



Research Article

Nigerian Newspaper Coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's Organ Harvest Deal as A Means of Saving the Nigerian Health Sector

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal by selected Nigerian newspapers, focusing on how the media portrayed the incident and the underlying health sector challenges it revealed. Employing a content analysis research design, the study analyzed 480 newspaper editions from *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, and *This Day* between June and December 2022. Findings indicate that only 0.37% of total news stories addressed the case, with most coverage framed around legal aspects rather than the systemic failures in Nigeria's healthcare system. The media predominantly used a pity frame, emphasizing personal tragedy over broader social implications. The study concludes that the Nigerian media failed to adequately fulfill their social responsibility by neglecting critical health sector issues. Recommendations include the need for responsible and investigative journalism that highlights root causes, avoidance of political and ethnic bias in reporting, and urgent government reforms to improve Nigeria's healthcare system.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian healthcare system is one of the poorest globally, ranking 163 out of 191 countries by the World Health Organization due to its weak infrastructure, insufficient funding, and lack of adequate personnel (Chukwuma & Charles, 2021). Despite marginal increases in federal allocations, ₦388.37B in 2019, ₦423.33B in 2020, and ₦386.24B in 2021, health outcomes remain poor compared to other nations (Aregbeshola, 2021). Limited access to affordable, quality healthcare has hindered development and weakened public health across the country (Inobemhe et al., 2021).

Organ transplantation is a critical life-saving medical intervention, especially for patients with non-functional vital organs like the kidney or liver. While technological advancements now support these procedures, Nigeria still faces organ shortages, high treatment costs, and limited transplant facilities (Aderibigbe & Adebayo, 2022). The recent arrest of Senator Ike Ekweremadu and his wife in the UK over alleged organ trafficking for their daughter's kidney transplant underscores the desperation driven by Nigeria's failing health sector (Opanuga, 2022; Omokri, 2022). Despite the donor being legally an adult, the case highlighted the gaps in local healthcare capacity and the ethical dilemmas of cross-border treatment (Oghenekevwe, 2022).

Although this case received significant media coverage, most Nigerian newspapers framed it as a criminal or humanitarian issue without addressing the systemic collapse of the health sector. Few reports acknowledged the underlying problems such as poor hospital infrastructure, limited funding, medical brain drain, and widespread inaccessibility of

quality healthcare services (Unini, 2022). This limited framing fails to utilize the media's power in spotlighting and driving health policy reforms.

The mass media, especially newspapers, play a vital agenda-setting role in shaping public discourse on national issues, including healthcare (Gever & Ezeah, 2020). Scholars argue that media platforms should be used to advocate for sustainable health development and inform citizens about health-related challenges and solutions (Amedari & Ejidike, 2021). This study, therefore, evaluates how Nigerian newspapers covered Senator Ekweremadu's organ harvest case, exploring whether the incident was framed in a way that could contribute to salvaging Nigeria's collapsing healthcare system through improved awareness and policy engagement.

1.1 Research Problem

The health situation in Nigeria and of Nigerians is dismal and efforts to change the situation over the years have been insignificant (Abubakar et al., 2022). As a result, the prevalence of various health problems in Nigeria and their devastating consequences on the socio-economic status of the nation are such that seem to have defied all logics (Aregbeshola, 2021). Worse still, despite the efforts made by the Nigerian government at various levels and many international health and funding agencies to improve the health status of the individual members of Nigerian society and the health sector at large, continues to leave much to be desired (Amedari & Ejidike, 2021).

Senator Ike Ekweremadu's resort to a foreign land for medical treatment for his daughter is not unconnected with scarce organ availability and the state of healthcare in

Nigeria. This is due to shortage and poor medical advanced equipment, inadequate well trained personnel and the fear of compromised medical personnel which can affect the standard of health care delivery in Nigeria. Travelling from Nigeria to the UK to conduct a medical examination as minor as a kidney compatibility test reveals the extent of the rot in Nigeria's health system and the level of confidence in the system by the leaders most of whom do not patronize Nigerian hospitals. Many Nigerians die daily from preventable diseases because they either do not have access to proper healthcare or they cannot afford it. This study is the first in Nigeria to evaluate Nigerian newspaper coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal as a means of saving the Nigerian health sector.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the study is to evaluate Nigerian newspaper coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal as a means of saving the Nigerian health sector. The study specifically examines:

1. The prominence given to the coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal.
2. To ascertain whether Nigerian newspapers coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal reveal the shortcoming of the Nigeria health sector.
3. To ascertain the source of coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal.
4. Ascertain the major frame of coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal.

