

## CHILD ABUSE: CAUSES AND EFFECTS ON NIGERIAN CHILD AND ROLE OF CURRICULUM STUDIES TEACHERS

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### Abstract

*Most recently, child abuse has increased considerably in all communities especially in Nigeria. The exact incidence of child abuse in the country may not be known because there is no former system of reporting cases of child abuse and most of the cases never get to the attention of the authorities concerned. This paper therefore examined the causes, types of child abuse, effect and the role of curriculum studies teachers in curbing this social ill in the Nigerian society. Some of the causes of child abuse are poverty, separation or divorce, high cost of education which prevents some parents from sending their children to school and so on. The paper also proffers solutions to this contemporary problem. For example governments should be alive to their responsibilities particularly to children in terms of provision of free and qualitative education, good health facilities, prevention of any form of maltreatment and other forms of indiscriminate use of a child. Parents and guardians must discharge their duties loyally and diligently.*

**Keywords:** Child abuse, curriculum educators

### Introduction

Generally speaking, child abuse can be seen as maltreatment of a child by their parents or guardian, and which may result to denying of the child the right to develop physically, mentally or socially. Child abuse differs from culture to culture; in fact what can be termed a corrective disciplinary measure by majority of Nigerians may be a serious form of child abuse in another culture. (Ahiakwo, 2000). In most Nigerian communities, the situation of economic instability, unprepared parenthood, social stress and isolation, parent self-hate and inability to cope with the pressures of everyday life are factors which greatly increase the risk of child abuse in Nigerian Society (Rekers, 2000).

There is no disputing the fact that such economic crisis in Nigeria is making life worse for the children of the poor as they suffer from malnutrition, high infant mortality, over-crowding in schools and sometimes withdrawal from school as a result

of inability to pay school fees and purchase of necessary materials that can aid effective teaching and learning.

Child abuse or child neglect occurs in all classes and cultures. Despite the large amount of literature on this subject, there continues to be a lack of empirical evidence explaining how broader, socio-economic forces contribute to abusive and negative behaviour and why such a disproportionate number of families captured by the problem are mostly from Nigerian communities (Rekers, 2000).

It has been noticed that certain factors or conditions lead to child abuse and there are various conceptions of what effect it has on the child. However, this paper looks at the concept of child abuse, the likely factors that give birth to its effect on Nigerian child and the role of curriculum studies teachers in curbing in the Nigerian society.

### Concept of Child Abuse

Odebode and Ashefon (2009) describe



child abuse as "child mistreatment" which include harmful traditional practices and beliefs as well as family breakdown. Suomi (2009) as quoted by Odebo and Asheton (2009) explained child abuse to be "any full time work given to a child under 18 is an abusive way of using the child because the Child Rights Act specifies that Nigerian children should not work full time until they are 18 years old".

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is of the opinion that child maltreatment or child abuse could be seen as "any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child". In other words, child abuse is the psychological/emotional mistreatment of children. It could be defined as "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (Solomon, 2016).

#### Types of Child Abuse

Child abuse can take many forms; it could be any of the following:

- (a) **Neglect:** This is a situation whereby a 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).
- (b) **Physical Abuse:** It is the physical aggression directed at a child by an adult. It can involve striking, burning, choking or shaking a child, and the distinction between discipline and abuse is often poorly defined. The transmission of toxin to a child through the mother (such as with fetal alcohol syndrome can also be considered as physical abuse in some jurisdictions).
- (c) **Child Sexual Abuse:** This involves any sexual act between an adult and a child, including penetration, fondling,

rough-handling exposure to adult sexuality and violations of privacy.

- (d) **Psychological Abuse:** Also known as emotional abuse, which can involve belittling or shaming a child, inappropriate or extreme punishment and the withholding of affection.

Aside all these, child abuse can start even before the birth of the child. This could be found in maternal drug abuse and failure to seek appropriate health care during pregnancy.

