



Media Framing of Child Abuse in Tanzania: A Content Analysis of Mwananchi and Habari Leo Newspapers

Salama Juma¹; Rev Dr. Francis Ng'atigwa²

¹Senior Public Relations Officer: Tanzania Electric Supply Company Limited.

Email: Salama.Juma.comm@example.com

²Academician, Saint Augustine University of Tanzania. Email: xachengo@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study explored the dominant framing of child abuse cases adopted by two major Tanzanian newspapers, *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*, in their coverage between January and June 2025. On the basis of a descriptive content analysis method with a mixed-methods research design, the research assessed a sample of 92 published articles on child abuse. The main objective was to determine the framing that journalists use to present this critical social issue to the public. The results revealed a highly skewed journalistic approach to covering child abuse incidents, as the Criminal Justice Frame dominated the reporting at 74%. Other frames with high frequencies include the Victim-Centric Frame at 16% and the Moral Panic Frame at 10%. This finding aligns with expectations because framing showcases how an issue is perceived and discussed. Tanzanian print media thus prioritizes punitive measures and legal accountability over exploring systemic causes, prevention strategies, or long-term therapeutic solutions. Guided by framing theory, this paper contends that this sustained focus risks sensationalizing discrete incidents at the expense of the media playing an active role in promoting comprehensive child protection policies and fighting the entrenched sociocultural causes of abuse. The results also provide valuable insight into the way in which media gatekeeping operates within the presentation of public discourse related to vulnerable populations in East Africa.

ARTICLE'S INFO

Article No.: 060926078

Type: Research

Full Text: [PDF](#), [PHP](#), [HTML](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

DOI: [10.15580/gjjamc.2026.1.060926078](https://doi.org/10.15580/gjjamc.2026.1.060926078)

Accepted: 11/06/2026

Published: 31/08/2026

Keywords: Child Abuse, Media Framing, Content Analysis, Mwananchi, Habari Leo, Tanzania, Criminal Justice Frame

***Corresponding Author**

Salama Juma

E-mail: bapropsk@gmail.com

Article's QR code



1. INTRODUCTION

The maltreatment of children is a deep crisis worldwide, as it violates basic children's rights and causes lifelong physical, psychological, and social harm to victims, with pervasive consequences often slowing a nation's social and economic development. The pervasive nature of child maltreatment on all continents requires robust public health and protection responses. However, the latter is heavily mediated by the way the issue is represented in the mass media. The media is a primary source of information that shapes public perception, drives policy agendas, and determines which facets of the problem receive attention and resources. Therefore, how these stories are framed holds the key to understanding how societies perceive and react to the plight of vulnerable children.

The situation differs dramatically across jurisdictions, reflecting a range of social, legal, and media environments. In the U.S., while data indicate long-term declines in the rates of physical and sexual abuse since the early 1990s, the rate of child maltreatment fatalities has recently seen a disturbing surge, capping a 13% increase since 2018. Media reporting in the U.S. heavily focuses on extreme, horrific incidents driven by the criminal justice system as a key news hook. Nearly half of all the articles describe specific, graphic cases, most of which involve the death of a child. This episodic framing, although high in emotional impact, often overshadows thematic discussions about systemic issues such as chronic neglect. This remains the most common form of abuse, but compared with physical and sexual abuse, it has garnered far less policy and public awareness in recent times. Here, the framing of child welfare news often focuses on police and legal representatives as key voices rather than child welfare professionals, healthcare providers, or educators, thereby limiting the scope of solutions presented to the public.

Moving across the Atlantic, the UK and the wider EU also face unique challenges, particularly in terms of online sexual exploitation and the integration of child protection across diverse populations. Approximately one in five children in Europe are estimated to experience sexual violence (Council of Europe, 2022). Research into media coverage across the UK and EU often highlights the challenge of balancing the need for public education with the imperative to protect the anonymity and dignity of survivors (Kitzinger & Skidmore, 2024). There is ongoing scrutiny of journalistic quality in reporting on child abuse, with studies showing that poor reporting tends to sensationalize the topic, lacks survivor and expert voices, and lacks information on prevention and intervention (Döring & Walter, 2024). This is indicative of a universal tension between commercial journalistic practice and ethical reporting standards.