2.1 Research Questions

The Research questions include the following:

1. To what extent did the newspapers give prominence to the coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?
2. To what extent does the Nigerian newspaper coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal reveal the shortcomings of the Nigerian health sector?
3. What are the source of coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?
4. What are the media frames used in the coverage of Se. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Framing Theory

This study is anchored on framing theory, which was first propagated by Erving Goffman in 1974. Framing theory postulates that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. The theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience, “the frame,” influences the choices people make about how to process that information (Abba-Aji, Balabanova, Hutchinson & McKee, 2020). The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media place on the information they convey (Goffman, 1974). They are thought to influence the perception of the news by the audience which could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting where they not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory) (Kiptinness & Kiwanuka-Tondo, 2019). When the newspapers publish stories on Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal, its readers are likely to start thinking about this topic. However, the readership of this media is also likely to form opinions of policy makers in

Nigeria healthcare system, and people living with kidney ill-health as a result of how the case is framed within the newspaper. This research aims to further the framing theory in relation to newspaper media representation of Ekweremadu's organ harvest case.

The three branches of framing research are communicator approach, social movement approach and media effects approach (Scheufele, 2004). The communicator approach concentrates on media coverage, which is the focus of this paper. Secondly, the social movement approach examines political actors and their influence of frames in the media (Goffman, 1974). Here media are seen as carriers of the frames for others. Media content serves as an indicator for the examination of discourse (Adeniran, Kayode & Oso, 2019). The media effects approach which goes beyond cognition to examine the influence of media framing on schemes, attitudes, emotions and decisions of media users (Kiptinness & Kiwanuka-Tondo, 2019).

However, through competition the public is divided over the issue of Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal and these limits framing effects. For example, when media frame Sen. Ike Ekweremadu negatively, yet public figures frame him positively, the public are torn on where to form their own opinions. This shows that other factors also exist that influence the public's attitudes and opinions of Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal. This theory can still be applied in the proposition that if the media frame Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal negatively, the public is likely to also form negative opinions about this. Newspaper media frames can serve to close the sense-making gap, or the gap between what one group views as real and what another group experiences. It is for this reason that the study is anchored on Framing Theory.

3.1.1 Development Media Theory

The development media theory was formulated by Dennis Mcquail in 1987. Development media theory seeks to explain the normative behaviors of the press in developing countries (Asamah, 2011). This theory came into existence to conceptualize the relationship between the mass media and the political system in developing countries. Thus, development media theory was basically propounded to reflect developing nations' primary engagement of the media for development course (Akpobo, 2015). The development media theory proposed that economic development and nation building take precedence over some freedom of the press and of individuals (Mcquail, 1987). The theory demands that the media subjugate themselves to the political, social, economic, cultural and health needs of the nation. This is because the theory emphasizes positive engagement and usage of the media in national development for the autonomy and cultural identity of the particular nation (Okunna, 1999).

The basic concept about this theory of communication is the idea of reporting or writing about development issues in developing countries, which do not form the agenda of international media discourse (Nyam & Okpara, 2019). Some of the major tenets of the development media theory are that the media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy; and media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically (Mcquail, 1987). The role of mass media in combating health promotion for sustainable health development throughout the world remains vital. Without the mass media, it might be difficult for health

promoters and stakeholders to communicate health information, monitor and co-ordinate health activities in various countries of the world (Akpobo, 2015).

Therefore, it can be concluded through this theory that mass media remain a key component and veritable tool in the campaign towards sustainable health development in Nigeria. This is so because through adequate health communication and campaigns on issues of health such as drugs abuse, vaccines/immunizations, maternal health care, family planning programs, healthful living practices, prevention practices, cure eradication of diseases etc., the mass media reveals the shortcomings of the Nigerian healthcare system, enhance policy support and advocate for policy change in the Nigerian health sector. Going by this theory, the dissemination of information and news on all subjects that makes for positive development of developing nation becomes an imperative of the media (Nyam & Okpara, 2019). It is on this premise, that the media's health communication through coverage of health-related issues becomes an imperative for sustainable health development in a developing country such as Nigeria.

