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THE PERVASIVENESS OF PHYSICALLY ABUSED CHILDREN IN SOME SELECTED SCHOOLS IN AFIJIO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Child abuse has been a touchy and perennial phenomenon in Nigeria. It occurs in four different dimensions namely: physical, sexual, emotional and neglect. Physical abuse is, however, the most visible of all. The perpetrators of physical abuse do not exclude the parents. This descriptive study was conducted to determine the prevalence of physically abused children in schools. The sample consisted of 205 (92 males representing 44.87% and 113 females representing 55.12%) primary and secondary students randomly selected from Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo state, Nigeria. A validated instrument tagged "Questionnaire on the Prevalence of Child Abuse in Schools" was used to gather data. One research question and two research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The findings showed that the use of corporal punishment is the most often used method of correcting child's maladaptive behaviour. This is closely followed by the use of force to tell the truth and giving children hard work beyond what their physical abilities can cope with respectively. Further analysis of the data revealed that there were no significant differences in the way male and female students, students from literate and illiterate suffer physical abuse from their parents. The implications of these findings on government activities and school counselor's professional responsibilities were discussed.

Key words: Pervasiveness, physical abuse, parents, schools, Oyo State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Child Right Act 2003 in Nigeria classified an individual below the age of eighteen as a child. The Act further identifies specific rights of children to include right to dignity, leisure, recreation and cultural activities, health and health services, parental care and protection, education and the right not to be exposed to narcotic drugs among others. Sections 21 – 36 of the same Act equally prohibit several acts, violations of which may be translated to child abuse (Akintola, 2007). For instance,

section 30 of the Act forbids the buying, selling and luring children for the purpose of hawking or begging for alms or prostitution, domestic or sexual labour. Offenders of this section of the Act are to be imprisoned for a decade for abusing the children.

A child is said to be abused, in the submission of Khatri (2004) if a recent act or failure on the part of parent, or caregiver leads to physical or emotional harms, sexual abuse or exploitation, or any act or failure to act which involves imminent risk of serious harm. Broadly speaking, children abuses have been classified into four major categories. These are physical, emotional, sexual and neglect (Thompson Corporation 2004; Axmaker, 2004; Uzoezie, 2004).

Physical abuse, which is the focus of this paper, may be defined as any act which results in a non-accidental trauma or physical injury (National Exchange Club foundation, 2000). It could also be said to be non-accidental infliction of physical injury to a child usually by a family member or other caretaker who is more likely to be male (Thomson Corporation, 2004). From these definitions, it is evident that physical abuse is different from other types of children abuses mainly because the victims of physical abuse suffer physical pain and injury from the abuser.

Physical abuse takes diverse forms and degrees, Uzoezie (2004), however, argues that intent murder is the most extreme form of physical abuse. Other dimensions of physical abuse could be in form of beating, whipping, paddling, punching, biting, choking or hair-pulling, burning with cigarettes, scalding water or other hot objects, severe physical punishment inappropriate to child's age (Ugbong, Ifeji and Beshel, 2004).

The statistics of children who have suffered diverse forms of physical abuse from parents or care givers have been documented in most developed countries of the world. When compared with other forms of abuses, Axmaker (2004) reports that physical abuse accounted for about one out of four substantiated cases of child abuse. In the same vein, the National Exchange Club Foundation (2000) reports that physical abuse only represents nineteen percent of all substantiated cases of child abuse. Specifically, the Thompson Corporation (2004) reports that in 1996, twenty-four percent of the confirmed cases of children abuses in United States involved physical abuse. Similarly, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2000) report shows that out of more than 2.5 million cases of child abuse and neglect thirty-five percent (35%) involve physical abuse.

In the developing countries of the world, statistical data of the prevalent level of physically abused children are yet to be accurately documented. There are however, evidences to show that African culture upholds the training of child thorough the use of disciplinary measures (Nnachi, 2004). Such disciplinary measures, according to him, include flogging the child if he/she does wrong thing or refuses to change from doing the wrong thing; scolding the child if he/she intends to insist on doing the wrong thing, depriving the child of his/her rights if he/she commits a crime. Orere-

Clifford (2004) corroborates the above trust of Africans in the use of physical punishment to correct children. He, however, added that some parents even go to the extent of handing over their errant children to the dreaded mobile police or vigilante group for thorough beating. Omoniyi (2004) also buttress the acceptability of culture of physical abuse in Nigeria when he states that:

The beating of children is common and cultural acceptable in many Nigeria homes just as the use of corporal punishment in the school reinforces the notion that physical aggression is an acceptable and effective means of eliminating unwanted behaviours in children ...instilling discipline (127 – 218).

He further observes that some forms of corporal punishment meted out to children are not only extremely harsh but are both physically and emotionally dangerous. They include:

- ❖ making the child to carry heavy objects;
- ❖ beating with horse-whip;
- ❖ using razor blade or knife to cut the child and adding pepper or salt to the cut. At times, such cut can even be made on the child's genitalia;.
- ❖ circumcision of female;. putting of tribal marks on the child's face.

