

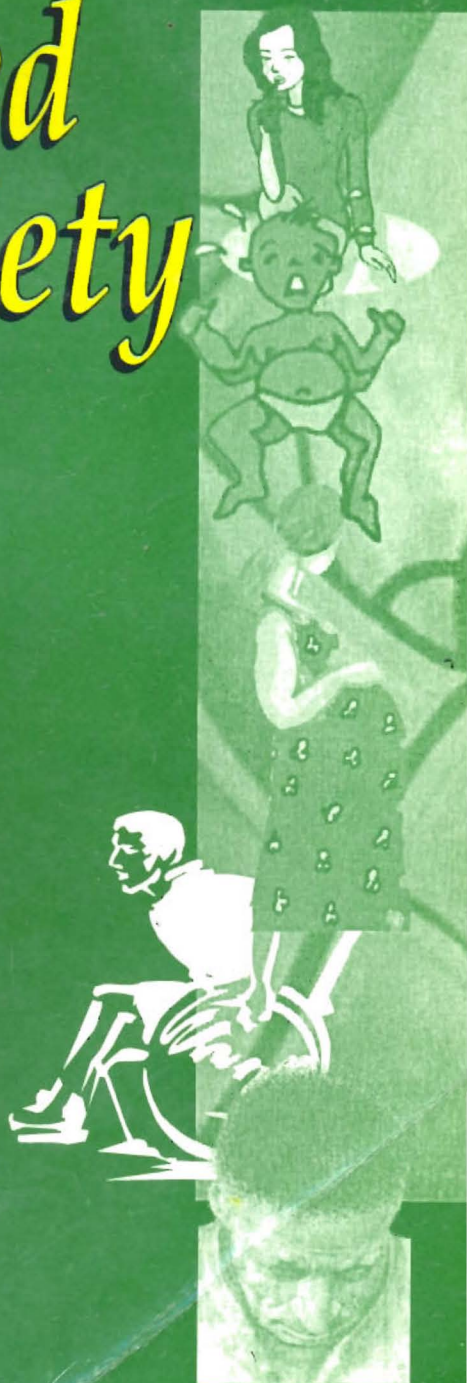
The *Abused* and the *Society*

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An Investigation Into Factors Sustaining Child Abuse in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The existence of child abuse dates back to pre-historic era. The mere fact that the menace still continues till today confirms the fact that certain factors are reinforcing or sustaining its continued existence. This study therefore, investigated some of these sustaining factors. Subjects of the study are two hundred and thirty 230 adults randomly selected from the three senatorial districts of Oyo State. A validated instrument was used to obtain data. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were utilized to test the research questions posed. The result at $X = 3.00$ decision point shows that the participants agreed that 17 out of the 25 psycho-social factors sustained child abuse in Nigeria. Towards this end, the paper recommended the establishment of counselling centres in all the local governments of the Federation to cater for the counselling needs of victims of child abuse and the abusers.

Introduction

Development of human being passes through a number of sequential but interrelated phases in life. This includes childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age phases of life. Of all these, childhood is singularly important because it sets

the pace for other phases of human development. The childhood period falls under school age period in most nations of the world. Children at this stage because of nature and nurture factors, naturally require love, care, protection, guidance from parents and care-givers. Paradoxically however, evidences abound from historical facts that children have suffered from the hands of their parents or caregivers. Put in another way, they were physically, emotionally, sexually abused and neglected. Isangedighi (2004) confirms this when he states that maltreatment of children such as parental torture or sale of children has always been treated as a domestic affair in almost all cultures.

Child abuse is the dehumanizing treatment meted out to a child which jeopardizes his/her normal development. Obinaju (2004) refers to child abuse as any act which would amount to making a wrong and an excessive use of the child. This excludes humane treatment which the child receives and an act which would amount to an insult on the child. Oniyama, Oniyama and Asamaigo (2004) regard child abuse as a conscious maltreatment of a child due to fault(s) or no fault of the child. In certain respect, one needs to decipher between behaviour that constitutes an abuse of children. For this reason (1988) Starr, contends that behaviour that constitutes abuse of children should be determined by the intention of the abusive person; the value judgement regarding the act; the standard upon which the value judgement is based and the effect of the act on the victim. This submission notwithstanding the abuse of children comes in diverse dimensions from the review of literature. This include severe beating/biting or punishment, tribal marks, verbal abuse/aggression, child prostitution, rape, fondling of genitals, incest, female circumcision, abandonment or failure to meet children physical, emotional, educational, medical, social needs etc.