3.1.2 Conceptual Review

Newspapers have remained a vital part of mass communication since their emergence in the 17th century. As agents of information dissemination, education, entertainment, and socialization, newspapers help shape public opinion, promote civic engagement, and influence political and economic power dynamics (Bello, 2015; Gever & Ezeah, 2020). In their agenda-setting function, newspapers provide coverage across various

sectors including politics, health, education, business, and entertainment, thereby acting as forums for societal dialogue. Their permanence and detailed reporting allow readers to engage with content at their own pace, offering both immediacy and depth of coverage (Uwom & Oloyede, 2014).

Newspaper coverage refers to the extent and quality of reportage given to a particular issue. It includes the volume of reporting and the framing or slant adopted in portraying subjects to the public. Newspapers are especially effective in covering complex societal issues such as health because they are capable of presenting causal narratives that foster understanding and invite discussion (Sambe, 2008; Niederdeppe et al., 2013). In the context of healthcare, newspapers play a critical role in raising awareness about diseases, preventive measures, and government initiatives, and can be powerful tools for advocating health sector reforms.

The Nigerian healthcare system is plagued with numerous structural and financial shortcomings. These range from poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, and insufficient human resources to high out-of-pocket expenses and a failing national health insurance scheme (Lawal, Obileye & Bakare, 2019). As a result, the country loses approximately \$1.2 billion annually to medical tourism, with over 5,000 Nigerians seeking treatment abroad monthly (Oleribe et al., 2019). The media, through newspaper coverage, can spotlight these deficiencies, inform public discourse, and create a demand for accountability. The case of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's alleged organ harvesting highlighted both the desperation of patients seeking transplants and the failings of the local healthcare system, offering an

opportunity for critical reflection on national health policies.

Coverage of the Ekweremadu case demonstrates how media can link health outcomes to policy shortcomings. Most reports emphasized the role of individual actions, often framing the issue around personal accountability using attribution theory. However, some also drew attention to the systemic failures that pushed the lawmaker abroad for his daughter's kidney transplant. These narratives underline the urgent need for accessible and high-quality local medical services. By highlighting both individual and institutional failings, newspapers can catalyze policy advocacy aimed at reforming the Nigerian healthcare system and providing equitable health services.

Furthermore, newspaper coverage can influence public attitudes and mobilize support for policy change. In cases like Ekweremadu's, media reports that focus on the structural causes of health disparities, such as lack of access to quality care or policy negligence can drive advocacy for improved healthcare legislation. Unfortunately, while the coverage brought attention to the sector's decline, it did not translate into significant policy responses. There remains a gap between awareness and action. Nonetheless, newspapers hold the potential to bridge this gap by working with health advocates and policymakers to drive reforms.

Finally, salvaging Nigeria's healthcare system requires a multifaceted approach. According to Omoleke and Taleat (2017), there must be urgent investments in hospital infrastructure, modern equipment, and health technology.

Staff recruitment, training, motivation, and fair remuneration are equally critical (Oyama & Okpara, 2017). Policymakers must depoliticize health sector funding and prioritize resource allocation based on actual needs. Strategic reforms such as implementing state-driven health insurance schemes, strengthening institutional capacity, and enforcing professional standards are necessary for a functional and equitable healthcare system. With a coordinated effort involving government, media, health professionals, and the public, Nigeria can rebuild a system that ensures access to quality care for all (Abubakar et al., 2022; Amedari & Ejidike, 2021).

3.1.3 Empirical Review

Nnaemeka et al., (2024) examined how three prominent Nigerian newspapers, *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard* covered Senator Ike Ekweremadu's alleged kidney harvesting case. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the study assessed the nature and direction of the coverage. The findings indicated that the prominence of the story across the newspapers was strongly linked to the frequency of reportage. Additionally, the headlines used in the coverage reflected specific slants or framing angles, revealing the newspapers' narrative positioning on the organ harvesting allegations. In the same vein, Aderibigbe and Adebayo (2022) explored the challenges surrounding organ donation and transplantation in Nigeria using a doctrinal research method. Their study identified issues such as illegal organ trade, lack of consent, compromised medical ethics, cultural and religious barriers, legal loopholes, and limited medical infrastructure.

They proposed solutions based on global practices from countries like Belgium and the UK, advocating for public awareness and incentives for voluntary donation. However, their study lacked empirical data or analytical backing.

