

The Effect of Child Abuse on the Academic Performance of School Children: Implication on the Nigerian Economy

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Augustine Sambo Azi¹, Abubakar Isa Saluhu²

¹Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria; ²Department of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

¹aziaustin@yahoo.com

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Abstract - *This study being a narrative theoretical study, examined the effect of Child abuse on the academic performance of school children and its implication on the Nigerian economy. Findings from the study showed that the three major types of child abuse are physical, sexual and emotional or psychological abuse. It was also discovered from the findings that abused children generally perform poorly in school because they find it difficult to concentrate in their academics. In addition, 24.6 percent of children in Nigeria were abused annually, which has affected the growth of the Nigerian economy negatively. To curb this trend, it was recommended among others that parents, school authorities, teachers and government all have roles to play in order to mitigate this problem for the economic growth of Nigeria.*

Keywords: Academic Performance, Child Abuse, Economy

INTRODUCTION

A child generally is a boy or a girl of any age between infancy and adolescence. This agrees with the United Nations convention where it was resolved through the Child Rights Act, 2003 that a child is anyone who has not attained the age of 18 years [1]. Child abuse is therefore a practice whereby children are maltreated, battered or deprived of some basic needs in the home, street, religious houses or at school by the elderly [2]. They further opined that Child abuse could harm children physically, emotionally, sexually or could even lead to their death. It is caused by poverty, lack of parental care, unemployment, marital conflicts and polygamous homes. Child abuse causes pain to both male and female victims. Harmful behaviours of children's teachers, parents, peers, guardians, siblings, so-called mentors and the society

in various forms could also lead to child abuse. Child abuse is therefore not a strange phenomenon in Nigeria. There is no safe place for children anymore because it is everywhere.

Similarly, Chalk, Gibbons & Scarupa [3] observed that child abuse negatively affects the child physically, psychologically and behaviorally. However, it is not possible to discuss them individually in real world situation. Physical problems (for example destruction of a child's developing brain) can lead to psychological manifestations (for example delay in cognitive development). Psychological effects mostly appear as high-risk behaviors which could affect the abused child academically and ultimately the economy. Shonk and Cicchetti [4] corroborated this view by disclosing that children who are maltreated usually get low grades in school and do not excel in the society, which slows down the economy.

Alokan and Olatunji [5] in a study on how child abuse influences primary and secondary school children in classroom and their academic performance in Nigeria using a sample of 200 teachers, found out that child abuse and children's concentration in class is positively related. This implies that abused children do not concentrate in class with negative implication on the Nigerian economy. Furthermore, Umobong [6] asserted that child abuse is now prevalent in schools with negative consequences on the educational development of children and the economy in the areas of joblessness. Gaudin [7] also submitted that abused children's intelligence is low as a result of neglect and abuse. As a result of this, the economy suffers because the abused children are unable to contribute meaningfully to the economy.

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse has been generally classified into three types as discussed thus:

Physical Abuse

This is when a child is aggressively abused by an older person. Most countries with laws on child abuse consider it as when injuries are deliberately inflicted on children or when the activities of adults put children at glaring risk of injury or loss of life. Such activities by adults which could make the child have burns, lacerations, illegal bruises, scratches, broken bones, rough treatment and repeated mishaps that could cause physical injury can be regarded as physical abuse [8]. Both boys and girls are abused, it differs from one culture to another and from one stage of child's development to another. What is seen as child abuse in Developed countries could be seen as normal or a way of discipline in Nigeria.

The ways of dealing with a youth may be a form of abuse when done to a young child. Similarly, Isangedighi [9] pointed out that physical child abuse, which is a global phenomenon, is when physical injury is being inflicted on a child or when a physical force is used on a child which causes the child harm. It include acts like beating, biting, throwing, hitting, shaking, pinching, punching, kicking, poisoning, burning, slapping or strangling which may or may not leave physical marks. Physical abuse could be accidental or not and might result from punishment. In the same vein, Sullivan [10] asserted that physically abused children were exposed to domestic violence with attendant implication on their academic performance.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult forcefully have sexual activity or activities with someone against their wish. This kind of abuse is defined as any act that exposes a child to sexual acts that transcends his/her understanding [11]. Herrenkohl [11] further disclosed that globally, at least one out of every ten girls have been abused sexually at one stage of their life. This include behaviours such as rape, incest, oral sex, touching a child's sexual organs, showing pornography to a child, child trafficking and all forms of sexual activities done by someone in higher authority or greater power than the child such as siblings, parents, teachers, elder ones around, members of the family, maids, gate keepers and so on.

