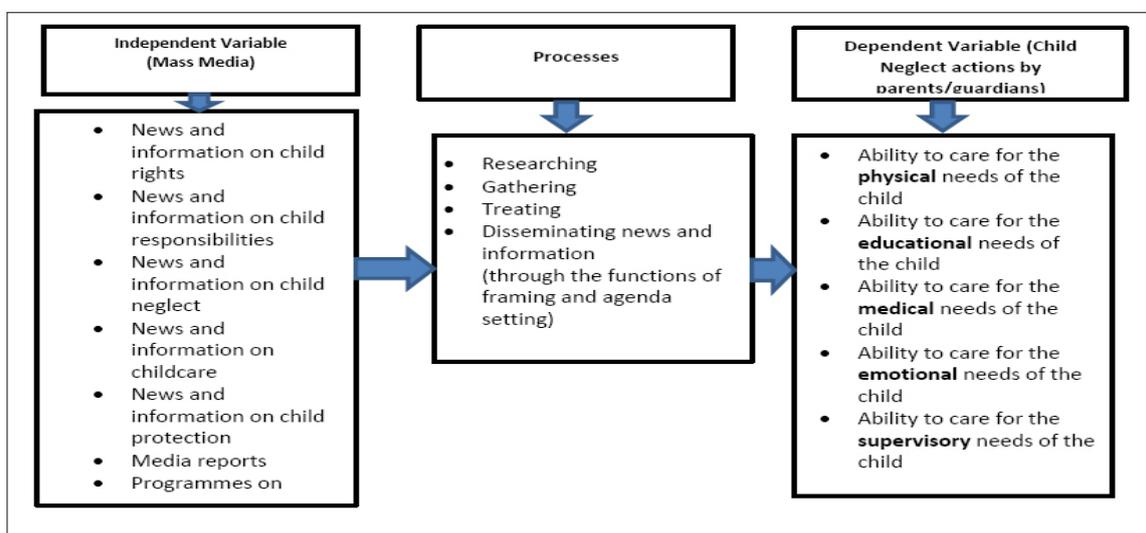


Figure 1. Operational model

11. Methodology

The quantitative research approach is used, with survey as specific method. A survey of parents and guardians in Buea, South West region of Cameroon is done to get their opinions on whether mass media inform and educate them on issues of child neglect and how these messages inform their decisions. Data were collected from two communities in Buea: The Government Residential Area (GRA), and Molyko.

GRA is chosen because of its strategic attraction to persons of high socio-economic status, and Molyko (seat of the University of Buea) is chosen because of its high and diverse populations with varying levels of exposure to the media.

A total 207 parents and guardians were sampled (153 in Molyko and 54 in GRA). A structured questionnaire with open and closed ended questions was used for data collection. The concepts and constructs of the

questionnaire constitute the role of the media in reporting child neglect towards prevention, the frequency of reporting, and the influence of such reporting on parents' attitude and behaviour towards child neglect, and dimensions of child neglect and how they are presented in the media: Physical, educational, medical, emotional, and supervisory neglect. The questionnaire also had a section on demographics.

The Cronbach's Alpha is .813, indicating that the instrument attained a high degree of internal consistency. Cronbach (1951) recommended that for a survey instrument to be considered valid, the reliability statistic should be 0.7 and above. The reliability of the instrument used for the present study surpasses this criterion, showing the questionnaire was well formulated, the questions asked were understood, and respondents' responses were consistent. Ethical considerations in the research process were observed. Validity was assured through content validity (contents met with the objectives of the study), construct validity (major constructs were measured) and face validity (attractiveness of the instrument to increase response rate).

The study covers 7 media houses in Buea. These include two newspapers (*The Post* and *The Rambler*). The Post newspaper was selected because it is the longest serving Anglophone newspaper (Ngange, 2019). *The Post* and *The Rambler* are also influential in covering different issues around Buea. For television, HiTV and PSTV are chosen. These two channels are based in Buea, are present on all cable networks, and cover diverse issues in the municipality. For radio, Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) Buea, Christian Broadcasting Service (CBS), and Mediafrique FM were used. They represent the state-owned media, the church, and the private media respectively. They are expected to significantly cover children's issues.

12. Findings

Seven key variables were examined under the demographic characteristics of the sample: gender, marital status, number of children a parent or guardian has, occupation, age, level of education, and the residence of the respondent. These variables are presented in the following analysis:

Out of the 207 respondents sampled for this study, 54.1% (112) are females and 45.9% (95) are males. Generally, females constitute the core of childcare in homes. The marital status of respondents shows that 56% (116) are married, 32.4% (67) are single, 10.1% (21) co-habit, and 1.4% (3) are widow(er). Considering

that more than half of the respondents are married, one would expect greater responsibility on the part of the parents and guardians, in terms of paying attention to mass media contents that benefit childcare. Similar trends are also expected for those who are either single, co-habit, or widow(er), considering the role that mass media are expected to play in shaping individual and public attitudes, beliefs, and opinions on a contemporary issue like child neglect. Findings show that 35.7% (74) of the respondents have one child each, 21.3% (44) have two children each, 16.9% (35) have three children each, 15% (31) have four children each, and 11.1% (23) have five children and above, each. More children would mean greater responsibility on the part of the parents and guardians and as such, reliance on the mass media on how to properly care for the children is expected.

The occupation of respondents spans across various areas of life: business persons 15% (31); students 14.5% (30); teachers 8.7% (18); journalists 7.7% (16); housewives 7.2% (15); drivers 4.3% (9); civil servants, social workers, accountants, and farmers each occupy 3.9% (8); nurse 3.4% (7); prison warder 2.4% (5); hawkers, translators, and secretaries each have 1.9% (4); court registrars, development workers, seamstress, and mechanics each constitute 1.4% (3); health counselors, senior youth counselors, builders, auditors, and storekeepers each have 1% (2); then hotel attendant, contractor, marketer, security guard, electrician, administrative assistant, carpenter, tourist guide, clerk, and police officer each constitute 0.5% (1) of the sample.

Respondents of this study are grouped into the following age brackets: ≤ 25 years = 16.9% (35); 26-35 years = 49.3% (102); 36-45 years = 21.7% (45); 46-55 years = 8.2% (17); and 56 years+ = 3.9% (8). This suggests that majority of the respondents fall under the youth category.

The level of education of the respondents is presented as follows: First School Leaving Certificate = 9.2% (19); Ordinary Level = 8.2% (17); Advanced Level = 19.3% (40); Bachelor's degree = 48.3% (100); Master's degree = 13% (27); and Ph.D. = 1.9% (4). This clearly shows that a majority of the respondents are holders of a Bachelor's degree, and consequently, can read and interpret media texts from newspapers, radio, and television. The other educational levels indicate that the respondents are literate and can as well read and interpret media texts.