Inobemhe et al., (2021) examined how social media was used in Nigeria to address public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the agenda-setting theory and health belief model, they found that social media played a vital role in disseminating health information. The study, however, focused solely on COVID-19 communication and did not address organ donation or transplant-related issues. Also, Ogbonne (2021) studied how four Nigerian newspapers, *Leadership*, *Guardian*, *Nation*, and *Punch* reported the economic impact of COVID-19 between February and October 2020. Using a quantitative approach and agenda-setting theory, the study found that news reporting was mostly in straight news format and lacked in-depth analysis or policy suggestions. While relevant to media coverage of health-related issues, the study did not address organ transplantation or harvesting.

Gever and Ezeah (2020) analyzed media reporting on COVID-19 across six Nigerian media outlets. Their content analysis of 537 stories revealed that media coverage increased only after the first confirmed case in Nigeria. The study showed limited health behavior recommendations and found no significant connection between media reports and policy formulation. Like previous studies, this research focused exclusively on COVID-19 and not on organ-related health issues. Similarly, Abba-Aji et al., (2020)

investigated how corruption in Nigeria's health sector was portrayed in the top ten national newspapers between 2016 and 2018. A total of 135 articles were analyzed through content and framing analysis. The study found that most coverage focused on episodic reporting, particularly around the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), and often framed corruption as a political issue. While this study highlighted the role of media in health sector accountability, it did not touch on organ donation or transplantation.

Oleribe et al., (2019) explored major challenges in Africa's healthcare systems during an African Epidemiological Association meeting involving representatives from 11 countries. Key issues identified included shortage of health professionals, poor funding, and weak leadership. Solutions such as health worker training, increased funding, and political advocacy were recommended. While the study offered valuable insight into Africa-wide health challenges, it did not specifically address organ donation or transplant issues. However, Lawal et al., (2019) focused on healthcare delivery in rural Nigeria, identifying issues like poor funding, inadequate workforce, and lack of essential drugs. Their thematic analysis revealed that healthcare development in rural areas lags behind urban centres. The study recommended increased investment and participatory health policymaking for rural communities. Although it addressed systemic healthcare failures, it did not focus on organ transplantation.

Adeniran et al., (2019) expanded the framing analysis of health coverage in Nigerian newspapers by investigating how maternal

and child health (MCH) issues were framed. Analyzing 1,235 editorial items from four national newspapers, they identified two main frames public health and coping versus alarm messages. Their findings revealed limited use of the public health frame (only 12%) and a preference for coping frames over alarm messages. The study highlighted the media's overreliance on official sources, leading to shallow coverage that lacked contextual depth. Furthermore, Nyam and Okpara (2019) examined health news distribution in Nigerian national dailies using Development Media Theory. Their findings indicated a preference for international health news over local coverage, with local stories often underreported. This imbalance points to the need for increased strategic space allocation for health content and more development-focused news analysis using advanced digital tools.

Gap in Literature

The reviewed empirical studies highlight significant scholarly efforts in exploring health communication, media coverage, and public health challenges in Nigeria. However, several notable gaps exist that underscore the relevance and necessity of the current study. First, while Aderibigbe and Adebayo (2022) critically analyzed the challenges of organ donation and transplantation in Nigeria, their approach was largely doctrinal and lacked empirical evidence or media-focused analysis. The study emphasized legal and ethical issues but did not assess how media, particularly newspapers, have framed organ transplant cases, especially high-profile ones like that of Senator Ike Ekweremadu.

Secondly, studies by Inobemhe et al. (2021), Ogbonne (2021), and Gever and Ezeah (2020) primarily focused on media and health

communication in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these studies demonstrate the agenda-setting power of the media and the influence of health campaigns on public perception, none addressed organ harvesting or how the media reports organ-related health crises. This leaves a gap in understanding how specific health issues, such as organ transplantation, are communicated to the public and policy makers. Furthermore, Abba-Aji et al., (2020) focused on newspaper coverage of corruption in the health sector. While their study underscores the media's potential role in driving health sector reform, it lacked focus on organ transplant challenges or ethical dilemmas surrounding organ donation. Similarly, the studies by Oleribe et al., (2019) and Lawal et al., (2019) offered broader analyses of healthcare infrastructure and rural health disparities in Nigeria but did not examine media narratives or the framing of individual health-related cases that may influence public policy or awareness.