Quite a number of factors have been pinned down as triggers of physical abuse of children by their abusers. Thomson Corporation (2004) concurs that the trigger may be normal child behaviour like crying or dirtying a diaper. It, however, makes a distinction between the reaction of an abuser and non-abuser to this normal behaviour of children. While non-abuser may become angry or upset but still in love the abuser parents harbor deep-rooted negative feelings toward their children. On the other hand, some writers have argued that physical abuse of children is triggered by defective personality inherent in the abusers. Such defective characteristics, according to Daley and Travers (1996), include parents or care givers who:

- . are abused when they are children;
- . are often loners;
- . refuse to recognize the seriousness or conditions of the child;
- . believe in harsh punishment;
- . have unreasonable expectations of the child;
- . feel personally incompetent;
- . Lack self-control and often immature and dependent..

Similarly, Isangedighii (2004) listed unrealistic parental expectations of the behaviour of their children, impaired parenting skills, parental inability to tolerate frustration, inappropriate parental expression of anger, parental social incompetence and isolation, emotional distress such as anxiety, depression, hysteria and all sorts of summate problems as pathological deficiencies of children abusers which make them unleash terror on their victims.

When children are physical abused Geocities (2005) asserts that parents are unintentionally teaching their children to learn four major things which include:

- . the association of love with violence;
- . moral rightness of hitting other family members;
- . justification for the use of physical force;
- . hitting under stress or anger is legitimate to certain extent.

Studies have also shown that physical abuse in children tends to make them aggressive towards peer; have difficulty with peer relatives and show a diminished capacity for empathy toward others (English, 1998). A physically abused child has also been found to possess a number of physical indicators of the abuse in diverse part of the body. These have been summarily tabulated by the Exchange Club Foundation (2000) thus:

BRUISES BURNS LACERATIONS & ABRASIONS SKELETAL INJURIES	HEAD INJURIES	INTERNAL INJURIES
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Posterior Immersion Shaped on The buttocks On body Fractures of Long bones From twisting and Pulling Missing or Cigarette burns: hands, feet In clusters Rope burns from confinement On infants Dry burns, caused by iron Spiral fractures	On Lips, eyes, infant face Burns:Doughnut- Loosened teeth On gum tissue, caused by forced feeding Separation of bone and shaft Absence of hair Subdural/retinal hemorrhages from hitting or shaking. Multiples in various stages of healing Stiff, swollen, enlarged joints Nasal or jaw fracture	Intestinal Injuries from hitting or kicking Unusual patterns Rupture of heart- related blood vessels. On external genitals Detachment of tissue of bone and shaft Hemorrhaging beneath scalp from hair pulling Inflammation of abdominal area
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Figure 1: Physical Indicators of Physical Abuse.

Evidences from the above background information directly point to the fact that physical abused is not racially biased. Second, it shows that children who are physically abused tend to suffer pain, injury and psychological maladjustment. Consequently, there is the urgent need to set machineries in motion that would

minimize if not completely eradicate the incident of physical abuse of children. One method of achieving this is to first of all determine the prevalent level of the incident thereby revealing the magnitude of the problem. It is, however, disheartening to note that accurate data on physically abused children are scarcely available in Nigeria to the best of the knowledge of these writers. Lack of statistical data may cause the problem to be underrated and thereby lead to the failure to tackle the problem appropriately by the stakeholders. Consequently, this paper is deigned to bridge the lack of empirical information gap by providing answers to questions on how often academic learners in primary and secondary schools suffer physical abuse from their parents and at the same time establish significant differences on the bases of their gender and educational level of their parents. It is hoped that the outcome of the study would provide base line data on which intervention strategies could be developed by government and non-government agencies to combat the problems. School counselors in particular would be endowed with facts and figures that would enable them meet the counseling needs of the physically abused children.

Research Question

How often and in what specific areas are students physically abused by their parents?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female students in the rate in which they are being physically abused by their parents.
2. There is no significant difference between literate and illiterate parents in the rate at which they abuse their children

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey design. All the primary pupils and secondary students in Afijio Local Government area of Oyo State, Nigeria form the target population. However, the sample consist of 205 randomly selected participants from 10 primary and 10 secondary schools. They are made up of 92 males representing 44.87% and 113 females representing 55.12% with a mean age of 10.9.

The instrument used for data gathering was "Questionnaire on the Prevalence of Abuse Children in Schools" (Gesinde, 2006). It is subdivided into two sections. Section A tapped demographic data: sex, age school and so on. While section B contains 4 sub-scales consisting of 6 statements on each of the 4 dimensions of child abuse namely: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. Item responses in the 4 sub-scales were design in a 3 point Likert type format ranging from 2 (often) to (Never). The reliability index of the instrument produced a Pearson Coefficient correlation of .71. However, for the purpose of this study, sub-scale A (Physical) was made use of. The scoring is done in such a way that the maximum score obtainable is 12 while), 0 is the minimum. The higher the score the more the respondent is physically abused by his/her parents. The instruments were distributed in the selected schools to the participants who are living with their parents only The items on the instrument were interpreted in vernacular

to facilitate understanding for some of the participants. The administration of instruments was carried out by this researchers, student-teachers, and classroom teachers. The completed questionnaire was collected on the same day.