13. Respondents' Media Exposure

As expected, all 207 respondents (100%) indicated that they have access to the conventional media. This meets the core objective of the research, which is to

examine media exposure by parents and guardians to contents related to child neglect, and whether such exposure translates into the prevention of child neglect by these parents and guardians.

Table 1. Respondents' weekly media exposure

Conventional media type	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low	Total
Newspaper	15.9% (33)	6.8% (14)	17.4% (36)	45.4% (94)	14.5% (30)	22.7% (47)	17.4% (36)	59.9% (124)	100% (207)
Radio	29.5% (61)	29.5% (61)	18.4% (38)	14% (29)	8.7% (18)	59% (122)	18.4% (38)	22.7% (47)	100% (207)
Television	61.8% (128)	18.4% (38)	15.5% (32)	4.3% (9)	0% (0)	80.2% (166)	15.5% (32)	4.3% (9)	100% (207)
MRS						53.9% (335)	17.1% (106)	29% (180)	

$N_{cases} = 207; N_{responses} = 621$

Overall exposure to the conventional media (newspapers, radio, and television) on a weekly basis leans more towards high exposure (slightly above 50%), with weight of 53.9%.

The data suggest that on a weekly basis, respondents are mostly exposed to television as a medium of mass communication. Up to 80.2% (166) have high exposure to television, as exposed to 15.5% (32) who are averagely exposed to television, and 4.3% (9) who registered low exposure to television. The next medium in the line of exposure, as this research shows, is radio. A proportion of 59% (122) respondents registered high exposure to radio, as opposed to 18.4% (38) who have average exposure, and 22.7% (47) who indicated that their exposure to radio on a weekly basis is low. Then, newspapers registered the lowest level of exposure, as up to 59.9% (124)

of respondents have low exposure to newspapers, as compared to 22.7% (47) who indicated that their exposure to newspapers on a weekly basis is high, and 17.4% (36) who indicated average exposure to newspapers on a weekly basis.

These statistics are revealing, as they show, primarily, respondents' attention to the mass media. Consequently, attention paid to a medium is likely to translate into what the audience retains from the medium, based on the contents disseminated, especially contents that form primary agenda along specific frames. Such exposure could translate to retention and action.

Most preferred medium

To confirm the above statistics, respondents mostly agreed that their most preferred conventional medium is television. This is shown in the following chart:

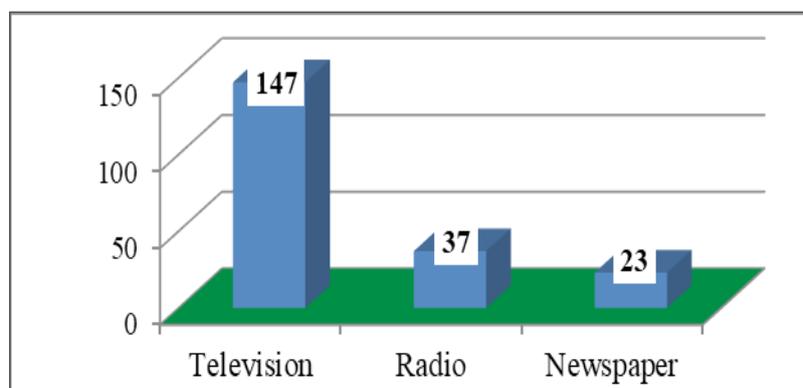


Figure 2. Most preferred conventional medium

Overall therefore, 71% (147) respondents prefer television, 17.9% (37) prefer radio, and 11.1% (23) prefer newspapers. A cross tabulation between the

most preferred medium and the associated reasons is shown as follows:

Table 2. Respondents' most preferred medium and associated reasons

Most preferred medium	Associated reasons in rank order	Total
Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV makes learning practical as it is a combination of audio and visuals (40.1%; 59) • TV is readily accessible (20.4%; 30) • Television is more interesting (18.4%; 27) • I retain what I watch on TV more (15.7%; 23) • TV is most convenient (5.4%; 8) <p>Total = 100% (147)</p>	71% (147)
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can listen to radio even when I am busy (83.8%; 31) • Radio is readily available (16.2%; 6) <p>Total = 100% (37)</p>	17.9% (37)
Newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper stories provide more detail (65.2%; 15) • I can read newspaper headlines on my phone (34.8%; 8) <p>Total = 100% (23)</p>	11.1% (23)
Total		100% (207)

The lead reason for choice of television by respondents is that it makes learning practical as it is a combination of audio and visuals. For radio, the leading reason is that respondents can listen to radio even when they are busy. Meanwhile, the main reason for preference

of newspaper is that newspaper stories provide more detail. These reasons, and others ranked in the table, provide an avenue for parents and guardians to expose themselves to the media of mass communication.

Table 3. Number of hours spent on selected conventional media on a daily basis

Mass media	0hour	1-2hours	3-5hours	6-8hours	9hours +	Total
The Post Newspaper	22.2% (46)	71% (147)	6.8% (14)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (207)
The Rambler	30% (62)	70% (145)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (207)
CRTV Buea	15.5% (32)	57.5% (119)	14% (29)	5.3% (11)	7.7% (16)	100% (207)
CBS Radio	15% (31)	51.7% (107)	20.3% (42)	2.9% (6)	10.1% (21)	100% (207)
Mediafrique FM	17.4% (36)	55.1% (114)	20.3% (42)	2.4% (5)	4.8% (10)	100% (207)
Hi TV	4.3% (9)	77.8% (161)	12.1% (25)	1.9% (4)	3.9% (8)	100% (207)
PSTV	26.6% (55)	65.7% (136)	4.8% (10)	2.4% (5)	0.5% (1)	100% (207)

$N_{cases} = 207$; $N_{responses} = 1449$

The data show that most respondents spend 1-2hours a day on the selected mass media. The number of hours spent on a medium could be a function of what the respondent wants to obtain from the medium or how much time one has for media activity.

14. Presentation and Interpretation of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question One: To what extent do conventional media in Cameroon raise awareness of children's rights and responsibilities?

There is evidence that parents and guardians barely

get information from the mass media in relation to children's rights and responsibilities, with weight of 64.2%.

Notably, the mass medium from which they get the lowest information about children's rights and responsibilities is *The Rambler* newspaper. Here, up to 87.5% (181) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from *The Rambler* is either 'no information at all', or 'rare'. This is contrasted with only 2.4% (5) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on children's rights and responsibilities from *The Rambler* newspaper.