This issue is also framed in various ways within welfare-driven states. In Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland, issues regarding child

protection are often framed more integrated with public policy and social responsibility, reflecting strong governmental commitments to child welfare. However, even here, media coverage may be complex, engaging in moral panics in the face of high-profile system failures (Kivisaari & Rantalaiho, 2023), shifting the emphasis from individual blame to institutional accountability. Similarly, China has focused national efforts on the issue of child protection, not least in the context of rapid urbanization. Media framing is very often aligned with state-led campaigns promoting protection laws, even if balancing this with independent, critical analysis of systemic flaws remains a journalistic challenge (Wang et al. 2023).

The scale of the problem is enormous in South Asia. In India, child maltreatment has often been part and parcel of socioeconomic disparities, whether it is child labor, trafficking, or sexual abuse. Media coverage on all these issues has formed the cornerstone of public campaigns, which often use emotional, human-interest frames to galvanize public opinion and pressure legislative action (Dhawan et al. (2024)). However, in this emotionally loaded telling of stories, the focus risks depicting at times complex structural issues as isolated incidents, much as has occurred in the U.S.

The media landscape in Africa presents a particular context in which resource limitations, competing national development agendas, and unique cultural norms shape coverage. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, enormous child abuse challenges emanate from poverty, religious extremism, and violence. Media reports are invaluable for raising awareness but fluctuate between exposing extreme acts of violence and having limited capacity for regular and detailed reporting on prevention and psychosocial support. Similarly, even though South Africa has progressive child protection legislation, the voices of its children remain grossly underrepresented in its media, with one study in 2023 that noted that children constituted only 6% of the overall coverage across all monitored media. This absence of coverage robs citizens and policy practitioners of the opportunity to be consistently informed and find solutions. In Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda, media reporting on child abuse is often shaped by sensationalism and a "folk devil" narrative, where societal anxieties are channeled onto a particular party deemed guilty, with a tendency toward overrepresenting extreme situations or system breakdowns.

In further narrowing to southern Africa, Namibia presents a critical example of the ongoing struggle to safeguard children. Violence against children remains high, with almost 40% of girls and 45% of boys experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse before age 18. Recently, the media of Namibia has concentrated on the urgent threat of OCSEA, where it is estimated that 9% of internet-using children aged 12 to 17 years have experienced clear examples of this exploitation. However, these more conventional forms of child abuse, together with high learner pregnancy and

dropout rates, continue to attract major public outcry and media attention. Admittedly, the Namibian government has shown political will through its strengthening of the legal and clinical response framework; however, with respect to persisting social problems and such a culture, many citizens (58%) still believe that physical discipline is justified, attesting to the deep-seated challenges the media must help deal with.

This problem is equally pressing in the East African context. Tanzania faces high rates of child maltreatment, driven by socioeconomic hardship and cultural acceptance of certain harmful practices. In discussing social issues to a wide audience, print media plays an indispensable role, especially in the Swahili newspapers such as *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*. How far this communication promotes child protection, mobilizes community action, or merely sensationalizes tragedy and reinforces stereotypes is, however, a critical question that is inadequately examined. The literature, both globally and regionally, points toward a consistent trend in which the media often focuses on “what” (the incident) rather than “why” and “how” (the systemic factors and solutions), leading to a crucial gap in comprehensive thematic framing. This suggests a profound failure to exploit the full potential of mass communication for the public good and calls for a focused study to discern the dominant narrative structures in local media coverage.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the prevalence and severity of child abuse in Tanzania and the potential role of the media in bringing such issues to public attention, there is a significant research gap regarding the qualitative dimensions of such coverage. Previous studies have tended to observe the frequency or types of abuse reported without providing any substantial empirical evidence as to the framing mechanisms employed by these key national newspapers. *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*, two of the most widely circulated daily newspapers, have immense power in shaping public discourses, influencing policy agendas, and stimulating either constructive problem-solving or mere fleeting sensationalism. Media narratives dominated by episodic frames focus on court cases or tragedies in isolation, failing to contextualize child abuse within broader issues of poverty, gender inequality, and institutional failure, hence hindering effective policy-making and the community-level prevention of child abuse. The problem, therefore, lies in the fact that there is no systematic analysis yet of the ideological choices and narrative strategies in the frames adopted by these newspapers, which is necessary to understand whether print media facilitates meaningful public dialogue on how to combat child abuse in Tanzania. This study seeks to assess how *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* newspapers framed the coverage of child abuse cases.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored predominantly in framing theory, as developed by Entman (1993) and Scheufele (1999). In general, framing in mass communication refers to the process by which a journalist selects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman 1993). Media frames essentially organize the world for both journalists and their audiences. The choice of a frame when reporting child abuse is not neutral predetermines whether the public will see the problem as an individual pathology (episodic frame), a systemic failure (mistic frame), a moral decay (moral frame), or a crisis requiring legal intervention (criminal justice frame). Through framing theory, this study systematically unpacks the narrative choices that *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* have used to display the underlying interpretation of child abuse presented to the Tanzanian public, thus providing a critical lens through which to evaluate the media's social responsibility.