The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and rank order for the research question and t-test statistic for the two research questions.

RESULT

Table 1: Frequency counts, percentages and rank order of responses to items on physical abuse of children by parents

S/N	Statement on Physical Abuse	Often (2)	Sometimes (1)	Never(0)	Rank order
1	When my parents are angry/frustrated they throw objects at me with the intention of harming me	11(5.37%)	64(31.22%)	130(63.41%)	5 th
2	My parents beat me without committing any offence	06(3%)	32(16%)	167(81%)	6 th
3	My parents have beaten me to the point of getting injured/deformed	09(5%)	74(36%)	121(59%)	2 nd
4	In an attempt to force me to tell the truth my parents have put pepper on my body	28(14%)	51(25%)	125(61%)	3 rd
5	My parents give work that is too hard for my age	24(12%)	53(26%)	128(62%)	4 th
6	Corporal punishment is used by my parents to correct my misbehaviour	34(17%)	78(38%)	93(45%)	1 st

It is evident from the analysis in Table 1 that physically abused suffered by participants from their parents covers all the items. The percentage of those who suffered from item 6 however top the list. This is closely followed by items 3, 4, 5, and 1 in that order. The least item from where the participants suffered physical abuse was item 2.

Research Hypothesis 1

Table 2: t-test analysis of the mean scores of male and female respondents

VARIABLES	N	X	SD	DF	t-obs	t-crit.	P
Male	92	2.94	2.35	203	0.04	1.96	NS*
Female	113	2.62	2.01				

*Not Significant @ 0. 0.5 alpha level

Examination of table 2 indicates that male respondents had a higher mean score of 2.94 as against female respondents of 2.62. Further analysis via t-test statistic, however, shows that significant difference did not exist in the ratings of the two groups. This is because the computed t-value of 0.04 is lesser than the t-critical of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level. Consequently, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups is accepted

Research Hypothesis 2

Table V1: t-test analysis of the mean scores of respondents from literate and illiterate parents

Groups	N	X	SD	DF	t-obs	t-crit	P
Literate Parents	101	2.74	2.24	203	0.13	1.96	NS*
Illiterate Parents	104	2.84	2.17				

*Not Significant @ 0.05 alpha level.

The analysis of data in table 3 shows that the mean score of respondents from literate parents ($x = 2.74$) is lower than those from illiterate parents ($x = 2.87$). When the data were further subjected to statistical significance difference existed between the two groups. It was found that the calculated t-value of 0.13 is far below the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, The null hypothesis which states no significant difference in the rating of the two groups is upheld.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of respondents' rating patterns clearly proved the fact that children who are physically abused by parents exist in Nigerian schools. This confirms the reports of George, (2004) and Omoniyi (2003) that parents made use of physical punishment to correct children misbehaviours. A closer look at the rating patterns also shows that the use of corporal punishment is the most often used method of correcting child's maladaptive behaviour. This is closely followed by the use of force to tell the truth and giving children hardwork beyond what their physical abilities can cope with respectively. As rightly observed by Isangedighi (2003), occasional parent-child conflict is a natural phenomenon, but when a nasty relationship is allowed to degenerate into abuse then there is much to worry about. Children are generally disobedient and stubborn by nature but it is doubtful if the application of painful stimuli would engineer socially acceptable behaviours. The use of painful stimuli would rather reinforce undesirable acts.

The data analysis of the two research hypotheses were upheld because no statistically significant difference exists between the physically abused male and female respondents as well as respondents from literate and illiterate parents. The higher mean score of male over female students, however, implies that the former suffer more physical abuse from their parents. This result corroborates other studies which reports that victims of physical abuse are mostly males while that of sexual abuse are mostly females (Medieinenet, 2004). Similarly, the fact that the respondents from illiterate parents had higher mean score than their counterpart from literate parents equally implies that the former group tends to suffer physical abuse than the latter group. This findings did not spark a surprise because poverty has been directly linked with lack of education. Child abuse, according to Onye (1984), is said to be a function of poverty. Research findings have even suggested that family income is strongly related to incessant rates of abuse (Medieinenet, 2004). The absence of statistical significance in the two research hypotheses did not equally come unexpectedly simply because respondents' parents belong to a social group whose trust in the use of physical punishment to bring about desirable behaviour in children is unshaken. Hence, gender factor and educational status of parents would not make any significant impact.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study have a number of implications for governments at all levels and school counselors. The fact that the participants of this study suffer physical abuse in all the dimensions of physical abuse identify by this study and that there exist no significant difference in gender and parental educational status expose the widespread nature of physical abuse of children by parents. As a result, government and non-government agencies should educate the citizens, particularly parents, on what constitutes physical abuse and punishment for offenders. They should also ensure that national

economic policies are targeted towards poverty eradication because of the direct association between physical abuse and poverty. The school counselors, on their part, should develop test that would easily identify physically abused children in schools with a view of preventing resultant maladaptive behaviour associated with physically abused children such as aggression, anger, violent activities, riots, cultism and so on.

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