Table 4. Degree to which parents and guardians get information about child rights and responsibilities from conventional media

S/N	Media	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	The Post Newspaper	1.9% (4)	3.4% (7)	14% (29)	35.3% (73)	45.4% (94)	5.3% (11)	14% (29)	80.7% (167)
2	The Rambler	1.9% (4)	0.5% (1)	10.1% (21)	23.7% (49)	63.8% (132)	2.4% (5)	10.1% (21)	87.5% (181)
3	CRTV Buea	7.2% (15)	12.6% (26)	32.4% (67)	25.1% (52)	22.7% (47)	19.8% (41)	32.4% (67)	47.8% (99)
4	CBS Radio	7.7% (16)	10.1% (21)	36.7% (76)	23.7% (49)	21.7% (45)	17.8% (37)	36.7% (76)	45.4% (94)
5	Mediafrique FM	2.9% (6)	6.8% (14)	32.4% (67)	26.6% (55)	31.4% (65)	9.7% (20)	32.4% (67)	58% (120)
6	Hi TV	6.8% (14)	9.7% (20)	28% (58)	26.1% (54)	29.5% (61)	16.5% (34)	28% (58)	55.6% (115)
7	PSTV	0% (0)	6.3% (13)	19.3% (40)	17.4% (36)	57% (118)	6.3% (13)	19.3% (40)	74.4% (154)
MRS							11.1% (161)	24.7% (358)	64.2% (930)

$N_{cases} = 207$

The next medium from which parents and guardians barely receive information about children’s rights and responsibilities is *The Post* newspaper. Here, up to 80.7% (167) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from *The Post* is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 5.3% (11) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from *The Post* newspaper.

In addition, parents and guardians have indicated that they barely receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from PSTV. Here, up to 74.4% (154) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from PSTV is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’, as opposed to only 6.3% (13) who indicated that they regularly receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from PSTV.

Then, parents and guardians also indicated that they barely receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from Mediafrique FM. Here, up to 58% (120) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from Mediafrique FM is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’, compared to only 9.7% (20) who indicated that they regularly receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from Mediafrique FM.

Also, parents and guardians noted that they barely receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from HiTV. Here, up to 55.6% (115) attested that the information they get from HiTV is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’, as opposed to only 16.5% (34) who indicated that they

regularly receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from HiTV.

To add, respondents indicated that they barely receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from CRTV Buea: 47.8% (99) attested that what they get from CRTV Buea is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 19.8% (41) who indicated that they regularly receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from CRTV Buea.

Then, respondents indicated that they barely receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from CBS Radio. Here, 45.4% (94) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from CBS Radio is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 17.8% (37) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on children’s rights and responsibilities from CBS Radio.

To get a comprehensive appraisal of how well respondents could appreciate the role played by the conventional media in preventing child neglect, their general access to the conventional media and knowledge of child rights and responsibilities were accessed.

15. Knowledge on Child Rights/Responsibilities Based on Information from Conventional Media

The data show that parents and guardians think the most important right of a child is education (64.7%).

Table 5. Most important rights of children parents and guardians are aware of

Rights of children	Frequency	Percent
The right to education	134	64.7
The right to life	20	9.7
The right to feeding	16	7.7
The right to good health	14	6.8
Right to adequate standard of living	7	3.4
The right to a name	5	2.4
The right to shelter	4	1.9
No Response	4	1.9
Right to be protected	3	1.4
Total	207	100.0

This is followed by the right to live (9.7%), the right to feeding (7.7%), the right to good health (6.8%), the right to adequate standard of living (3.4%), the right to a name (2.4%), the right to shelter (1.9%), and the right to be protected (1.4%).

Parents and guardians have accepted that they are aware of these rights, so, one would expect that news and information from the mass media would help them better put these rights into context, for the wellbeing of their children.

The fact that education stands at the top of the classification means that parents/guardians know the

power of education in helping shape and mold the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviour of their children. Education plays a fundamental socializing function, especially as children are expected to learn certain developmental values that will help them to effectively integrate into society. In school, children meet other children, teachers, and other school-wide factors which they interact with. This data also corroborates one of the foundational roles of the mass media in society – education, amongst other functions like information and entertainment.

Table 6. Most important responsibility of children parents and guardians are aware of

Responsibility of children	Frequency	Percent
Assist their parents and guardians	48	23.2
Responsibility to help with house chores	45	21.7
To be obedient	44	21.3
To be respectful	44	21.3
No Response	11	5.3
To do well in school	10	4.8
To run errands	2	1.0
Responsibility for personal hygiene	2	1.0
To be truthful	1	.5
Total	207	100.0

Parents and guardians revealed that the most important responsibility they think children should bear is that of assisting their parents (23.2%). This is followed by the responsibility to help with house chores (21.7%), be obedient (21.3%), be respectful (21.3%), do well in school (4.8%), run errands (1%), responsibility for personal hygiene (1%), and the responsibility to be truthful (0.5%).

Notably, children are an important part of every home. So, they are expected to partake in affairs that help keep the home alive and functional. This is probably why parents and guardians have opined that it is

necessary for children to have as key responsibility, to assist parents and guardians. For instance, sell at a shop, go to the farm on weekends, amongst others.

This follows logically with the responsibility to help with house chores, which are immediate activities in every household. For instance, cleaning the house, doing laundry, washing plates, sweeping the compound, amongst others. The educational factor has also been highlighted here, especially as parents and guardians think children have a responsibility to do well in school. This correlates with children’s rights as discussed in this analysis. Thus, parents

and guardians are of the opinion that in as much as children have a right to education, the children also have a responsibility to do well in school. In fact, if they do well in school, they are assisting their parents and guardians by, for instance, taking away some burden (financial, psychological) from them. It also makes the parents to respect the rights of children.

This is because when children do well in school, the tendency is for parents to have the zeal to continue sponsoring and supporting them.

Hypothesis One: Conventional media reports on children’s rights and responsibilities in Cameroon are significantly low.

Table 7. Coverage of children’s rights and responsibilities by conventional media

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from the Post Newspaper?	1.8116	.93386	207
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from the Rambler Newspaper?	1.5314	.84631	207
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from CRTV Buea?	2.5652	1.18007	207
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from CBS Radio?	2.5845	1.16225	207
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from Mediafrique FM?	2.2319	1.05864	207
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from HI TV?	2.3816	1.19637	207
How often do you get information about child rights and responsibilities from PSTV?	1.7874	1.09865	207

The statistics presented above support the hypothesis that conventional media’s report on children’s rights and responsibilities in Buea are significantly low. This is particularly so because looking at the mean and standard deviation scores regarding the degree of coverage of children’s rights and responsibilities, and the extent to which mass media of interest

inform and educate respondents on children’s rights and responsibilities, only CRTV Buea and CBS Radio Buea fall within the average mean of 2.5652 and 2.5845 respectively. The rest of the mass media studied in this research fall below the average mean, depicting significant low coverage.