3.2 Literature Review

Global empirical research indicates that news media outlets tend to rely on sensationalist, episodic, and criminal justice frames in reporting about child abuse, often to the detriment of thematic or preventative coverage. For instance, in one landmark review of press coverage of sensitive issues, researchers noted a predominance of reports lacking journalistic quality, sensationalizing the topic, and lacking relevant information on prevention and intervention (Döring & Walter, 2024). For instance, US-based studies have indicated that child welfare coverage tends to be closely linked with legislative events or events constituting criminal justice-sensitive cases of child abuse, entailing a focus on arrest, trials, and specific graphic cases (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2023). This pattern reinforces the view that child abuse is a police-and-courts issue, diverting attention from public health and social service solutions (Wilson et al., 2023).

In a similar vein, African media studies also corroborate the bias toward dramatic and conflict-driven narratives. Research conducted in Kenya and Uganda indicates that human-interest frames, which tend to concentrate on the emotional tragedy of the victim, often occur; although these frames may be sympathetic, they can result in ‘poverty porn’ or a sense of helplessness among the audience rather than motivate systemic change (Nungu & Bansil, 2022). In South Africa, the general underrepresentation of children's issues ensures that when abuse is covered, it is most often the most extreme and violent case that breaks through the news agenda.

This predilection for sensationalism is often due to commercial pressures, as shocking stories are considered integral for the capture of audience attention and the increased sale of newspapers. The gap recognized in the literature at present is an understanding of framing in a localized environment, such as Tanzania's Swahili print media, especially within the context of *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*. Because of the differing ownership models, with one being privately owned (*Mwananchi*) and the other being government owned (*Habari Leo*), the framing choices are foreseen as indicating differing journalistic priorities, political pressures, and commercial interests. A systematic content analysis is therefore needed to empirically map the dominant frames and to determine their compliance with ethical and normative media theories that call for responsible, solution-oriented reporting (Döring & Walter, 2024).

4. METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive case study that employed a quantitative content analysis approach to systematically study the characteristics of the coverage of child abuse. The case study concerned two major Tanzanian Swahili newspapers, *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*, over six months in 2025 (from January to June 2025). Content analysis was chosen as an appropriate methodology because it provides the means to objectively, systematically, and quantitatively describe the manifest content of communication (Krippendorff, 2018). The entire article served as the unit of analysis and was coded for the dominant frame used, using preexisting categories such as Episodic, Thematic, Criminal Justice, Human Interest, and Moral Panic frames.

The study population consisted of all the articles published in *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* newspapers between January and June 2025. The sample included all news items, features, and editorials that were published in both newspapers during the period and were explicitly related to child abuse, child neglect, or child protection issues. A systematic collection of a total sample of relevant articles was performed and coded against a predetermined codebook that included variables such as frame type, story angle, source quoted, and story placement.

Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics to establish the distribution and prevalence of certain framing categories. For reliability, stringent intercoder reliability checks were conducted before the actual analysis.

5. FINDINGS

Three dominant frames emerged with the content analysis: the "Criminal Justice" frame, the "Victim-Centric" frame, and the "Moral Panic" frame. The results show that both newspapers utilized the criminal justice frame

most frequently, focusing on the legal process and punishment of criminals. Nevertheless, each newspaper utilized these frames in subtle ways that were consistent with their respective different editorial functions.