The prevalence of the above dimensions of child abuse syndrome has reached a worrisome dimension both at home

and abroad from review of relevant literature. It is the submission of Ifeyinwa (2002) that all societies worldwide are prospective dens for both the simplest and life-threatening cases of child abuse. This might not be an understatement when consideration is given to a number of statistical reports of child abuse incidence from diverse nations. For instance, in a 1994 survey reported by Wiese and Daro (1995) the analysis of percentage of all forms of child abuse stood at: 21% for physical abuse; 11% for sexual abuse; 49% for neglect; 3% for emotional abuse; and 16% for other forms of child maltreatment. In this same vein, Axmaher (2004) reports that while physical abuse accounts for about 1 in 4 substantiated cases of child abuse, sexual abuse is about 8% of all substantiated cases. Child neglect, on the other hand, constitutes more than half of all substantiated cases of child abuse.

Although accurate statistics on child abuse in Nigeria is presently unavailable, its existence has been reported by Ifeyinwa (2002); Bukoye (2004) and Dunapo (2002). Specifically, Ifeyinwa (2002) states that in Nigeria all forms of abuse abound but sexual abuse is overriding with trafficking of female children for prostitution and disregard for child rights. In a study conducted by Durosaro (1993) on the effects of child abuse on the academic performance of secondary school students in Oyo State, it was discovered that physical abuse such as beating, corporal punishment, excessive workload, neglect as well as emotional and psychological abuses were prevalent. It is however, the belief of some scholars that the true prevalence level of child abuse could not be obtained because some of the victims are too young or fearful to report. Hence, it is possible that incident of child abuse is greater than official data indicated (Johnson, 1996).

From the foregoing, it is glaring that the prevalence of child abuse phenomenon from pre-historic period up till the present age has a number of sustaining factors. Until these

reinforcing factors are kept at bay, attempt at the eradication of the menace of child abuse might turn out to be fruitless endeavour. Realising this fact, quite a number of scholars have pinpointed certain causative/sustaining/enhancing factors of child abuse. These include poverty (Dunapo, 2002; Eweniyi, 2003 and Isangedighi, 2004); impaired or poor parenting skills (National Council of Child Abuse and Family Violence, 2004 and Obinaju, 2004); lack of support for the family (Dacey and Travers, 1996; Bassey, Udoh and Ubom, 2004); abuser as victims of abuse (Daroven, 1995); emotional/psychological problems (English, 1998); large family size (Oniyama, Oniyama and Asamaigo, 2004); illiteracy (Bukoye, 2004); pathological deficiency (Isangedighi, 2004); migration and urbanization (Obinaju, 2004); Single-parenthood (Isangedighi, 2004; Sedlack and Broadhurst 1996); divorce (Oniyama, Oniyama and Asamaigo, 2004); unemployment (UNICEF, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

From the perspective of these scholars, child abuse is a multifaceted phenomenon which a single factor can not adequately explain. Hence, a number of factors cooperatively work together to sustain child abuse practices. Although different authors have pointed out certain sustaining factors of child abuse most of the identified factors are theoretical postulations. There is the need to carry out studies that would confirm or negate some of these postulations on sustaining factors of child abuse.

Purpose of the Study

On the premise of the above observations, the concern of this study is to determine the extent to which certain factors sustain child abuse in Nigeria.

this study to ensure that different parts of Oyo State were represented. Hence, the three senatorial districts that state is made of was identified and the instrument of the study was randomly distributed to two hundred and thirty (230) participants selected from the three senatorial districts of Oyo State.

The instrument used to collect data from the respondents was a self-developed validated questionnaire, which is subdivided into three parts. While part A measures demographic information such as sex, age, educational qualification, marital status, state of origin and number of children, part B contains 8 items that have their primary focus on extent to which the respondents are involved in child abuse practices. The last part C, is a 25 item scale on sustenance of child abuse rated on 5 point Likert format on continuum ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The highest possible score obtainable by a respondent was 125 (5×25) while the lowest was 25 (1×25). For the purpose of this study, the higher the score, the higher causative capability of the factors and vice-versa. The instrument was face and content validated by six experts from departments of Sociology, Test and Measurement and Guidance and Counselling. The draft copies of the instrument given to them were corrected and suggestions made were incorporated into the final production of the instrument.