Table 8. Analysis showing Relationship between conventional media coverage and knowledge on children’s rights and responsibilities

Conventional Media	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-test	Sig. (p-value)
The Post Newspaper	.188 ^a	.035	.031	7.534	.000
The Rambler	.321 ^a	.103	.099	23.516	.000
CRTV Buea	.000	.000	-.005	.000	.000
CBS Radio	.072 ^a	.005	.000	1.065	.000
Mediafrique FM	.057 ^a	.003	-.002	.674	.000
Hi TV	.095 ^a	.009	.004	1.878	.000
PSTV	.055 ^a	.003	-.002	.633	.000

The statistics attest that there is a significant relationship between conventional media’s coverage of issues related to children’s rights and responsibilities, and the degree to which parents and guardians are likely to be educated, aware, informed, and reminded on the necessity for them to provide physical, educational, medical, emotional, and supervisory needs of their children.

variance in the data. Then, another important item on the regression table is the F-test, which has the null hypothesis that there is no linear relationship between variables under study (in other words, $R^2=0$). However, the test of significance across all media examined in this study shows a highly significant relationship between media’s coverage of child related issues, and how the public is likely to be educated on same issues. This data corroborates the descriptive statistics

The R^2 is useful in this model as it explains the

which show that the conventional media under study give very little attention to covering children’s rights, responsibilities, and child neglect. Thus, hypothesis one has been affirmed in that coverage of children’s rights and responsibilities in the conventional media is low. The inferential data further suggest that if more space and time is devoted to covering children’s rights and responsibilities, the more significant this subject will be to parents and guardians.

Research Question Two: To what extent do conventional media reports on child neglect influence parents/guardians’ decisions on child neglect?

Table 9. Degree to which parents/guardians get information about child neglect from conventional media

S/N	Media	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	The Post Newspaper	2.9% (6)	1.9% (4)	28% (58)	23.2% (48)	44% (91)	4.8% (10)	28% (58)	67.2% (139)
2	The Rambler	1% (2)	0.5% (1)	16.4% (34)	21.3% (44)	60.9% (126)	1.5% (3)	16.4% (34)	82.2% (170)
3	CRTV Buea	7.7% (16)	21.7% (45)	28% (58)	23.2% (48)	19.3% (40)	29.4% (61)	28% (58)	42.5% (88)
4	CBS Radio	11.6% (24)	13% (27)	39.1% (81)	13.5% (28)	22.7% (47)	24.6% (51)	39.1% (81)	36.2% (75)
5	Mediafrique FM	1.4% (3)	9.2% (19)	30% (62)	23.7% (49)	35.7% (74)	10.6% (22)	30% (62)	59.4% (123)
6	Hi TV	5.8% (12)	15.9% (33)	22.7% (47)	27.1% (56)	28.5% (59)	21.7% (45)	22.7% (47)	55.6% (115)
7	PSTV	1% (2)	8.7% (18)	15.9% (33)	22.7% (47)	51.7% (107)	9.7% (20)	15.9% (33)	74.4% (154)
MRS							14.7% (212)	25.7% (373)	59.6% (864)

$N_{cases} = 207$

The data show that parents and guardians barely get information from the conventional media in relation to child neglect, with weight of 59.6%.

Particularly, the mass medium from which they get the lowest information about child neglect is *The Rambler* newspaper. Here, up to 82.2% (170) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from *The Rambler* is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 1.5% (3) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from *The Rambler* newspaper.

The next medium from which parents and guardians barely receive information on child neglect is PSTV. Here, up to 74.4% (154) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from PSTV is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 9.7% (20) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from PSTV.

16. Definition of Child Neglect by Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians were asked to indicate whether they think child neglect is the failure of a parent to provide for the health, emotional, educational, nutritional and physical development of a child. The results are: Strongly agree = 39.1% (81); Agree = 36.7% (76) – that is, 75.8% agreement; Neutral = 12.1% (25); Disagree = 3.9% (8); and Strongly disagree = 8.2% (17) – that is, 12.1% disagreement.

Also, respondents attested that they barely receive information about child neglect from *The Post* newspaper. Here, up to 67.2% (139) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from *The Post* newspaper is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 4.8% (10) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from *The Post* newspaper.

Then, respondents proved that they barely receive information about child neglect from Mediafrique FM. Here, up to 59.4% (123) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from Mediafrique FM is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 10.6% (22) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from Mediafrique FM.

Next is HiTV. Here, 55.6% (115) parents and guardians attested that what they get from HiTV is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with

only 21.7% (45) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from HiTV. Equally, respondents showed that they barely receive information about child neglect from CRTV Buea. Here, 42.5% (88) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from CRTV Buea is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 29.4% (61) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from CRTV Buea.

Finally, parents and guardians itemized that they barely receive information about child neglect from CBS Radio Buea. For this medium, 36.2% (75) parents and guardians attested that the information they get from CBS Radio Buea is either ‘no information at all’, or ‘rare’. This is contrasted with only 24.6% (51) respondents who indicated that they regularly receive information on child neglect from CBS Radio Buea.

17. Empirical Findings on the Various Types of Neglect

Here, parents and guardians rated the extent to which conventional media inform them about the negative

effects of the different types of child neglect. The data is presented as follows:

17.1 Physical Neglect

Parents and guardians are of the view that conventional media play a lesser role in informing and educating them on the negative effects of physical neglect, with weight of 35.9%. In particular, such lesser role is felt most at the level of the conventional media’s failure to provide them with information on clothing for their children (46.4%, 96). This is followed by failure of the mass media to provide them with adequate information on hygiene for their children, giving 41.8% (85). Next is the failure of the mass media to provide adequate information on how to provide shelter for the children with proportion of 35.2% (73). Again, respondents affirm that mass media have failed to provide them with information on how parents and guardians should provide food for their children, giving 33.3% (69). Last but not the least, parents and guardians are of the view that the mass media have failed to inform them adequately on the negative effects involved in abandoning a child, with proportion of 23.7% (49).