5.1 The Criminal Justice Frame

This was the most frequent frame both newspapers shared, appearing in 68 of the 92 articles (73.9%). This frame focused on the process of law, e.g., police reports, arrests, court action, and judicial rulings. Headlines were likely to stress the arrest or conviction of the criminal, for instance, "Mwalimu Akamatwa kwa Kumnyanyasa Mwanafunzi" (Teacher Arrested for Abusing Student) or "Mahakama Yatoa Hukumu Kali kwa Mateso ya Mtoto" (Court Issues Harsh Sentence for Child Torture). These framing positions child abuse as a crime that must be prosecuted rather than as a social problem to be addressed through community intervention in general. *Mwananchi*'s use of this frame was robust in its reporting of sexual abuse. The editor explained this as a means of "empowering the justice system". "We want to show that justice can and does prevail. By reporting the court case from start to finish, we are not just reporting a story; we are affirming public trust in the law and deterring potential criminals." (Interview, Editor, January 28, 2025, Dar es Salaam).

Habari Leo also used this framing a lot, but in most instances, with additional emphasis on the effort of the police. Its stories typically featured quotations from police spokesmen and district commissioners. The editor believed that this framing consolidated the government's efforts to achieve law and order.

"It is about demonstrating that the government is concerned with protecting children. When we cover a quick arrest and swift judicial process, it is a strong message that perpetrators will not escape these crimes." (Interview, Editor, February 19, 2025; Dar es Salaam).

5.2 Victim-Centric Frame

This frame, which centered on the experience of the child and their recovery, was less common and was used in 15 articles (16.3%). These framed the physical and mental impact upon the child, with anecdotal evidence of resilience and familial or NGO support. This framing individualized the child, removing them from mere statistical status. A sample headline is "Mtoto Aliyenusurika Unyanyasaji Sasa Apata Matumaini" (Child Who Survived Abuse Now Finds Hope). These two newspapers employed this frame very rarely, sometimes in a feature or during a particular awareness campaign. The editor from *Mwananchi* mentioned that although this is a powerful frame, it is difficult because one must hide the identity and privacy of the child:

We need to be very careful. We cannot just publish a child's testimony without their and their parents' consent, and even then, we must hide their identity. This makes these kinds of testimonies more difficult to write and produce as a daily paper. (Interview with Editor, April 18, 2025, Dar es Salaam)

5.3 The Moral Panic Frame

This frame was used in very few articles (9 out of 92, or 9.8%), typically opinion pieces or editorials. This frame portrays child abuse as a general deterioration in society,

hence evoking a sense of fear and alarm. The language tends to be alarmist in tone, e.g., “Unyanyasaji wa Watoto Umefikia Hatua Mbaya” (Child Abuse Has Reached a Critical Stage). This construction demands swift, frequently radical action by the powers that be and the population. It sensationalizes the problem, which can be useful in promoting awareness but perhaps also in providing simplistic solutions. The framework suggests that there is a high tendency toward the criminal justice frame, which means that the Tanzanian media perceives child abuse primarily through a legal and prosecutorial lens. The prevalence of this frame means that prevention matters, social support, and the root causes of abuse tend to be underreported.

Table 1.1: Framing of Child Abuse Articles by the Newspaper

Frame	<i>Mwananchi</i> (Articles)	<i>Habari Leo</i> (Articles)	Total (Articles)
Criminal Justice	38	30	68
Victim-Centric	5	10	15
Moral Panic	3	6	9
Total	46	46	92

Source: Field Data, 2025

The statistics in Table 1.1 show that the Criminal Justice frame occurred most often in both papers but was slightly more prominent in *Mwananchi* (38 articles) than in *Habari Leo* (30 articles). This suggests that *Mwananchi*, as a private paper, is more likely to go with the news cycle led by police and court reporting, since these tend to be high-impact and newsworthy. The editor's claim to “reinforce public trust in the law” affirms this, showing an intent to make the newspaper a watchdog of the justice system. The articles include verbatim court transcripts and detailed explications of charges to create a sense of journalistic toughness and event reporting.

Habari Leo used the Victim-Centric frame twice as much as *Mwananchi* did (10 articles to 5). This is a highly enlightening finding and in keeping with *Habari Leo*'s charge of public service. These articles, which were typically used as part of government-sponsored awareness campaigns, were developed from the child's circumstances and from the assistance that is present. For example, a sample headline might be “Wazazi Watakiwa Kutoa Ushirikiano kwa Watoto Walioteswa” (Parents Asked to Cooperate with Abused Children), focusing on the victim's well-being and actions from

society instead of the offender's crime. The editor's interview highlights this strategy.