However, none of the existing literature critically examined how Nigerian newspapers cover high-profile organ transplant-related incidents or how such coverage may spotlight systemic healthcare failures and potentially catalyze health sector reform. The absence of studies analyzing the *media framing* and *policy implications* of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest case, in particular, reveals a significant gap. **Therefore, this study addressed these gaps by evaluating Nigerian newspaper coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest case and exploring its potential to contribute to discourse on saving and reforming the Nigerian health sector.**

4.0 METHODOLOGY

To accomplish the aims of the study, the researcher used a content analysis research design, taking into account the nature of the study. In order to determine if the daily newspapers selected for study adequately and prominently covered Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal, it is essential to assess the manifest content of those publications. Adopting this methodology also aids the researcher in determining the dominating theme and framing of the three newspapers that were the subject of the study's coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal.

Nigerian newspapers are the subject of this investigation while three Nigerian newspapers made up the study's environment. The newspapers: This-Day, The Nation, Vanguard, and The Guardian were chosen particularly for the study. This study focused on newspapers because, compared to broadcast media, newspapers offer better details that viewers might follow up on and gain more information (Uzochukwu & Ikegbunam, 2022). The researcher chose the aforementioned newspapers to ensure that all of the major regions of the nation were covered in the study because this is an exploratory study on the coverage of Senator Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal as a means of saving the Nigerian healthcare system.

All of the registered newspapers that are published and distributed in Nigeria make up the study's population. Given that it is impossible to investigate all of Nigeria's newspapers in one study, this researcher chose three national dailies: This-Day, The Nation, The Vanguard, and The Guardian.

These publications were selected based on their readership, circulation, accessibility, and convenience. Newspapers published between June 2022 and December 2022 were included in the study. The month covered are seven since the deal of Sen Ike Ekweremadu's organ harvest broke into the news in June 2022. Thus, the reason for the choice of the month was informed by the fact that it is the month into which the brokerage reporting of the organ harvest deal by print media started. With this month as the target population, the researcher has a total of 210 days to study for the three newspapers making 840 editions in all.

Relying on the fact that all the 840 editions of three newspapers will be too much for a study, the researchers resorted to the use of composite week sampling technique to systematically select the days of the week to be studied from a total of 210 days in the 7 months covered in the study. Using the composite week sampling technique, the researcher selected a total of 30 weeks for each of the three newspapers making a total of 480 editions in all. The advantage of this sampling technique was captured in Lacy (1993) as was cited in Uzochukwu and Ikegbunam (2022). The argument behind this composite sampling technique is because of its superiority to both random sampling and consecutive sampling technique when dealing with newspaper contents (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

The coding system was utilized to collect the data for this study, and a coding sheet and coding guide were created and used to code the variables. Nwabueze, Ugochukwu, and Egbra (2014) claimed that the coding guide aids in the creation of the coding sheet and the

selection of the study's content categories.

Validation is concerned with whether the research instrument measures what it should measure. The research instrument adopted for use in this study is considered valid since content analysis of newspaper coverage is an accurate measure of both the frequency and content of the item covered. Reliability refers to the consistency of the research instrument to produce stable and repeatable of results. That is, the instrument is reliable if consistent responses can be obtained in identical situations but different circumstances. The instrument's inter-coder reliability was evaluated using Holsti's reliability test technique, and a reliability coefficient of 0.792 was found, demonstrating the instrument's internal consistency.

The data obtained from the content analysis were presented in tables and descriptively

analyzed using frequency counts and percentages with the aid of SPSS Version 23. The units of analysis were based on four key themes used to examine the manifest content of the selected newspapers: prominence of coverage, revelation of health sector shortcomings, sources of coverage, and media framing. Prominence was assessed through story placement on the front page, inside page, or back page. The health sector's shortcomings were identified through stories highlighting issues such as dilapidated healthcare infrastructure, industrial actions, lack of health insurance, and government neglect. Sources of coverage were categorized as international, local, religious, political, legal, expert, or others. Media frames were classified according to identifiable narrative approaches such as pity frame, humanitarian frame, service negligence frame, corruption frame, and other relevant perspectives.