Table 10. Extent to which conventional media inform parents and guardians on the negative effects of physical neglect

S/N	Physical Neglect	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	Abandoning a child	17.4% (36)	24.6% (51)	34.3% (71)	14% (29)	9.7% (20)	42% (87)	34.3% (71)	23.7% (49)
2	Failure to provide food for a child	6.8% (14)	20.3% (42)	39.6% (82)	19.3% (40)	14% (29)	27.1% (56)	39.6% (82)	33.3% (69)
3	Failure to provide clothing for a child	5.8% (12)	15.5% (32)	32.4% (67)	25.1% (52)	21.3% (44)	21.3% (44)	32.4% (67)	46.4% (96)
4	Failure to provide shelter for a child	12.6% (26)	21.7% (45)	30.4% (63)	22.2% (46)	13% (27)	34.3% (71)	30.4% (63)	35.2% (73)
5	Failure to provide hygiene for a child	10.1% (21)	21.3% (44)	27.5% (57)	28.5% (59)	12.6% (26)	31.4% (65)	27.5% (57)	41.1% (85)
MRS							31.2% (323)	32.9% (340)	35.9% (372)

$N_{cases} = 207$

17.2 Educational Neglect

Overall, parents and guardians are of the opinion that comparatively, though less than 50% which is average, mass media play a greater role in informing them on the negative effects of educational neglect, with weight of 39.1%.

In particular, such greater role is felt most at the level of the mass media’s ability to provide them with information on the negative consequences of a parent or guardian allowing a child to stay home from school

without reasonable justification, with proportion of 45% (93).

This is closely followed by provision of information on the negative consequences of failure to follow up a child’s educational activities with 43% (89).

Next is information on the negative effects of failure to provide the necessary tools for a child in an educational system with proportion of 39.1% (81).

Also, respondents affirmed that mass media somewhat provide them with information on the negative effects

involved in the failure to provide books for children with 36.7% (76).

Then, parents and guardians are of the opinion that to some degree, the mass media provide them

with information on the negative effects involved in deliberately interfering in a child’s successful educational development, with proportion of 31.9% (66).

Table 11. Extent to which conventional media inform parents and guardians on the negative effects of educational neglect

S/N	Educational Neglect	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	Allowing a child to stay home from school without reasonable justification	18.4% (38)	26.6% (55)	25.1% (52)	15.5% (32)	14.5% (30)	45% (93)	25.1% (52)	30% (62)
2	Failure to provide the necessary tools for a child in an educational system	18.8% (39)	20.3% (42)	35.3% (73)	12.6% (26)	13.5% (27)	39.1% (81)	35.3% (73)	26.1% (53)
3	Failure to provide books	10.6% (22)	26.1% (54)	27.5% (57)	22.2% (46)	13.5% (28)	36.7% (76)	27.5% (57)	35.7% (74)
4	Failure to follow up a child’s educational activities	15% (31)	28% (58)	35.3% (73)	11.6% (24)	10.1% (21)	43% (89)	35.3% (73)	21.7% (45)
5	Deliberately interfering in a child’s successful educational development	19.3% (40)	12.6% (26)	35.7% (74)	18.8% (39)	13.5% (28)	31.9% (66)	35.7% (74)	32.3% (67)
MRS							39.1% (405)	31.8% (329)	29.1% (301)

$N_{cases} = 207$

17.3 Medical Neglect

Generally, parents and guardians are of the opinion that comparatively, and though less than 50% which is average, conventional media play a greater role in informing them on the negative effects of medical neglect with weight of 40.1%.

In particular, such greater role is felt most at the level of the conventional media’s ability to provide them with information on the negative consequences of delaying or denying recommended health care for a child (e.g. vaccines), with proportion of 47.4% (98).

This is closely followed by provision of information on the negative consequences of failure to acknowledge the seriousness of an illness or condition with 44% (91).

Next is information on the negative effects of withholding medical interventions due to religious beliefs with proportion of 34.8% (72).

Also, respondents affirmed that mass media somewhat provide them with information on the negative effects involved in parents and guardians not following necessary instructions and medications that practitioners give them to treat illness with proportion of 34.3% (71).

Table 12. Extent to which conventional media inform parents and guardians on the negative effects of medical neglect

S/N	Medical Neglect	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	Failure to acknowledge the seriousness of an illness or condition.	15.5% (32)	28.5% (59)	27.5% (57)	9.7% (20)	18.8% (39)	44% (91)	27.5% (57)	28.5% (59)
2	Delaying or denying recommended health care for a child (e.g vaccines).	20.3% (42)	27.1% (56)	21.3 % (44)	10.6% (22)	20.8% (43)	47.4% (98)	21.3 % (44)	31.4% (65)
3	Withholding medical interventions due to religious beliefs.	11.1% (23)	23.7% (49)	25.6% (53)	20.8% (43)	18.8% (39)	34.8% (72)	25.6% (53)	39.6% (82)

4	Parents not following necessary instructions and medications that practitioners give them to treat illness.	18.4% (38)	15.9% (33)	29.5% (61)	15.9% (33)	20.3% (42)	34.3% (71)	29.5% (61)	36.2% (75)
MRS							40.1% (332)	26% (215)	33.9% (281)

$N_{cases} = 207$

17.4 Emotional Neglect

Overall, parents and guardians are of the view that mass media play a lesser role in informing them on the negative effects of emotional neglect with weight of 37.3%.

Specifically, such lesser role is felt most at the level of the mass media’s failure to provide them with information on parents and guardians often feeling angry at a child for little or no reason, giving a proportion of 43.4% (90).

This is closely followed by failure of the mass media to provide them with adequate information on the negative effects involved in actively isolating a child, giving 41.6% (86).

Next is the failure of the mass media to provide adequate information on the negative effects involved in belittling or demeaning a child with proportion of 36.7% (76).

Again, respondents attested that mass media have failed to provide them with information on the negative effects involved in failure to provide adequate encouragement and support for children, giving 34.3% (71).

Last but not the least, parents and guardians are of the view that the mass media have failed to inform them adequately on the negative effects involved in failure to provide adequate nurturing and affection, with a proportion of 30.5% (63).

Table 13. Extent to which conventional media inform parents and guardians on the negative effects of emotional neglect

S/N	Emotional Neglect	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	Failure to provide adequate nurturing and affection	16.4% (34)	19.8% (41)	33.3% (69)	17.9% (37)	12.6% (26)	36.2% (75)	33.3% (69)	30.5% (63)
2	Belittling a child or demeaning a child	7.7% (16)	15% (31)	40.6% (84)	17.9% (37)	18.8% (39)	22.7% (47)	40.6% (84)	36.7% (76)
3	Failure to provide adequate encouragement and support	11.1% (23)	13% (27)	41.5% (86)	12.1% (25)	22.2% (46)	24.1% (50)	41.5% (86)	34.3% (71)
4	Actively isolating a child	7.7% (16)	18.4% (38)	32.4% (67)	21.3% (44)	20.3% (42)	26.1% (54)	32.4% (67)	41.6% (86)
5	Often feeling angry at a child for little or no reason	17.4% (36)	14% (29)	25.1% (52)	18.8% (39)	24.6% (51)	31.4% (65)	25.1% (52)	43.4% (90)
MRS							28.1% (291)	34.6% (358)	37.3% (386)

$N_{cases} = 207$

17.5 Supervisory Neglect

Generally, parents and guardians are of the opinion that comparatively, mass media play a greater role in informing them on the negative effects of supervisory neglect with weight of 34.8%. In particular, such greater role is felt most at mass media’s ability to provide them with information on the negative

consequences of being absent as parent or guardian, with proportion of 53.2% (110). This is also a rare variable whose positive responses are above 50% affirmation.