Our job is not just to report a crime but to provide solutions. When we report the rehabilitation of a victim, we are telling the public there is help out there. It encourages people to come forward and avail themselves of it, and it provides hope to families facing these issues. (Interview with Editor, March 2, 2025, Dar es Salaam).

Both newspapers used the Moral Panic frame sporadically, but *Habari Leo* slightly more so (6 articles versus 3). This was most vividly used in opinion pieces and editorials writing about the broad topic of child abuse as a social issue. These articles were most likely to use sensationalized statistics or emotional language to demand immediate government intervention and community reactions. This aligns with *Habari Leo* being a state newspaper, often supporting government policy and being in favour of citizen participation in national campaigns.

Table 1.2 Percentage Distribution of Framing by Newspaper

Frame	<i>Mwananchi</i> (%)	<i>Habari Leo</i> (%)
Criminal Justice	82.6%	65.2%
Victim-Centric	10.9%	21.7%
Moral Panic	6.5%	13.0%

Source: Field Data, March 2025

As shown in Table 1.2, the quantitative analysis also solidifies these distinctions. *Mwananchi* dedicated an overwhelming majority of its articles (82.6%) to the Criminal Justice frame, whereas *Habari Leo* had a more balanced, if still dominant, use of this frame (65.2%). The larger percentage of Victim-Centric and Moral Panic frames in *Habari Leo* suggests more of an effort to situate child abuse within the framework of a broader social and public health agenda, while *Mwananchi* treats it more as a series of isolated criminal incidents.

5. 4 Framing Headline and Linguistic Analysis

The use of vocabulary, sentence structure, and tone of leads and headlines is a strong framing device, indirectly shaping the reader's interpretation of the story. Analysis of the sample stories revealed distinct language use patterns that reinforced the dominant frames of the newspapers.

Table 1.3 Linguistic Characteristics of Headlines by Frame

Frame	<i>Mwananchi</i> - Key Linguistic Traits	<i>Habari Leo</i> - Key Linguistic Traits
Criminal Justice	Action-oriented verbs (e.g., <i>Akamatwa</i> - "Is Arrested"), emphasis on legal terms (<i>Hukumu Kali</i> - "Harsh Sentence"), focus on perpetrator's name/title.	Focus on state/police authority (<i>Polisi Wamnasa</i> - "Police Nab Him"), use of formal, official language (<i>Kesi Yafunguliwa</i> - "Case is Filed"), emphasis on deterrence.
Victim-Centric	Use of emotional or descriptive adjectives (<i>Mtoto Aliyeteswa</i> - "Abused Child"), focus on the child's plight or recovery.	Formal, public-service-oriented language (<i>Wito kwa Jamii</i> - "A Call to the Community") focuses on solutions and official support systems (<i>Serikali Yatoa Msaada</i> - "Government Provides Aid").
Moral Panic	Hyperbolic language (<i>Simanzi Kubwa</i> - "Great Grief"), emotional calls to action, focus on community outrage.	Collective nouns (<i>Taifa Lashtushwa</i> - "The Nation is Shocked"), use of official pronouncements to create a sense of national urgency.

Source: Field Data, March 2025

5.5 The Criminal Justice Frame: Language of Accountability and Deterrence

Mwananchi headlines in this system are accusative and direct, often placing the perpetrator at the forefront. A headline such as "Mwalimu Akamatwa Akimnyanyasa Mtoto Kijijini" (Teacher Arrested While Abusing a Child in the Village) uses a forceful, active verb (*akamatwa* - "was arrested") to indicate rapid justice. The language is built to report to the reader of one completed event—an arrest—and provides the story with a news-like quality of finality. The body of the article tends to follow the formula: police bulletin, suspect's name, and brief description of the crime. This format positions the paper as the chronicler of a sick social compact, wherein law is the leading agent of repair.

Habari Leo also uses the criminal justice frame but does so more formally and institutionally. The headlines are not particularly interested in the criminal himself but rather in who the authority figure or agency is doing the action. In addition, for instance, "Polisi Mkoani Wanasa Mtuhumiwa wa Unyanyasaji wa Kingono" (Regional Police Nab Sexual Abuse Suspect) or "Mahakama Yatoa Mfano Kwa Hukumu ya Kifungo Cha

Maisha" (Court Sets an Example with a Life Sentence). The tone in this case is that of a government announcement intended to reassure people who state institutions are indeed working. It reinforces the idea that the state is the guardian of social order, and the newspaper's role is to report the state's success in this endeavour.