The split-half reliability that was based on even-odd paradigm 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.

A total of three hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher and three field assistants. The administration and collection were done on the same day. Of the total number administered only two hundred and thirty were properly filled and found usable for the purpose of the study.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The decision point was put at $X = 3.00$. Hence, mean score below 3.00 is interpreted to represent disagreement while mean score of 3.00 and above represent agreement with the items.

Results

Table1: Means Scores and Standard Deviation of Responses to Sustenance Factors of Child Abuse

ITEM	X	S.D.	DECISION	RANK
Lack of parenting skills	3.58	1.52	Agree	1 st
Personal history of abuse	3.24	1.33	Agree	9 th
Large family size	3.24	1.37	Agree	9 th
Unemployment	3.11	1.44	Agree	13 th
Alcohol or drug influence	3.4	1.42	Agree	3 rd
Poverty or poor economy	3.42	1.26	Agree	2 nd
Children from unwanted Pregnancies	3.10	1.36	Agree	15 th
Domestics Problems	3.1	1.23	Agree	13 th
Unrealistic expectation from children	3.04	1.29	Agree	17 th
High crime environment	2.89	1.47	Disagree	18 th
Mental/ Health problem	3.2	1.33	Disagree	11 th
Social isolation	2.87	1.26	Disagree	19 th
Lack of support from government and non-government agencies	2.69	1.31	Disagree	22 nd
Inappropriate discipline techniques	3.27	1.29	Agree	6 th
Disabled children	2.6	1.37	Disagree	23 rd
Teenage parent	3.25	1.43	Agree	8 th
Unmet emotional/ physical needs	3.20	1.17	Agree	11 th
Divorce/ Separation/ Single Parent	3.3	1.44	Agree	4 th
Illiteracy	3.3	1.37	Agree	4 th
Prolong holiday	2.57	1.33	Disagree	24 th
Unemployed children	2.72	1.29	Disagree	21 st
Polygamous family structure	3.08	1.38	Agree	16 th
Migration /Urbanization	2.56	1.24	Disagree	25 th
Patriarchal/family structure	2.81	1.16	Disagree	20 th
Absence of preventive laws	3.27	1.39	Agree	6 th

The results of data analysis presented in Table I above shows that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, and 25 have mean scores above the upper limit of 3.00 which are indicators of acceptance while items 10, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23 and 24 have mean scores below the decision point of 3.00 which signifies non-acceptance or disagreement.

Discussion of the Findings

The outcome of this study clearly demonstrates that not all psycho-social factors identified by the study have sustaining influence on child abuse. Items 10, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23 and 24 which the respondents disagreed with are combination of psycho-social factors. Significant numbers of these factors are, however, social factors. Specifically, the rejection of items 12, 13, 15 and 23 negate the earlier findings of English (1993); Dacev and Travers (1996) English (1993); Obinaju (2004) respectively. On the other hand, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 which the respondents are in agreement with confirm National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (2004); Daroven (1995); Sedlack and Broadhurst (1996). UNICEF (2000); National Centre on Child Abuse and Neglect (1992); Bukoye (2002) findings respectively.

Further analysis from the table reveals that the mean ratings of factors agreed to by the respondents could be hierarchically arranged thus: 1, 6, 5, 18, 19, 25, 14, 16, 2, 3, 11, 17, 4, 8, 7, 20 and 9. In addition to this, this is the first study, at least to the best of the knowledge of the researcher that would investigate the sustaining role of having children from unwanted pregnancy, children on holiday and unemployed children (items 7, 20, and 21) on child abuse.

Implication for Counselling Profession

The findings of this study have a number of implications for counselling practice. First of all, the fact that 17 out of the 25 factor items have sustaining influence on child abuse implies

that counsellor should give considerable attention to those 17 factors when designing preventive and corrective counselling intervention for child abuse. Secondly, the fact that poor parenting skill tops the list of psycho-social factor sustenance of child abuse has implication for marital counselling. Counsellors should provide necessary counselling hints on effective child rearing techniques to their clients.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study the following suggestions are made:

- counselling centres should be established in all the local government areas of the Federation to cater for the counselling needs of the victims of child abuse and abusers.
- genuine economic reforms that would alleviate poverty should be implemented by government.
- government and non-governments agencies should intensify their efforts at encouraging parents to have minimum number of children they can cater for.

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