This is followed by provision of information on the negative consequences of relative lack of spontaneous positive parent-child interactions with 31.4%

(65). Next is information on the negative effects of inattention of a parent to a child with proportion of 30.5% (63). In addition, respondents affirmed that mass media somewhat provide them with information on the negative effects involved in parents and guardians being uninformed and apathetic about the child’s development and behaviour with proportion of 24.1% (50).

Table 14. Extent to which conventional media inform parents and guardians on the negative effects of supervisory neglect

S/N	Supervisory Neglect	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	High	Average	Low
1	Being absent as parent or guardian	26.1% (54)	27.1% (56)	27.5% (57)	6.3% (13)	13% (27)	53.2% (110)	27.5% (57)	19.3% (40)
2	Inattention of a parent to a child	12.1% (25)	18.4% (38)	38.6 % (80)	16.4% (34)	14.5% (30)	30.5% (63)	38.6 % (80)	30.9% (64)
3	A parent being uninformed and apathetic about the child’s development and behaviour	10.6% (22)	13.5% (28)	32.9% (68)	28% (58)	15% (31)	24.1% (50)	32.9% (68)	43% (89)
4	Relative lack of spontaneous positive parent-child interactions	11.6% (24)	19.8% (41)	32.4% (67)	13% (27)	23.2% (48)	31.4% (65)	32.4% (67)	36.2% (75)
MRS							34.8% (288)	32.8% (272)	32.4% (268)

$N_{cases} = 207$

Table 15. Summary table for mass media’s coverage of the five types of neglect

S/N	Types of Neglect	High	Average	Low
1	Physical Neglect	31.2% (323)	32.9% (340)	35.9% (372)
2	Educational Neglect	39.1% (405)	31.8% (329)	29.1% (301)
3	Medical Neglect	40.1% (332)	26% (215)	33.9% (281)
4	Emotional Neglect	28.1% (291)	34.6% (358)	37.3% (386)
5	Supervisory Neglect	34.8% (288)	32.8% (272)	32.4% (268)

From the table, parents and guardians opine that medical neglect is the most covered type of neglect in the mass media. This is followed by educational neglect, supervisory neglect, physical neglect and emotional neglect. Surprisingly, all of these neglects are below 50% coverage, which suggests that mass media pay little attention to coverage of child neglect.

18. Parents’ and Guardians’ Behaviour/ Decision Towards Information Gotten from the Conventional Media

Parents and guardians pointed out whether their decision not to neglect their children is based on the

information they get from conventional media. The data obtained here, based on the five-point Likert scale (agreement) show the following statistics: Strongly agree = 10.1% (21); Agree = 32.4% (67); Disagree = 16.4% (34); and Strongly disagree = 41.1% (85). Hence, 57.5 % (119) do not make decisions based on the information they get from the mass media when it comes to child neglect. Meanwhile, 42.5% (88) affirm that their decision not to neglect their children is based on the information they get from mass media. A cross tabulation showing whether parents’ and guardians decision not to neglect their children is based on the information they get from the mass media and the associated reasons is shown as follows:

Table 16. Respondents’ agreement/disagreement on whether conventional media inform their decisions about child neglect / associated reasons

Response	Associated reasons in rank order	Total
Disagree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My decision is intuitive (64.7%; 77) • I am informed by my upbringing (32%; 38) • The mass media does not talk about child neglect (1.7%; 2) • My Christianity guides me (0.8%; 1) • The mass media has only recently contributed (0.8%; 1) <p style="text-align: center;">Total = 100% (119)</p>	57.5% (119)
Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes from the mass media shape my mind on how I should relate with my children (36.4%; 32) • The mass media inform me on the importance of not neglecting my child (30.7%; 27) • The mass media remind me when I am hurting my children unknowingly (24.9%; 22) • The mass media remind me when I neglect my children due to my busy schedule (8%; 7) <p style="text-align: center;">Total = 100% (88)</p>	42.5% (88)
Total		100% (207)

The table shows that the leading reason why parents and guardians disagree that their decision not to neglect their child/children is based on the media is because their decision is intuitive. This is followed by the fact that they are informed by their upbringing, meanwhile a small proportion of respondents’ reasons for disagreeing are that the mass media do not talk about child neglect. Others are guided by Christianity and that the mass media has only recently contributed to creating awareness about child neglect.

On the other hand, most respondents who agree that their decision not to neglect their child/children

is based on the information gotten from the mass media justify that programmes from the mass media shape their minds on how they should relate with their children. The next reason that follows is that the mass media inform them on the importance of not neglecting their children, while others note that the mass media remind them when they hurt their children unknowingly. The least proportion of parents and guardians in this category affirm that the mass media remind them when they neglect their children due to their busy schedule.

Table 17. Degree of satisfaction with conventional media’s efforts in preventing child neglect

S/N	Conventional media	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	High	Average	Low
1	The Post Newspaper	5.3% (11)	12.1% (25)	55.6% (115)	10.1% (21)	16.9% (35)	17.4% (36)	55.6% (115)	27% (56)
2	The Rambler	1% (2)	7.2% (15)	61.4% (127)	6.3% (13)	24.2% (50)	8.2% (17)	61.4% (127)	30.5% (63)
3	CRTV Buea	10.6% (22)	35.3% (73)	32.9% (68)	11.6% (24)	9.7% (20)	45.9% (95)	32.9% (68)	21.3% (44)
4	CBS Radio	14.5% (30)	33.8% (70)	34.3% (71)	9.2% (19)	8.2% (17)	48.3% (100)	34.3% (71)	17.4% (36)
5	Mediafrique FM	5.3% (11)	31.4% (65)	44.4% (92)	7.2% (15)	11.6% (24)	36.7% (76)	44.4% (92)	18.8% (39)
6	Hi TV	10.6% (22)	33.8% (70)	41.5% (86)	2.9% (6)	11.1% (23)	44.4% (92)	41.5% (86)	14% (29)
7	PSTV	1.4% (3)	23.7% (49)	52.2% (108)	1% (2)	21.7% (45)	25.1% (52)	52.2% (108)	22.7% (47)
MRS							32.3% (468)	46% (667)	21.7% (314)

*N*_{cases} = 207

The data show that most parents and guardians are averagely satisfied with the mass media’s efforts in preventing child neglect in the Buea Municipality, with weight of 46%.