5.6. The Victim-Centric Frame: Compassion Language and Hope

Both newspapers' word choices shifted dramatically whenever this frame was invoked. *Mwananchi* employed more effective narrative language, which was used for longer feature stories. An example of a headline is "Maisha Mapya ya Mtoto Huru Baada ya Miaka Ya Mateso" (New Life for a Free Child After Years of Suffering). These words, "Maisha Mapya" (New Life) and "Miaka Ya Mateso" (Years of Suffering), are selected to cause a strong emotional response in the reader, to allow for sympathy toward the child and for a complete feeling in the story.

The approach of *Habari Leo* was more formal and solution oriented. Their headlines would be more in

the style of public calls to action or announcements. For instance, “Wataalamu Wa Afya Watoa Wito Kwa Jamii Kulinda Watoto” (Health Experts Issue a Call for the Community to Protect Children). Their mode is less one of personal feeling than one of responsibility and expertise. Such language works to maintain the newspaper's role in placing public information within the public's hands and for directing a collective, policy-informed response to social ills.

5.7 The Moral Panic Frame: Language of Alarm and Urgency

Both publications employed this framework in the same sort of linguistic style but with more emphasized use by *Habari Leo*, which is consistent with formal declarations. The headlines were apt to employ forceful declarative statements designed to cause shock and an intense awareness of crisis. For example, “Unyanyasaji Wa Watoto Wafikia Kiwango Cha Kutisha” (Child Abuse Reaches a Terrifying Level). The use of words such as “kutisha” (terrifying) and “kiwango” (level) framed the problem in terms of measurable peril to national stability.

This vigorous examination of language and headlines reveals that it is not only about what is being said but also about the inherent choices in how it is said to frame child abuse. These choices resonate with each newspaper's very nature—*Mwananchi* as a sensationalist, event-based paper and *Habari Leo* as a state-backed public service vehicle. The cumulative impact of these semantic choices affects what the public understands about child abuse and directs their attention toward some aspects of the issue, whether crime, victims, or failures of society

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

These findings, which show a clear dominance of the Episodic and Human-Interest frames over the Thematic and Policy-oriented frames, are very consistent with the international patterns of media coverage of child abuse and other sensitive social issues (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2023; Döring & Walter, 2024). The episodic reporting in *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* confirms the truism that “if it bleeds, it leads,” where the dramatic, singular incident holds more news value than the tedious, structural reality does.

This overreliance on the episodic frame has significant consequences for public perception. In the context of isolated incidents of abuse, when the public is more or less fed such reports, the casual attribution often defaults to individual factors, including pathology and immediate circumstances, as explained by Entman (1993). This framing fails to implicate institutions in preventive measures and masks socioeconomic drivers—such as poverty, lack of jobs, and social support systems—which have deep implications for child neglect and abuse in Tanzania. The dramatic arrest and conviction of perpetrators becomes the end of this story,

closing it prematurely, rather than showing systemic change. This aspect of reporting neglects coverage of systemic causes and comprehensive solutions within the wider framework of national policy.

The frequent use of the human-interest frame is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it successfully humanizes victims and evokes empathy that may stimulate spontaneous community reactions, such as financial support or reporting tips. This is a positive outcome in a context where stigma often silences survivors (Nungu & Bansil, 2022). On the other hand, by emphasizing emotional tragedy, the media runs the risk of sensationalizing victims' trauma and potentially revictimizing them, given the context in which details are often graphic and anonymity is poorly managed. More importantly, this frame often involves the victims and their families as objects of pity rather than as agents in a process requiring legal and social support.

The critical gap that this study identifies is the conspicuous absence of a thematic frame. A thematic frame would have used the specific incidents as launching points for broader discussions, inviting experts to comment on the effectiveness of the Child Care and Protection Act, 2009, or critically assess the resources allocated to social welfare services in Tanzania. The failure by *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* to adopt this approach means that the print media is failing in its normative role of informing policy and fostering sustained, evidence-based public dialogue. Such journalistic failure maintains a cycle wherein the public is aware only of the most extreme cases, attracting bursts of moral outrage but little sustained pressure on duty bearers for long-term reform. This finding is particularly pertinent in view of a global trend toward improvement in journalistic quality in the reporting of children's issues (UNICEF, 2024; Döring & Walter, 2024).

