

The Correlation Between Parents' Educational Status and Child Abuse

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Abstract: The study investigated the relationship between parents/guardians' educational background and child abuse among public secondary school students in South-West Nigeria. A descriptive research design of exploratory type was adopted for the study. A total of 1,440 public secondary school students in 36 schools from 9 local government areas in 3 south western states of Nigeria, were sampled for this study. Out of these students, 695 students were found to be abused and their responses formed the data that were analysed for this study. A self constructed questionnaire titled Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) was administered on the students after validation. The instrument has construct validity coefficient of 0.756 and a reliability coefficient of 0.83. The statistical technique used was one-way ANOVA. The result of the analysis showed that there is no relationship between fathers' and mothers' level of education and child abuse; but there is a significant relationship between guardians' educational background and child abuse. Based on the finding, it is recommended among others that counsellors should be on the look-out to identify and render help to the abused students; and that any parent or guardian caught maltreating a child should be convicted crime.

Key words: Missing

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is any form of physical, psychological, social, emotional and sexual maltreatment of a child whereby the survival, safety, self esteem, growth and development of the child are endangered. The term child abuse is broad and it subsumes many different conditions. It involves acts of omission or commission by a parent or guardian that are judged by a mixture of community values and professional expertise to be inappropriate and damaging to the child.

According to Wikipedia [1], most child abuse occurs in a child's home, with a smaller amount occurring in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

Neglect is the instance in which the responsible adult fails to adequately provide for various needs, including physical (failure to provide adequate food, clothing or hygiene), emotional (failure to provide nurturing or affection) or educational (failure to enroll a child in school). Physical abuse is physical aggression directed at a child by an adult. It can involve striking, burning, choking or shaking a child. Noh Anh [2] says that the distinction between child discipline and abuse is often poorly defined. Cultural norms about what constitutes abuse vary widely; among professionals as well as the wider public, people do not agree on what behaviours constitute abuse. Some human service professionals claim that cultural norms that sanction physical punishment are one of the causes of child abuse and have undertaken campaigns to redefine such norms [3]. However, Furedi [4] suggests that many advocates of a total ban on physical punishment are actually against all forms of punishing children. He sees the underlying agenda as an anti-parent crusade. According to Global Initiative of End All Corporal Punishment of Children [5], the use of any kind of force against children as a disciplinary measure is illegal in twenty-four countries around the world.

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Out of all the different forms of abuse, emotional abuse is the hardest to identify. This form of abuse includes name-calling, ridicules, degradation, destruction of personal belongings, torture or destruction of a pet, excessive criticism, inappropriate or excessive demands, withholding communication and routine labeling or humiliation. Some ways that victims of emotional abuse may react is by distancing themselves from the abuser, internalizing the abusive words and to fight back by insulting the abuser. Emotional abuse can result in abnormal or disrupted attachment disorder, a tendency of the victim to blame themselves for the abuse, learned helplessness and overly passive behaviour [1].

Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation [6]. According to Roosa, Reinholtz and Angelini [7] and Widom [8], the effect of child sexual abuse include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, propensity to re-victimization in adulthood and physical injury to the child, among other problems. Sexual abuse by a family member is a form of incest and can result in more serious and long-term psychological trauma, especially in the case of parental incest [9].

Although child abuse occurs in Nigeria, it has received little attention. This is probably due to the problems of malnutrition and infection [10]. Another possible reason is the general assumption that in every African society, the extended family system always provides love, care and protection to all children. Yet there are traditional child rearing practices which adversely affect some children, such as female genital cutting, purposeful neglect or abandonment of handicapped children, twins and triplets in some rural areas. These may be considered as the outcome of abnormal interactions of the child, parents/ guardians and society. They include abandonment of normal infants by unmarried or very poor mothers in cities, increased child labour and exploitation of children from rural areas in urban elite families.

The International Labour Organization [11] and the United Nations Children Fund [12] refer to children as those below 18 years of age. It has become a norm all over the world that any person under 18 is considered a child. This may be due to the fact that a person under 18 years has no right to vote and be voted for into any house of parliament because he is seen as a minor; also he cannot sue or be sued. Wikipedia [13] gives a legal definition of a 'child' as being interchangeable with minor and may vary by country, in keeping with cultural conceptions.

All the features of child abuse that have been mentioned negate the United Nations Convention and O.A.U Charter on Rights of the Child [14]. Nigeria is a signatory to the charter. Among the basic principles of children's rights are:

- Every child has the right to live and be allowed to survive and develop.
- Every child has the right to express opinions and freely communicate them on any issues, subject to restriction under law.
- Every child is entitled to adequate rest, recreation (leisure and play) according to his or her age and culture.
- Every child is entitled to protection from any act that interferes with his or her privacy, honour and reputation.
- Every child (male and female) is entitled to receive compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education, depending on individual ability.
- Every child is entitled to good health, protection from illness, proper medical attention for survival, personal growth and development.
- Every child must be protected from indecent and inhuman treatment through sexual exploration, drug abuse, child labour, torture, maltreatment and neglect.

