Effects of Child Abuse on Secondary School Students’ Academic Performance in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Authors
Dr. Tina Nweze¹, Josephine Ngozi Owo²

¹Dept. of Educational Foundation (Guidance & Counselling), Ebonyi State University, Nigeria
²Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu Campus

ABSTRACT
This study was designed to determine the effects of Child Abuse on Secondary School Students’ Academic Performance in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A total of five secondary schools were selected in Ebonyi State by the use of stratified random sampling, and 500 students were randomly selected as target population. The researcher adopted both structured and unstructured interview of the teachers, headmistress/headmasters and other relevant actors with the school administrative frame work. Nevertheless, the data collection technique included both primary and secondary sources. The researcher presented data in frequencies and percentages according to sources of information, more so content analysis was used to verify the validity of the data. In the final analysis the researcher came up with the following findings: that the prevalent and predominant forms of abuse within the study area are hawking, sexual abuse, neglect, beating, maltreatment, abortion and incest. The greatest culprits are the parents, caretakers and guardians; that the commonest features of the most families of abused school children are the prevalence of poverty. The study also revealed that abused school children perform lower educationally than non-abused children. The several practical measures which would help to address the problem of child abuse have been enumerated and expounded in the study.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Neglect, Maltreatment, Abortion, Incest, Academic Performance

INTRODUCTION
Child Abuse implies physical or mental injury, negligent treatment or maltreatment, sexual abuse of a child under legal age for adulthood by a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare under circumstances which indicates that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened. The definition does not in any way suggest that the concept has a universal definition. But it inter-alia, touches on the salient aspects and form of physical abuse, sexual abuse emotional neglect, physical neglect. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to observe...
here that the concept has no definite definition. Of course, Heibeiger (1983) was reasonably correct when he noted that abuse cannot be objectively defined and that it is judged in accordance with the social context.

Meanwhile, any definition of child abuse should take into cognizance of the various forms of abuse which include the psychological, physiological and sociological aspects of child abuse. However, Martin (1978) observed that the most common way of defining abuse has been in terms of physical injuries to the child. Such abuse cannot in themselves constitute a definition. They are merely examples of the phenomenon and their continuous elaborate brings one nearer to general statement of what in essence constitutes abuse. Thus, any comprehensive definition must be seen as not only all embracing but must take into consideration all activities of man that infringe on the survival of liberty and freedom of the child. Perhaps it was to avoid the pitfalls enunciated by Martins that motivated Cook and Bowles (1980) to define child abuse as thus:

- “Any act of omission or commission by individuals, institutions or society as a whole and any conditions resulting from such acts or in action which deprive children of equal rights and liberties, and or interfere with their optimal development constitute by definition abusive or neglectful acts or conditions”

This definition, no doubt is very comprehensive it touches on the fundamental human rights of the child, more importantly it emphasized that an act constitutes child abuse whether consciously or unconsciously done, in so far as it deprives the child equal rights and liberties and or interferes with the optimal development of the child. This negates the basic postulation of Gil (1970). He argued tenaciously that any definition of child abuse which does not acknowledge the motivation of the perpetuator as a very important element is inadequate hence he argues thus: “Abuse of children is the intentional non-accidental use of force or intentional non-accidental acts of omission on the part of the parents or caretaker interacting with the child in his care (non-ediately hurting or destroying the child”.

However, by insisting that abuse becomes tenable only when it is intentionally done is to say the most misleading, myopic and unacceptable. When a man or woman cuts off the hand of the child for a sacrifice because the oracle decrees so, does it then mean that it would not become child abuse since the perpetuators of the heinous crime does so out of ignorance of the law which forbids human sacrifices? Hence, he or she has no original intention of committing murder but was only obeying the customs or tradition.

Child abuse is committed by anyone, whether the parent or others, who commit acts of abuse against the child. Thus when a stranger rapes a child and subjects same to various forms of maltreatment, alienation and brutality, it constitutes child abuse. Hence, child abuse is not limited only to parents and caretakers.