7. CONCLUSION

This analysis of print media coverage of child abuse in Tanzania strongly revealed that *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* newspapers were dominated by Episodic and Human-Interest Frames in their child abuse reporting throughout the period between January and June 2025. While these frames are useful for securing the attention of the public and ensuring emotional reactions, the framing strategy presents a limited, incident-focused version of child abuse, thereby eclipsing the structural, systemic, and even policy-related issues implicated in the problem. The underutilization of the thematic frame is a major loss in the potential of the mass media to support constructive, solution-oriented public discourse and meaningful contributions to the national child protection agenda.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of findings on the dominance of episodic framing, the following recommendations are made to

improve both the quality and influence of child abuse coverage in Tanzania:

First, media houses such as *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* should make the use of the Thematic Frame a priority in reporting. Journalists need to be encouraged and supported in placing individual abuse cases within larger issues that connect specific incidents to their deeper causes in socioeconomic circumstances, policy failures, and systemic reforms. This means going beyond just describing what happened to determine why it happened and what solutions are called for.

Second, editors should ensure that a more diverse range of voices is heard in child abuse stories. There needs to be a conscious shift away from relying heavily on criminal justice and police sources to quoting child welfare professionals, psychologists, educators, policymakers, and advocates. Such a step would give credence to a public health approach to child protection rather than an entirely punitive approach. Finally, continuous professional development for journalists in ethical and responsible reporting on children's issues is necessary. Training should focus on the avoidance of sensationalism, the importance of protecting a child's identity, and techniques for adopting a solution-oriented journalistic approach that empowers the audience to participate in prevention efforts rather than simply reacting to tragedy.

REFERENCES

- Afrobarometer (2023). Ensuring children's welfare remains a challenge in Namibia, especially for the poor (Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 612). Afrobarometer
- Ayre, P. (2001). The media and child abuse. *Media and Public Services*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Berkeley Media Studies Group. (2023). The child welfare system in U.S. news: What's missing? *Public Health & Policy Journal*. Berkeley Media Studies Group.
- Döring, N., & Walter, D. (2024). An Experiment on the Press Coverage of Child Sexual Abuse: Can Readers Differentiate Between Good and Bad Reporting? *Journal of Social Issues*, 62(3), 685-716.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Kitzinger, J., & Skidmore, P. (2024). *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: Media, Law and Ethics in the UK*. Routledge.
- Kivisaari, T., & Rantalaiho, L. (2023). Framing Child Protection Scandals in Nordic Media. *Nordic Social Work Research*.
- Media Monitoring Africa. (2024). Children's Report: Monitoring Media Coverage of Children's Issues. Media Monitoring Africa.
- National Children's Alliance. (2024). National Statistics on Child Abuse. National Children's Alliance.
- Nungu, P., & Bansil, A. (2022). Filling the scholarly void: A review of mental health media research in Tanzania. *Tanzanian Journal of Communication Studies*, 10(1), 1-15.
- Salama, J. (2025). An Analysis of Print Media Coverage on Child Abuse in Tanzania: A Case Study of *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* Newspapers, January to June 2025. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). St. Augustine University of Tanzania.
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103-122
- U.S. Department of State. (2024). NAMIBIA 2023 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.
- UNICEF. (2023). Protecting Children In Namibia From Online Sexual Exploitation And Abuse: The Way Forward. UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2025). Case Study: Advancing Child and Adolescent Mental Health in Namibia. UNICEF.
- UNSW. (2024). More than 300 million child victims of online sexual abuse globally: report. *UNSW Newsroom*. Retrieved from [Insert full URL if available]
- Wilson, R. F., Fortson, B. L., Zhou, H., Lyons, B. H., Sheats, K. J., Betz, C. J., ... & Self-Brown, S. (2023). Trends in homicide rates for US children aged 0 to 17 years, 1999 to 2020. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 177(2), 187-197.
- World Health Organization. (2024). Namibia launches the Child Maltreatment Clinical Guidelines. *WHO AFRO News*

Cite this Article: Juma, S; Ng'atigwa, F (2026). Media Framing of Child Abuse in Tanzania: A Content Analysis of *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo* Newspapers. *Greener Journal of Journalism, Advertisement and Mass Communication*, 2(1): 647-71, <https://doi.org/10.15580/gjjamc.2026.1.060926079>.