5.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation

Table 1: Average distribution of stories on Ike Ekweremmadu's kidney deal among the newspapers

Newspapers	Total average pages Per day	Average number of main/lead stories per page	Total average main stories per day	Total main stories in a month	Total main stories in seven months	Number on Ekweremmadu stories	Total % covered in 7 months
The Punch	51	4	204	6120	42840	152	0.35
Daily trust	48	4	192	5760	40320	131	0.32
This Day	56	3	163	5040	35280	161	0.45
Total	155	11	559	16920	118440	444	0.37

Researchers' contents analysis, 2025

This table shows the general news items published by the three select newspapers in the period of seven months' understudy. According to the table, out of 118440 stories published, only 444 accounting for 0.37%

were on Ekweremmadu's kidney deal in London. The implication of this table is that the Ekwremmadu's arrest in London commanded media attention among Nigerian media organisations.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question I: To what extent did the newspapers give prominence to the coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?

Table 4.2: Showing whether Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal was given prominent coverage by the selected newspapers

Variables	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>Daily trust</i>	<i>This Day</i>	Freq	%
Cover Page	10	8	0	18	4.0
Back Page	45	25	58	128	28.8
Inside Page	96	98	103	297	66.8
Total	152	131	161	444	100

Researchers' contents analysis, 2025

On whether the newspapers gave prominence to the coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal, Table 4.2 showed that the majority of the stories covered are buried inside newspapers. The implication of this is that the newspapers did not consider the deal very important to the people.

Research Question II: To what extent does the Nigerian newspaper coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal reveal the shortcomings of the Nigerian health sector?

Table 4.3: Whether the Selected Newspapers Revealed the Shortcomings of the Nigerian Health Sector

Variable	The Punch	Daily Trust	This Day	Frequency	%
Dilapidated healthcare systems of the country	41	38	41	120	27.0
Health sector industrial action	0	0	0	0	0
Government's failure to take care of the health system	22	37	63	122	27.4
Lack of health insurance	59	32	19	110	24.7
Others	28	24	38	90	20.2
Total	152	131	161	444	100

Note. Source: Researcher's content analysis (2025).

Table 4.3 indicates the extent to which the selected Nigerian newspapers referred to or identified the shortcomings of the Nigerian health sector in their stories about Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal. The most frequent shortfall identified was

Government's failure to take care of the health system (frequency of 122).

Research Question III: What are the source of coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?

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Table 4.4: Source of coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?

Variables	<i>The Punch</i>	<i>Daily trust</i>	<i>This Day</i>	Freq	%
International source	23	20	27	70	15.7
Local source	30	18	21	69	15.5
Religious source	9	22	16	47	10.5
Political source	17	12	20	49	11.0
Expert source	23	19	23	65	14.6
Legal source	46	36	54	136	29.7
Others	03	04	0	07	1.5
Total	152	131	161	444	100

Source: Researcher's contents analysis 2025

According to this table, majority of the news stories covered in the media concerning Ekweremmadu was covered from the legal sources. The implication is that the mass media paid attention to the criminal case charged against the serving senator in London leaving the main reason for making such move which centers on poor health facilities in Nigeria. The finding is a gross violation of social responsibility theory of the press which

places the press under obligation to hold the government accountable to the people. The media reports never looked it from financial status of a poor man who cannot afford to even be jailed in London.

Research Question IV: What are the dominant media frames used in the coverage of Se. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal?

Table 4.5: Dominant media frames used in the coverage of Se. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal

Frames	<i>The punch</i>	<i>Daily trust</i>	<i>This day</i>	Freq	%
Pity frame	86	85	121	296	65.7
Humanitarian frame	17	6	2	25	5.6
Service negligence frame.	1	4	0	5	1.1
Corruption frame	25	21	17	63	14.1
Others	23	36	21	80	18.8
Total	152	131	161	444	100

Source: Researcher's contents analysis, 2025

Five identifiable frames including the pity frame, humanitarian frame, negligence of service frame, corruption frame and others were identified and examined. Among them, the pity frame dominated the media coverage of the arrest and detention of Senator Ike Ekweremadu for alleged kidney deal with a total of 296 items accounting for 65.7% of the total publication. The implication of this is that the media framed the arrest of the federal law maker from the angle of pity for the daughter and his travail. Without due consideration for the health implications of traveling abroad for medical treatment on many poor Nigerians whose father or relative is not a political office holder who live in money.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

On whether the newspapers gave prominence to the coverage of Sen. Ekweremadu's organ harvest deal, the result of analysis shows that the majority of the stories covered are buried inside newspapers. The implication of this is that the newspapers did not consider the deal very important to the people. The analysis of the second research question showed that the most frequent shortfall identified was Government's failure to take care of the health system (frequency of 122).