It is however true that there is lack of uniform observation and definition of child abuse, it is not surprising to find, even among the Western society where the concept apparently first originated that what actually
constitute abuse is a matter of individual and group opinion or value system (Schutt, 2004). But one common and re-occurring variable among this definition/explanation is the improper care of the child which takes various forms of abuse like neglect, maltreatment, deprivation alienation, suppression and starvation. Hence in all there definitions, the most accepted and encompassing is the one earlier provided by Cook and Bowles (1980) which stipulates that it is any act of omission or commission by individual, institution or society as a whole and any conditions resulting from such acts or in action, which deprive children of equal rights and liberties or interfere with their optimal development.

Many children are often harassed and beaten in their various schools either by their teachers, principals, head masters and even their school mates who are in their higher classes., Onwuzurike (1986), maintained that many studies have shown that abused children themselves manifest various symptoms of behavioural deficiencies, including hostility, tension, insecurity, higher incidence of mental retardation and speech difficulties, stubbornness, unresponsiveness, negativism and depression, fearfulness, apathy and likelihood to provoke physical attack from others. Also, Ekpe (1975), stresses that abuse can have psychological as well as physical consequences on a child. Psychological consequences include negative self-concept, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, difficulties in relating to peers and adults, unpaired capacity to trust others and generalized unhappiness, one possible warning lag is severe lag in development and abuse is better to prevent than to detect.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This is purely a fundamental research that aims to find out the effects of child abuse on Secondary School Students academic performance in Ebonyi State. Thereby enabling those connected with the upbringing of the child to be ware and adopt a proper method of treating and handling of the child. The study shall examine in details the various manifestations of child abuse such as neglect abandonment, deprivation, starvation. The objective of this study is to find the following:

1. The effects or consequences of child abuse on academic performance of the Students.
2. The practical measures to be adopted to alleviate the incidence of child abuse.

Research Questions

To adequately address the issue of child abuse in a scientific manner, the researcher deemed it expedient to formulate certain two research questions, which are in consonance with and in fact highly related to the objectives of the study. The questions are stated as follows:

1. What are the effects or consequences of child abuse on academic performance of the pupils?
2. What are the practical measures to be adopted to alleviate the incidence of child abuse?
Research Question 1:
What are?
The researcher randomly selected 25 abused pupils five (5) from each selected Secondary Schools and subsequently compared them with other non-abused students using the simple mean to calculate the cumulative scores in the last term’s exams record.

Table 1: Abused/Neglected Comparison Group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Subjects</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>36.42</td>
<td>56.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>42.34</td>
<td>67.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>30.82</td>
<td>52.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Science</td>
<td>34.33</td>
<td>68.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>49.33</td>
<td>59.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Continuous Assessment Record boxes:

In each subject the mean scores from the non-abused children was higher than the scores from the abused children. The mean on various scores for abused children ranged from 30 to 42 while the mean for non-abused ranged from 52 to 68. It is possible to assume that if the children are not abused they could perform better on subject by subject basis. The study also revealed that the academic performance of the abuse children falls below that of their non-abused counterparts and the males are more prone to child abuse than their female counterparts.

Research Question 2: What practical measures are to be adopted to alleviate or attenuate the incidence of child abuse? A vivid illustration of this shall be presented in table V below.

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>Children should be taken to social welfare unit where they will be subsequently adopted by foster parents to curb the incidence of this, proper enlightenment campaign should be intensified to educate the people on family planning and sexual restraint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>Persons who perpetuate this should be taken to Court and subsequently fined as a deterrent for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battering</td>
<td>Perpetrators of this should be severely disciplined in a country law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltreatment</td>
<td>Appropriate punishment should be given to an offender and more stringent measures should be adopted enforce the rights of the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>The Court should take appropriate actions to bring the offender to book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 2, the researchers have different types of cases. In all cases of child abandonment, the babies should be sent to Motherless Babies Home or Social Welfare Office, where application for adoption can be
approved and granted by the Court. Moreover, acts of battering, neglect, maltreatment etc. should be promptly addressed and offenders severely punished.