Principally, the mass medium they are most satisfied with is CBS Radio. Here, up to 48.3% (100) parents and guardians attested that they are satisfied with CBS Radio’s effort in preventing child neglect as opposed to 17.4% (36) who indicated that they are not satisfied.

The next mass medium which respondents are satisfied with is CRTV Buea as 45.9% (95) respondents affirm their satisfaction with CRTV Buea’s effort in preventing child neglect. This is contrasted by 21.3% (44) parents and guardians who expressed dissatisfaction as per CRTV Buea’s role in preventing child neglect in the Buea Municipality.

Also, HiTV is registered as the third mass medium whose efforts have proven satisfactory to parents and guardians as 44.4% (92) respondents note that they are satisfied with HiTV’s effort in preventing child neglect in the Buea Municipality. This is opposed to 14% (29) who maintained that they are dissatisfied with HiTV’s efforts in preventing child neglect.

In addition, parents and guardians rated the efforts of Mediafrique FM in helping them prevent child neglect, giving 36.7% (76) satisfaction as opposed to 18.8% (39) dissatisfaction.

The data also affirm that the rate of satisfaction of parents and guardians in terms of the information they receive from PSTV is 25.1% (52). This is contrasted with 22.7% (47) who attested that they are not satisfied with the information they receive from this medium.

To add, the rate of satisfaction of parents and guardians in terms of the information they receive from *The Post* newspaper is 17.4% (36). This is contrasted with 27% (56) who attested that they are not satisfied with the information they receive from this medium.

Finally, the least medium in terms of the satisfaction with the information parents and guardians receive concerning child neglect is *The Rambler* newspaper – that is, only 8.2% (17) satisfaction and 30.5% (63) dissatisfaction.

19. Conventional Media’s Role in Preventing Child Neglect in the Buea Municipality

Overall, 33.3% (69) parents and guardians are of the view that the mass media is doing a good job but they still have a long way to go. This is followed by 19.8% (41) who believe that the mass media are doing their best to inform the public on children’s rights.

In addition, 18.4% (38) opine that the mass media do not run adequate programmes that educate the public on child neglect. Then, 12.1% (25) think mass media play their part, so parents and guardians should play theirs.

Table 18. Rank order of overall appraisal of the conventional media’s role in preventing child neglect in the Buea Municipality

Appraisal of Mass Media’s Role in preventing child neglect (specific indicators)	Frequency	Percent
The mass media is doing a good job but they still have a long way to go	69	33.3
The mass media are doing their best to inform the public on children’s rights.	41	19.8
The mass media do not run adequate programmes that educate the public on child neglect	38	18.4
Mass media plays their part, parents and guardians should play theirs	25	12.1
Good	18	8.7
Very little is reported about child neglect because it is a very sensitive area	8	3.9
They rather concentrate on other issues	8	3.9
Total	207	100.0

Also, 8.7% (18) consider the role of the mass media in this domain as good, while 3.9% (8) agreed that very little is reported about child neglect because it is a very sensitive area, while 3.9% (8) affirmed that little attention is paid on child neglect because the mass media rather concentrate on other issues.

Hypothesis Two: Conventional media messages on child neglect have a significant positive effect on parents and guardians.

The descriptive data have shown that most of the decisions that parents and guardians make about childcare, children’s rights and responsibilities, and whether or not to respect the principles of child neglect, do not come from the mass media. This is because in the first place, the mass media devote little time and space to covering these issues.

At the inferential level, the data show that in cases where mass media make efforts to report on childcare, children’s rights and responsibilities, and child neglect,

the impact is significant to the parents and guardians (positive effect, based on the p-value projected, that is, 0.000). The statistics are fully explained using the model as presented below:

Table 19. Summary for effect of media messages on parents and guardians

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.014 ^a	.000	-.005	1.63596

This shows the effects that the messages are likely to have on the parents and guardians. This corroborates with the descriptive statistics which suggest that most of the decisions that parents and guardians make

about childcare, children’s rights and responsibilities, and whether or not to respect the principles of child neglect, do not come from the mass media.

Table 20. ANOVA statistics for effect of media messages on parents and guardians

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.108	1	.108	.040	.841 ^b
	Residual	548.655	205	2.676		
	Total	548.763	206			

Table 21. Coefficients for effect of media messages on parents and guardians

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.072	.223		13.781	.000
	Is your decision not to neglect your child/children based on the information you get from the mass media?	-.016	.081	-.014	-.201	.841

The F-test table (ANOVA) shows that there is no linear relationship between key variables under study. However, with F= .040 and 206 degrees of freedom, the test is highly significant, thus, it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between mass media messages and the effects (positive) that such messages will have in terms of creating awareness and educating parents and guardians on child neglect (p=.000).

20. Discussion

Research question one measures the extent to which conventional media in Buea raise awareness of children’s rights and responsibilities. Scholars agree that issues of child rights rarely make news and are going to occupy the inside pages for many years to come (Bwire & Wenje, 2000; Habib, Ullah, Khanum, & Khan, 2023; Jackson, 2023; Wellings & Macdowall, 2000; Gatheru, 2011; McCormick, 1995). This view is in line with results of this research as parents and guardians affirm that they barely receive information about child rights and responsibilities from the mass media.

Wellings and Macdowall (2000) illustrate that the strength of the mass media lies in helping to put issues on the public agenda in reinforcing local efforts, in

raising consciousness about issues and in conveying simple information. Unfortunately, this is not reflective of the mass media in Buea as far as child rights issues are concerned. For audiences to be properly educated on child rights, mass media must be effective in conveying complex information pertaining to child rights, must be effective in teaching skills, in shifting attitudes and beliefs, and in changing behaviour. This is connected with the theoretical basis of this study: Framing and Agenda Setting. If the media put issues of child rights on public agenda, and equally frame their messages towards attitude change, then one can predict that such messages will sink into the hearts and minds of people. The question of message frequency is also key.

Ekwen (2015) and Habib, Ullah, Khanum, and Khan (2023) note that children have human rights to education, health, standard of living. They insist that these rights have to be respected and protected. Contrarily, children are often victims of bad treatment, negative social and cultural practices, sexual abuse, and all forms of economic hazardous exploitation. Findings prove that conventional media in Buea rarely discuss these rights. Nyamnjoh (1995),

arguing in line with the agenda setting theory, stated that in order to change the attitude of an individual, and ways that translate theories into practice so as to bring about behavioural change among the people and transform society, an individual needs vast amounts of information and persuasion – in this case, through the media. Thus, for conventional media to change the attitudes of society towards child neglect, vast amounts of information on child rights and child neglect should be disseminated.

