

# CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT



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## Chapter 21

### AN INVESTIGATION INTO DIFFERENTIAL PERCEPTION OF CHILD ABUSE CAUSATIVE FACTORS IN THE SOUTH WEST OF NIGERIA.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Children are heritage from God. Marriage, in African traditional belief, would not record a complete success story if the couples are childless. Consequently, couples explore all possible means to have as many issues as possible. Some even go to the extent of requesting for children from evil spirits. If having children is as much as important as this, one would therefore, expect that children would be given the best of love, care, attention, support and so on. This becomes paramount because at their age they cannot be totally independent. Put in another way, the attainment of their full potentials is dependent on the assistance rendered by significant others in their life such as parents, caregivers, guardian, babysitters, teachers, e.t.c.

Unfolding events in the recent past both in the developed and developing nations of the world, however, indicate that what significant number of these children receive from significant others in lieu of love, care, and support is maltreatment. Differently coined, they are either being abused or neglected. A case in point is the child abuse and neglect statistic from the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse which reported that in 1994, over 3 million children were reported for child abuse and neglect to Child Protective Service (CPS) agencies in the United States of America (Johnson, 1996). It is the submission of the writer that developing nations would record higher numbers of child abuse if adequate statistics is taken.



The term 'child abuse' has been given diverse interpretations. For instance, the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (2004) defined it as any behaviour directed towards a child by a parent, guardian, caregiver, other family members or adult, that endangers or impairs a child's physical or emotional health and development. Axmaher (2004), on the other hand, defined it as any mistreatment or neglect of a child that results in non-accidental harm or injury and which cannot be reasonably explained. From these definitions and many others not mentioned in this paper, it is obvious that children are victims of many abusers. Axmaher (2004), however, contended that three in four abuse cases are parents. It is also evident from their definitions that child abuse takes diverse forms. These include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. The review of definitions also exposes the fact that when children are abused it has a number of negative physical and psychological consequences on their development. It is even the submission of Aber, Allen, Carison and Cicchetti (1989) that consequences of child abuse can last throughout a person's life. Weise and Daro (1995) reported that more than three children die each day due to child abuse. Academically, English (1998) reported that the older the abused child becomes, the more likely he performs poorly in school. Emotionally, Axmaher (2004) argued that less severe forms of early emotional deprivations produces babies who grow into anxious and unsecured children.

Arising from the above, child abuse syndrome is too grievous to be left unattended to. Since children of today are leaders / parents of tomorrow whatever will jeopardize their becoming full functioning individuals should be given globalized recognition. This becomes imperative because child abuse is a complex and multi dimensional social vice. It occurrence is hinged on multiple forces that are mutually reinforcing each other (Maliposky - Rummell and Hansen, 1993).

The implications of the facts are that a single factor cannot be the sole cause of child abuse. Researchers have indicated that child abuse is more likely to occur in poverty ridden homes which are commonly characterized by financial pressures, unemployment and poor housing conditions (English 1998); lack of parenting skills coupled with a lack of knowledge of child development, inappropriate discipline

and single parenthood (National Council of Child Abuse and Family Violence 2004; Sedlack and Broadhurst 1996); lack of support from extended family / community; social isolation (Chambliss and Emshoff 1993); substance abuse (Parent Child Abuse America, 1996).

### **Statement of the Problems**

From the foregoing a good number of empirical studies have been documented on causative or sustaining factors of child abuse. This notwithstanding, a critical analysis of literature indicates that apart from the fact that most of these studies are foreign-based considerable attention has not been given to multi-causatory explanations on the differences that exist on the basis of gender, marital status, religion, educational qualification and respondents' level of involvement in child abuse practise.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study, on the premise of the above submission, is set out to find out if there were significant differences in the causes of child abuse based on involvement or non-involvement in child abuse practise and educational qualification.

### **Research Hypothesis**

Arising from the primary aim of the study two research hypotheses are formulated to give direction to the study:

- (1) Child abusers and non-child abusers will not differ significantly in their perception of the causative factors of child abuse.
- (2) Educated and illiterate subjects will not differ significantly in their perception of the causative factors of child abuse.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design.