#### Causes of Child Abuse

Having examined what child abuse is, it has been discovered that a number of factors could be traced one way or the other as contributing to the emergence of child abuse. These include divorce, death of one of the parents or both parents, poverty, sickness disability, lack of parental skills, parental choices traditional practices and beliefs.

**Poverty:** Poverty has been discovered as the main source of child abuse in Nigeria. This is because it is tough for some parents families to take proper care of their children because of the poor economy. As a matter of fact, most children still work to sponsor their families and that is one of the reasons why one sees some of these children on the road selling sachet water, soft drinks, newspapers, fruits, eggs and so on, just to earn their living. Some even go to the extent of staying with others as 'house-helps', while some even engage in prostitution so as to survive Welton (2016).

**Economic Factor:** Economic factors (too often caused by the death of one or both parents) have a strong effect on the children. The children are forced to stay with others where there is every possibility of misusing/abusing them Divecha, (2014).

**Traditional Practices:** Another main causes of child abuse include harmful traditional practices and beliefs as well as family breakdown. An example of this harmful situation could be seen among the Fulanis that believe that any first child must not stay with or be trained by the parents. In the process these children would be taken to another place where their guardian can do and undo. They



still believe that the female child has nothing to do in life except to work as 'house-help' Amato (2005).

**Broken Homes:** Moreover, sole parent/broken home is another cause because a single parent is the sole care giver to a child. Such children are lonely and have little or no knowledge of good parental care which may affect their social adjustment in the society. Single parents even go to the extent of revenging/retaliating what their spouse had done. For example, beating and cursing the child 'You this idiot, you've started the way your stupid mother started that made her perished' and so on. Some cultural norms even sanction physical punishment Green, (2016).

**Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse is another major contributing factor to child abuse. It has been observed that parents with documented substance abuse, most commonly alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and so on, were much more likely to mistreat their children.

#### **Effects of Child Abuse on Nigerian Child**

The effect of child abuse vary, depending on its type and this can be mild, serious or extremely serious. Children who have been physically, sexually and /or emotionally abused not only suffer a wide range of effects from their victimization but are at greater risk of suffering from any of the following. Honestly speaking, children with a history or physical abuse are at risk of developing psychiatric problems or a disorganized attachment style. Disorganized attachment is associated with a number of developmental problems including dissociative symptoms, as well as anxiety and depression. Victims of childhood abuse, also suffer from different types of physical health problems later in life with no identifiable reason. Childhood emotional/and sexual abuse were strongly related to depression. Violence and exploitation of children may result to child raping, risk behaviours such as substance abuse and early initiation to sexual behaviour/mess.

Again, early exposure to violence is associated with later lungs, heart and liver

diseases, sexually transmitted diseases as well as later partner violence and suicide attempts. Neglect can distort education and can even lead to death. Unexplained burns, cuts, bruises, or welts in the shape of an object or bite marks are also an effect of child abuse. Apart from all the effects mentioned above it can also lead to any of the following:

- Lack of concentration;
- Inappropriate interest or knowledge of sexual acts;
- Children being used as drug carriers;
- Children being murdered and gutted and their bodies used to courier drugs across country borders or sell them parts by parts;
- Child trafficking
- Sex molestation;
- Poor self esteem;
- Isolation etc.

There is no doubting the fact that children hold the key to our collective future in Nigeria. So, the rights of the child must be enforced personally and or by a person who has parental responsibility for the child.

#### **The Role of Curriculum Studies Teacher in Curbing Child Abuse**

The actual realization of curriculum studies objectives generally and that of the contemporary issues in particular would depend very much on the teacher's factor. Teachers who are responsible for curriculum education should be dedicated and promote the attitudes and values of dedication, loyalty and tolerance in their students. He/she should be a role model by putting to practice what he had taught the students.

One of the findings of a research carried out by Onifade (2004) reported that some contemporary problems such as child abuse, drug abuse, child trafficking to mention but a few confronting Nigeria would have been minimized if they were incorporated into the curriculum studies curriculum. This is to justify a balance curriculum that would help the individual total adjustment in the society.