Some individuals accuse the media of doing too little to explain to the society what child rights issues are. This is confirmed in this study. Findings point to the need for the media to focus attention on child neglect, especially as current research shows that child abuse and neglect remain significant problems in society (Jackson, 2023).

Researchers (Jones, Finkelhor, & Halter, 2006; Whitehead, Chiodo, Leschied, & Dermot, 2004) who have studied variations in reporting to child protection agencies attest that news media coverage of child maltreatment does not only affect the development of institutions and policy; it can also affect people's individual behaviour. This is however not the case as the findings of the study show that the media rarely discuss child issues.

The framing theory as used in this study should enable the mass media to frame stories about issues of child rights in a manner that can allow individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label issues, events and topics. This is not the case as the findings of the study indicate. The media discusses child rights issues passively in a manner that does not fully engage the audience to the extent that the frame in the communication can actually influence the audience's frame in thought around the issues of child rights and consequently, no framing effect occurs. If people do not fully understand what the rights of children are, then they cannot control when they neglect a child or not.

The agenda setting theory on its part is expected to enable the mass media to give more coverage to child rights issues, because people pay more attention to the issues which have more coverage in the news media. News organisations have the ability to control the public's agenda by choosing to cover child rights issues repeatedly. This, again, is not the case with the mass media in Buea's coverage of child rights issues as proven by findings of this study. The mass media in Buea do not regularly cover issues of child right

and even when they do, the stories are not given prominence; they do not appear in newspaper front pages or even in radio and television headlines. This confirms the viewpoints of Bwire and Wenje (2000) who affirm that if care is not taken, children's issues will remain hidden in the media and from public view for many years to come.

The study also measured the extent to which mass media report issues of child neglect. Data show that mass media rarely discuss or project issues of child neglect. Meanwhile, the agenda setting theory assumes that people pay more importance to the issues which have more coverage by the media (Nyamnjoh, 1995). This therefore indicates the mass media in Buea has very little effect on the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of parents and guardians when it comes to child neglect as evidently, child neglect is not covered frequently in the media.

Arthur (2012), Dubowitz (2013), and Nair (2019) attest that the media may be particularly influential when covering issues of child neglect by putting it on public agenda, thereby creating awareness that will lead to the formulation of policies against child neglect. The findings of the study are not in accordance with this, as the mass media in Buea do not put issues of child neglect on public agenda.

Research question two investigated the effects of conventional media reports on child neglect have on parents and guardians' decisions. This was measured in relation to the decisions made by parents and guardians on whether or not to neglect their children. The results prove that majority of the parents and guardians do not make decisions about child neglect based on the information gotten from the media. Meanwhile, few aver that their decision not to neglect their children is based on the information gotten from the mass media.

21. Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to examine conventional media's role in preventing child neglect in the Buea Municipality. The study also looked at parents' and guardians' use of the mass media and the frequency with which they receive information relating to child neglect from the mass media.

Research Objective One: To ascertain if the conventional media in Buea raise awareness of child rights and responsibilities

Findings illustrate that conventional media in Buea barely raise awareness of child rights and

responsibilities. This fact is striking in this research as most parents and guardians (64.2%) attested that they rarely receive information about child rights and responsibilities from the media. The survey also proves the passiveness of the mass media as some parents and guardians are of the opinion that the mass media rather report on other issues than child neglect.

Research Objective two: *To establish the effect of conventional media messages on child neglect on parents' and guardians' decisions*

Results depict that parents' and guardians' decision not to neglect their children are not dependent on information from the media. Therefore, conventional media's reports on child neglect are yet to have a positive effect on parents and guardians due to their low coverage of the issue.

22. Recommendations

The following recommendations are important to highlight, based on the results of this research.

Increase in coverage of child neglect: This study recommends that mass media should intensify the coverage of issues of child neglect. This will raise public attention on the issue and prompt actions geared toward child protection, as UNICEF recommends.

Mass media should be more pro-active in reporting child neglect: To better engage in prevention strategies, mass media should be at the forefront of informing and educating the masses about child neglect. Neglect should not only be reported when an incident occurs. It should be a continuous process. Here, mass media should collaborate with social services, parents, guardians, and society.

Evident education role: The main roles of the mass media are to inform, educate and entertain audiences. The educational role of the media on the subject of child neglect should be intensified. Through this role, the mass media can better shape public opinion on child neglect.

Mass media messages should be tailored towards policy formation: Mass media should provide action-oriented information that can be used to formulate policies on child neglect. Most especially, the masses should be informed and educated frequently about child neglect so that an agenda can be set in society, thereby putting pressure on the government to formulate policies that can outrightly protect and reinforce the rights of children.

Host children's programmes: Findings of this study have shown that of the five broadcast mass media used for this study, none has specific programmes that address children's issues. To fully ensure the protection of children's rights, need exists for specific programmes where these issues can be discussed in details. Also, the responsibility of child upbringing is not entrusted solely in the hands of parents; but, to whole communities of which the mass media is involved. Therefore, such programmes should be hosted to accompany parents throughout this journey.

Role of parents and guardians: The study recommends that parents and guardians increase their exposure to the media. They should be more proactive in looking for information on child issues from the mass media and more importantly, they should put into use the information they get from the mass media concerning child rights and child neglect.

Role of government and other development partners: It is recommended that the government and other development partners sponsor more awareness campaigns on child rights issues. More so, government should formulate informed policies that protect the rights of children.

23. Areas For Further Research

Collaboration between the mass media and social affairs services: It could be interesting to study how mass media work together with social affairs services to prevent child neglect. The current study shows mass media's role in preventing child neglect and how the mass media inform parents and guardians about child rights and child neglect. It will be interesting to investigate how mass media work together with social and child protection services to prevent child neglect. How the media cooperate with social services to prevent and reduce the incidence of neglect is unknown.

Other factors that could help in preventing child neglect: This study shows that not only the mass media give parents and guardians information on prevention of child neglect. There could be other intervening variables like; word of mouth communication (interpersonal communication), individual and community beliefs, attitudes, opinions on child neglect, community and social influence, individual experience and exposure, nature of the household (upbringing) amongst other factors. It is necessary to study these factors in further research so as to get a

more comprehensive picture on the totality of factors that affect or influence child neglect.

Role of the Internet/Social Media: Today's world is characterised with much information flow (information revolution). Consequently, many individuals obtain huge information on different aspects of life from the Internet/social media. It is therefore important for further research to incorporate the role of the Internet/social media on child neglect discourse.

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