### **Sample**

The sample for the study consisted of two hundred participants randomly and judgmentally selected from 3 states in the south west of

Nigeria—Oyo: 82 (41%); Osun: 62 (31%); Ogun: 56 (28%). Of the total sample 95 (47.5%) were males while 105 (52.5%) were females. Their ages ranged between 23 and 85 with a mean age calculated to be 51.22.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used to collect data from the subjects was a self-developed validated questionnaire which was sub-divided into three parts. While part A measured demographic information such as sex, age, educational qualification, marital status, state of origin and number of children, part B contained 8 items that had their primary focus on the extent to which the subjects were involved in child abuse practice. The last part C was a 25—item scale on causes of child abuse rated on 5 point Likert format on a continuum ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The highest possible score obtainable by a respondent was 125 (5 x 25) while the lowest was 25 (1 x 25). For the purpose of this study, the higher the score the higher the causative capability of the factors and vice-versa. The instrument was face validated by six experts from departments of Sociology, Test and Measurement and Guidance and Counselling.

The split - half reliability that was based on even - odd paradigms was computed in an attempt to determine the reliability of the instrument. This yielded 0.75 which was considered adequate for the administration of the instrument.

### **Procedure for Data Administration and Collection**

The administration and collection of the instrument were carried out by the researcher with assistance of six research assistants. The translation of the instrument into vernacular was done by the researchers for the illiterate subjects. In all, out of 305 copies of the questionnaire distributed, only 200 were properly filled and returned.

### **Data Analysis**

The statistical tool employed for the study was t-test at .5 level of significance. This was used to assess the significant differences between the scores of child abusers and non-child abusers as well as educated and illiterate subjects.

## Results

This section presents the results of data analysis in accordance with the earlier stated research hypotheses:

**Table 1: t-test comparison of causes of child abuse scores of child abusers and non-child abusers.**

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	t-obs	t-Critical	p
Child Abusers	60	79.33	13.92	198	4.18	1.96	<0.05
Non Child Abusers	140	73.69	13.89				

The result of the statistical analysis of the first hypothesis indicated that the calculated t-value (4.18) is greater than the table value (1.96). This implies that significant difference existed between the mean scores of the two groups. Consequently, the first hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 2: t-test comparison of causes of child abuse scores of educated and illiterate subjects.**

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	t-obs	t-Critical	p
Educated	125	73.66	14.27	198	-3.90	1.96	<0.05
Illiterate	75	78.6	13.18				

From the t-test statistical analysis of the second hypothesis presented in table 2, it could be seen that the calculated t-value is -3.90. Since this is greater than the critical of 1.96, the hypothesis was therefore rejected. Hence, the study upheld that a significant

difference existed between the mean scores of the educated and illiterate subjects.

## **Discussion**

The outcome of the statistical analysis of the two hypotheses formulated for this study indicated clearly the significant differences that existed between child abusers and non-child abuser on one hand and educated and illiterate on the other hand. For the first hypothesis, the fact that child abusers recorded greater mean scores than non-child abusers did not provoke any surprise. Unlike their counterpart, they are in the better position to predict the extent to which each factor promotes child abuse. This is simply because they have at one time or the other abused either their children or other children in their care. As such they are in the better position to explain reasons for abusing these children.

The finding of the second hypothesis which indicated that illiterate subjects had higher mean than the educated subjects could be as a result of the fact that most of the illiterates used for this study were victims of abuse or were child abusers. As such they were well versed in the identification of factors responsible for child abuse practise. Besides, their pattern of life, intellectual abilities, economic prowess etc significantly differ from the elites.

## **Recommendations**

On the premise of the outcome of the study it is recommended that:

- government should promulgate laws against child abuse.
- considerable efforts should be made by government and non-governmental agencies at eradicating illiteracy.
- counselling services should be provided to victims of child abuse and abusers.

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