However, neglect implies a disorder in the teacher-child relationship characterized by a failure of the teacher to endow the child with personal value. The student child suffers from lack of attention by the teacher manifested by poor academic performances and lack of stimulation (Cichetti, and Toth, 2008). This is neglect in form of emotional deprivation, a failure to provide the psychological nurturance necessary for the student’s psychological growth and development. Emotional neglect represents a lack of emotional involvement between teacher and such student. Neglect at school by the class teacher can be a very insidious form of maltreatment and implies the failure of the teacher to act properly in safeguarding the academic growth and well being of the student. This is in line with the words of Ekpe (1986) that neglect is a form of physical neglect which occurs when a child’s health or safety is endangered because of lack of adequate food, clothing, shelter or supervision. One manifestation is a “failure to thrive syndrome in which the student child exhibits retarded physical growth and development without organic cause. Also, lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities in our schools is another form of neglect, which deprives the students opportunities to develop academically.

Sexual abuse is the exploitation of immature children through such actions as in cast, molestation and rape. Most sexual victimization takes place within the child’s family and school premises; not with strangers but with people whom the child is entrusted to. While the problem cuts across social and economic lines, it seems to be more prevalent in families and schools of lower social class and rural background, indicating that social isolation may play a key role in victimization and violence (Cichetti, and Toth, 2008). Mothers and class teachers are crucial in protecting the female students from sexual abuse; girls whose mothers were absent, ill, poorly educated or alcoholics were much more likely to be victimized. School children were most vulnerable prior to puberty and most of them did not reveal their experiences to anyone at the time it occurred (Okunola and OJO, 2012). Experiences involving force were much traumatic than those not involving force. It has been observed that majority of the school teachers in the rural areas exchange sexual intercourse for examination marks (Schutt, 2004). Female students who are dull academically are most vulnerable to this form of abuse; they have sex with their teachers to be promoted to the next academic class. This form of abuse affects the student psychologically over a period of time.

Child battering or flogging is very common in our schools and nothing is been done about it. This is a term used to characterize a clinical condition in school children who have received serious physical abuse, generally from a parent or foster parent, class teacher or school mate who is in a higher class. Service workers have described this significant cause of childhood disability and death as an “un-recognizant trauma”. A battered student child therefore is one who has received serious physical abuse which might lead to permanent injury or death. This should be seen in any child exhibiting possible signs of trauma or neglect.
in form of fracture of any bone, tissue injuries, poor skin hygiene or malnutrition and poor academic performances.

**CONCLUSION**

It should be noted that what affects the student child affects the well being of the entire community and such student child is a child of the entire community. A popular Igbo song which says “Onulu akwa nwa mee ngwa ngwa na oburo so ofu onye new nwa”, in English translation this means that anybody who hears a child’s cry should hurry and cuddle the child since a child is a child of the community. This testifies to the fact that a child comes into a world already occupied by other people and his chances of survival in it and his own effective participation and care matter usually beyond his control. The immediate bearing of these remarks is to make clear the fact that child welfare and care are not for the child alone but are part and parcel of his community and nation. The value a community places upon children should be reflected in the care and services it provides for them. Studies have shown that unmarried mothers, prostitutes, unmarried school girls, working class women and orphans are found to be the perpetuators of child abandonment. Demand for obedience from children has often led teachers and even parents to abuse their children. They see their highly punitive attitudes as demands for perfect behavior and these parents often regard their harsh treatment, as justified and morally defensible.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. As a result of the aforementioned implications, which arose from the investigations; the researcher wishes to recommend as follows:

2. Parents should be educated on the health hazards associated with such practices of sending the children out on the streets during or after school hours to hawk all kinds of goods.

3. Government should over haul and re-appraise the function of rehabilitation institutions so that there will be a change of attitude from parents, professionals and the general population.

4. A network of child care centres, day care centres, and foster homes must be developed by each state government. There should be ministries involved in children services particularly that of justice and that of social development, information youths and culture to cater specifically for the needs of the children.

5. The importance of sex education for young students and family planning for married couples more emphasis should be directed toward this.

6. Government in a special way, should come out fully to support in both financially, morally the African network for the prevention and protection against child abuse and Neglect (APPCAN), so that they will help in discovering and reducing the social consequences of child abuse.
7. Government should create awareness and find lasting solutions to the following, sexual abuse, child trafficking, street children, situations of emergency uprising and war as it affects women and children, malnutrition and child battering, as this could help to reduce incidence of child abuse and its social consequences.

8. The schools, peer groups, mass media and indeed the large society as socializing agents, need to work close together to give the children a clearer orientation in socialization in order to prevent child abuse.

REFERENCES