On the third research question which sought to ascertain the major sources of stories in the media coverage of the arrest of Senator Ekweremadu in London, it was found that the newspapers dwell more on legal source which controls 136 items representing 29.7% followed by international source which has 70 items accounting for 15.7% (see table 2 for more on sources of coverage). The multiplicity of legal source of stories deviated the main issue in the arrest. This was what moved the attention of the media from the

painful state of health of the nation that led to the migration to London. Expert and local sources could have centered on the originating cause of the travel.

Many Nigerians, who read Ms Ekweremadu's plea for a kidney donor, argue that she doesn't deserve being helped because her father is among the political elite who have failed to improve the country's health care system. Do you think that is a fair statement to make? (Punch News, 2022). With this question, the media adopted a frame that indicts the law maker there by exposing the inability of the government that he serves to provide the needed health facilities for the people. The media choice of words and phrases in the report above helps it in presenting a new and hidden dimension to news and as such evoke different sentiments through emphasis on the negligence of the health sector by the government. This is in line with the views of the proponents of framing theory which centers on the media choice of word and selection of angle or direction of covering an event (Diehl et al., 2015; Jibrin, 2019; Borah, et al, (2021).

The fourth research question posed to ascertain the dominant media frame used in the coverage of the arrest of the embattled senator revealed that pity frame dominated the other three frames in the study with a total of 296 stories representing 65.7% of the items. Unfortunately, humanitarian frame has only 25 items while service negligence frame has only 5 items representing 1.1% (see table 5 for more). In one of its publications, the Punch Newspaper on 12th September, 2022 through a victim source-based story published a story captioned "Ekweremadu's daughter begs public for kidney donor". In this story the girl made a heart-touching plea to the public to

appeal to pity for health condition. "My family has battled to save my life and has taken me to various hospitals but the illness persisted and kept degenerating". I am alive today by the special grace of God. I am presently in London, UK, receiving five hours of dialysis 3-4 times a week. This is at the expense of my family as I am not qualified for the NHS due to my immigration status (Punch, sept. 12, 2022).

This is the height of disservice to the masses by the media and a gross disregard for the social responsibility function of the press which according to Ikegbunam and Agudoso (2020) is improvement in objectivity in news coverage and display of sincere responsibility in interpretation of events to the people in the society. Framing the arrest of the senator from the pity angle will shield the main issue in the country which borders on insufficient skilled medical expert and total lack of sound health facilities to take care of the citizens in Nigeria.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that the media did not live up to social responsibility to the public by failing to air reports on the situation of Nigerian health system adjudged to be among the worse health systems in the world. From the research objectives that guided the study, the researchers concluded that the mass media here-in this study represented by the select newspapers did not respect the health need of the common man in Nigeria. That is why the legal frame dominated the contents. Being on the side of the embattled senate leader as against the needs of the people who cannot afford to travel to London is a gross disrespect to the social responsibility function of the which is to hold those in authority accountable for the people. It is the duty of the machineries

of government to provide around health system for the citizens as it is the duty of the media to watch what the government is doing in order to ensure that the people are not left out as in the case of this health challenge facing the country. The researchers also concluded that the media mostly issued negative slanted reports on the health situation of the country while pity frame dominated the media framing while the service negligence frame which is on the side of the masses was poorly seen in the reports.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings above, the researchers recommended as follows:

1. That the media should wake up and strive to use their reports to attract responsible and accountable government for the country by looking at originating cause of an action and not on the prevailing consequences. The consequences of not having functional health system in Nigeria is traveling abroad for medical treatment which landed Ekweremadu into the white man's police custody. A reasonable media examination of the incidence is expected to accommodate the interest of the public by presenting the decay in the medical service in Nigeria.
2. That the media should do away from politics and ethnic sentiment when issues of national concern is up for investigation. The pitiable health condition in Nigeria is not an ethnic matter because kidney disease does not select an ethnic group or political party to kill.
3. That the government of Nigeria should please look into the health system, improve upon it and save the lives of the citizens who voted for them to lead them.

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