A parent's job is never done. It is the duty of parents to be committed to instilling good values in the children as they grow and develop through the years they have with them. The job of a parent is one of the most challenging and most important job that one can ever have but it also brings many rewards. Each child is different; it is difficult to compare one with another. To say 'your brother did this, why can't you' is missing the beauty of our children completely. Each child is unique and come to this world with gifts and qualities to offer [15]. As each of our children is unique so must be our approach as we lend our years of experience to our children from which they will develop their own.

Children that are abused are costly investment deficits for the society. This is because they are prone to high incidence of personality disorder and lack of social skills for dealing with others. Thus, they cannot interact without ending in confrontation, manipulation and provocation [16]. Studies have shown that child maltreatment is one of the strongest predictors of children's educational underachievement, the development of emotional disturbances and antisocial behaviour [17, 18]. In line with this, Egeland and Erickson [19] suggested that maltreatment affects intellectual functioning; because of the emotional unresponsiveness of their parents, children lost interest in exploring their environment. It was also observed and documented that affectionate care is extremely important for healthy human development and that lack of such care can result in severe deficit and can even be fatal.

Abused children grow up as callous, insensitive adults with varied repercussions for families and society. They become cognitively deficient and create various cadres of street children [20]. Some abused children often repeat the vicious cycle by becoming abusive parents. This study is based on finding out the relationship between parent's education status and child abuse with a view of determining how to manage the effect and reduce cases of child abuse in the society.

Statement of the Problem: Times without number, there have been public outcry including media campaign against the prevalent exposure of children to this avoidable social misfortune called child abuse. When one goes out, one sees children engaged in petty-trading and street begging, while some hawk for their parents and guardians when they should be laying a solid foundation for their future. One reads about rape of children in the newspaper. One also sees cases of child prostitution in order to get money. Parents leave their children at home uncatered for and run after money making; there are also cases of child battering by some parents.

The average school teacher today has on his hands a crisis resulting from parents' abdication of their responsibilities. This, many teachers believe, has adversely affected the character and output of students [21]. In schools, one observed students who are affected with anxiety, depression, passive or withdrawal behaviour. Some of the students engage in aggressive, destructive and inappropriate acts or delinquent behaviour. One sees neglected children stealing or begging for food, students not coming to schools regularly and students sleeping during lessons almost all the time. Some seek inappropriate affection from others. All these types of negative behaviours are wide spread in the country and they usually affect students' academic performance.

In a developing country like Nigeria, some socio-economic problems militate against the survival, development and protection of children. There is deprivation of basic emotional need largely due to parental absence from home in pursuit of economic survival. Poverty could lead to behaviours or rejections, intolerance, discrimination, deprivation, marginalization, cruelty and maltreatment towards children.

Abused children grow up in a world of uncertainty, inconsistency, lies, violation, pain and abandonment. Victims of child abuse have learnt to live and adapt to the abusive environment, so their behaviours can appear superficially moody, dysfunctional, unpredictable, offensive, antagonistic or hostile. A victim is left with a sense of absolutely no control over life which is very sad. To this end, the following research hypothesis was raised.

Hypothesis:

- There is no significant relationship between parents'/guardians' level of education and child abuse.

Methodology: The researchers used descriptive research design of exploratory type. The plan of study involved the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test the hypothesis raised in the study. The target population for this study was made up of public secondary school students in South West Nigeria, who were within the age range of 9-18 years. Multistage random sampling was used in drawing out the sample.

Since the study is on South West Nigeria as a whole, the researchers recognized the states, local governments and schools. The researchers therefore selected the sample in stages.

Out of the six states in the South West Nigeria, three were chosen. Also, out of the local government areas in each of the three states, three were selected by simple random sampling technique. In each local government, four secondary schools were selected by simple random sampling. In each school, 40 students were selected. Copies of questionnaire were given out to 1440 students in 36 schools. Exploratory method was then used. Out of these questionnaire, the researchers brought out those of abused students; that is, those who scored 200 and above out of the 300 score obtainable. The respondents that scored 200 and above were 695 in number. Their questionnaire were used in data analysis.

A self-designed questionnaire called Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) was used for this study. Part A was designed to collect information on background characteristic of respondents; part B consisted 28 items which elicited students' responses on child labour, sexual abuse, physical abuse and child neglect; while part C consisted 32 items which brought out such psychosocial factors as poverty, broken home, death of parents, psychological disorder and family interaction.