In assisting the abused child, it is the responsibility of the curriculum Studies'



teacher to discourage the use of derogatory language, name calling, abusive language, corporal punishment and the host of others in the school. Pupils are extremely sensitive to the language their teachers use on them. Selecting appropriate tone and words is crucial to teachers' success not only in achieving behavioural and learning responses but also maintaining the quality of relationship (Mishra, 2007).

To encourage, promote and respect the rights of a child, the curriculum studies teacher should assume the following responsibilities:

1. Show commitment to learning and care about the pupils individually. The teacher should assist individual pupils to learn at their own pace.
2. Is approachable, welcoming, accommodating and friendly to children and the community. The teacher should maintain cordial relationship with the pupils parents and the community;
3. Improve the capacity to teach in interactive ways, so essential for development of life-skills. The teacher, as much as possible, should practice active learning by the use of participatory approach to learning;
4. Responds to the needs of each child as an individual. He/she should attend to a child according to his/her individual need(s);
5. Trained to identify tell-tale signs of child abuse. Teacher should be knowledgeable about false stories against children; also an abused child exhibits some trails. Teachers should be able to identify an abused child and give him/her the necessary support;
6. Knowledgeable in the use of various teaching methods. He/she should exhibit mastery of different teaching and learning techniques to make learning easier;
7. Have adequate motivation in various forms to encourage children. Teachers should encourage the pupils by the use of rewards;
8. Be trained to respect the rights of the

child, for the child to have right to education means that somebody is under an enforceable duty to provide the education. Therefore, curriculum studies teachers should not fail in providing the rightful education to the child because it is an obligation;

9. Understand and monitor children's right. The curriculum studies teacher should understand the children's rights and make sure that these rights are respected;
10. Keep an up-to-date class teacher's records. The teacher should keep necessary classroom records such as register, lesson notes, class time-table, individual cumulative record card, academic records of students and teacher's weekly diary;
11. And above all, demonstrate mastery of subject matter. The curriculum studies teacher should be well grounded in what he/she is going to teach; and minimize teacher absenteeism, lateness and poor preparation incidence. Teacher should be a role model in, area of regularity, punctuality and good dressing.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Serious effort should be made through organizing seminars and enlightenment programmes for parents on the danger of exposing their children to street trading, street begging and street wandering. Parent should be encouraged to stop withdrawing their children from schools in order to give them out in marriage.

Also, the use of children as farm and factory hands should be discouraged. In the same vein, the law enforcement agents need to be enlightened and re oriented with a view to making them abide by the laws especially as it affects children, and to put in place proper mechanisms to punish erring officers as well as mechanism through which the children can seek redress whenever the need arises.

At present preventive measure against child abuse is very low compared to the alarming rite at which child abuse is practiced. There are no enough legislations on the issue

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and the existing few are insufficiently enforced. There are no committed government policies being formulated to combat this social evil.

Since poverty and lack of education are the root causes of child abuse. The curbing of these vices can not be achieved unless these problems are removed. Government is encouraged to create employment opportunities for its citizenry. In addition, free and compulsory formal education, studies on human right, child labour, Child abuse and drug abuse should be incorporated into school curriculum. All collapsed and collapsing industries, firms and establishments must be - revived. It is grossly unfortunate in Nigeria today that millions of competent and capable university graduates as well as graduates from the Polytechnics and Colleges of Education and other tertiary institutions continue to roam about in our towns and villages without being gainfully employed or assisted in concrete terms to become self-employed. No wonder why incidences of armed robbery day and night continue unabated - throughout the length and breadth of Nigeria today.

Parents must learn to bear the number of children they can adequately cater for instead of bothering their relatives, friends and other people with the responsibility for their children. It is even a sin in the presence of God to bring into this odd world, a child that the individual cannot adequately cater for.

As the future of any nation rests squarely on its young ones, and children of today are the leaders of tomorrow, it is important for government, parents, guardians and other stakeholders in child bearing and upbringing to make adequate preparations to ensure a better tomorrow or future of the children, so that they can live comfortably in a conducive environment.

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