The methods used in validating the instrument were face, content and construct validities. For face validation, the experts determined at face level the appropriateness of the instrument in measuring what was being studied, to ascertain if the instruments elicit the intended responses on child abuse and the psychosocial factors.

Expert judgments were used in determining the content validity. The experts checked the extent to which the items were representative of content, practices and factors specified by the theoretical concept being measured. The scores of the test administration on 30 abused secondary students were correlated with that of Child Abuse and Neglect Test [22] using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, a correlation coefficient of 0.756 was obtained. This indicated that the research instrument used (CAQ) clearly measures the same construct with CANT [23].

A reliability test was also carried out on 20 abused secondary school students using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. On the basis of these psychometric properties, the instrument was found to be suitable for data collection.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researchers and the school counsellors to a sample of 1,440 students in 36 schools. Researchers' presence during administration enhanced better understanding of the items in the instrument. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion by the researchers.

The data generated were analysed using oneway ANOVA. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Test of Hypothesis:

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between parents/guardians' level of education and child abuse.

In testing this hypothesis, the data obtained on educational qualification of parents/guardians were analysed by using oneway ANOVA.

The result revealed that the observed F-ratio value for father's level of education was 1.172 while the table value was 2.10. The result revealed that there is no significant relationship between fathers' level of education and child abuse. Thus, the null hypothesis that says there is no significant relationship between fathers' level of education and child abuse was accepted.

The result also showed that observed F-ratio value for mothers' level of education was 0.255 while the table value was 2.10. The results revealed that there is no significant relationship between mothers' level of education and child abuse. Thus, the null hypothesis that says there is no significant relationship between mothers' level of education and child abuse was accepted.

Table 1: Oneway ANOVA Summary of Parents/Guardians Level of Education and Child Abuse

	Source	SS	df	Ms	Fcal	Ftable
Father	Between Groups	1083.396	6	180.566		
	Within Groups	106003.5	688	154.075	1.172	2.10
	Total	107086.9	694			
Mother	Between Groups	237.962	6	39.660		
	Within Groups	106849.0	688	155.304	0.255	2.10
	Total	107086.9	694			
Guardian	Between Groups	2450.666	6	408.444		
	Within Groups	104636.3	688	152.088	2.686	2.10
	Total	107086.9	694			

Table 2: Scheffe Post-Hoc Test of Guardians' Educational Qualification and Level of Child abuse

Educational qualification	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
University Degree							*
HND				*		*	
NCE							
Diploma							*
School Certificate							*
Primary School Certificate							
Illiterate					*		

It was also revealed that the observed F-ratio value for guardians' level of education was 2.686 while the table value was 2.10. The result showed that there is a relationship between guardians' level of education and child abuse. Thus, the null hypothesis that says there is no significant relationship between guardians' level of education and child abuse was rejected. Hence Scheffe Post-Hoc was done.

The result revealed difference between guardians who were illiterates and University degree holders and child abuse. Also there was a significant difference between guardians who were HND holders and holders of primary schools certificate; guardians who were HND holders and holders of diploma; guardians who were holders of diploma and guardians who were illiterates; guardians who were school certificate holders and those who were illiterates as regards child abuse.

The result showed that there is no significant relationship between fathers' and mothers' level of education and child abuse. This could be argued that one does not need to be literates before one knows how to care for his/her children. Those who are literates provide such

facilities as books, toys and coaching centres for their children; although, the parents may not be there because of their office work. While the illiterate parents may not be able to provide those facilities listed above, their presence is likely to provide social support for the children. This report is in contrast with Gill [24] who identified that parents with little or no higher education are more likely to act aggressively towards their children than the educated ones.

This study also revealed that there is a significant relationship between guardians level of education and child abuse. It could be argued that the natural love and warmth between parents and their children is absent between guardians and their wards. Another possible explanation for this result could be that, the more education an abuser has and the more he attains, the more he/she knows how to conceal his or her actions. Also, guardians who have no education know little about legality and how criminal child abuse is, whereas elites stand the chance of knowing. Such elites will do anything to protect their names, dignity and integrity in contrast to guardians who have no legal idea.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from the study has led the researchers to conclude that educational background of parents does not have anything to do with child abuse. On the other hand, educational status of a guardian determines whether he/she will be a child abuser.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Counsellors should be on the look-out for abused students; to identify and render help to them.
- Guardians should make effort to relate to their wards with love.
- Practice like excessive corporal punishment and too much involvement of children in selling may have cultural roots. It is therefore recommended that community based institutions and religious bodies should embark on programmes that will teach parents/guardians their own responsibilities and the rights of their children/wards.
- Any parent or guardian caught maltreating a child should be convicted of crime.
- The school is a place where children should learn about their own rights and also about responsible parental and sexual behaviour in order to prepare them for their future roles. To this end, it is recommended that teachers receive in-service training on preventing, detecting and ameliorating child abuse.

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