Using a sample of 4,023 children in the United States of America, Snyder [12] found out that 8.1 percent of the respondents have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime, with 74 percent of the victims knowing their abusers well, while 32.5 percent of the victims were the abusers friends. Similarly, Ebigbo [13] disclosed that children who are abused sexually have high risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, unwarranted pregnancies and abortion related problems.

Based on the above, Ward and Beech [14] therefore formulated a theory known as the integrated theory of sexual offending. This theory considered ecological, neuropsychological and biological factors as integral components of sexual abuse.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse

This type of child abuse occurs when a child's emotions, social life and intellect is being tampered with [2]. Yelling at children and bullying are examples which may affect children's self-esteem and confidence. Children's emotions are affected if they witness fights at home or if they are from broken homes. Emotional abuse also occurs in the school, by seniors or bullies, teachers and adults. When the basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, education, health) of a child are not met, such a child is being neglected. Neglect is a form of abuse which usually happens when a care-giver ignores the child and does not care about the existence and well-being of the child.

Hammer [15] postulated the psychological theoretical model which concentrated on the personal and interpersonal attributes of the abused person and the abuser. Examples of psychological theoretical model as revealed by Hammer are personality characteristics and disposition to violence which affects the abused child psychologically.

Effect of child abuse on the academic performance of children

Learning is an important activity which humans engage in. For children to perform in class, they must learn otherwise teaching will be an effort in futility. It is in this light that Zimmerman and Schunk [16] revealed that the three types of learning are behaviourist, cognitive and social learning theories. These theories explain how children are taught and how learning is expected to take place. Abused children therefore do not learn effectively hence they perform poorly in school.

Children that have been victimized by one or more form(s) of abuse exhibit some behaviours different from others in school with attendant effects on their academic performance. Shonk and Cicchetti [4] revealed that Child abuse generally delays students' progress academically, because there is always lack of trust in people because they have been disappointed and abused by those that ought to be source of joy, trust, defense and security to them, they believe nowhere is safe and nobody is to be trusted. This leads to changes in behaviour such as emotional pain, physical pain, withdrawal from opposite sex, poor social relationship, anxiety, mental stress, depression, difficulty in socializing, sadness, hooliganism, thuggery, rebellious, malnourishment, anger, scars on body parts, addictions, sexual difficulties, unhealthy appearance and clothing. These traits lead to poor academic performance by the child as concentration becomes a problem.

Furthermore, the United States Department of Education [17] revealed that abused children perform less than their mates academically in school. They feel distracted and withdrawn from other students, teachers and then from their studies. A sexually abused female student may have a great hatred for her male teachers. This will affect her learning process and personal relationship with teachers. This is also the same for male children that are abused by the opposite sex. Since children's lives are greatly influenced by teachers, a poor relationship with them can lead to low academic performance. Truancy and social vices are exhibited by students that are neglected. Some are hostile to other students and their mates which may lead to their expulsion. Physically abused children encounter academic problems at home, school and among their mates.

In the same vein, Students that are neglected by their parents or care-givers tend to be independent, lack moral values, rude to teachers and law breakers as a result of lack of parental roles especially the motherly roles and advice. On the other hand, some children might be too dependent, have low confidence, self-esteem, psychologically affected and might not be able to face challenges or solve high tasking work in school. They tend to have lower grades and high rate of class repetitions than their mates [18]. In a bid to hide their scars from others, they tend to skip school and classes. A child that is not eating well will have poor growth and development of the brain, body and soul. He/she will not be able to reason well or think fast in class.

Implication on the Economy

Child abuse has implication both to the abused child and the economy. The Leadership Council [19] disclosed that funds spent annually on children welfare services for abused children are regarded as economic costs, as well as the amount the economy losses as a result of consequences of child abuse. In addition, economic costs represent the economic effect of child abuse and negligence in the long run. These include the costs of education, persistent use of health facilities and fall in productivity as a result of underemployment and unemployment. Chalk, Gibbons and Scarupa [19] disclosed that these costs could be put at more than \$69 billion each year.

Fang, Brown, Curtis and James [20] reported that the economic consequence which results from the abuse of children in the U.S.A in 2008 was approximately \$124 billion. A breakdown of the analysis shows that the level in which children are abused in the U.S is 40 children per thousand children per year, implying that in year 2008, the agency responsible for child protective services in the United States of America received 3.3 million complaints of child abuse. In addition, the report revealed that averagely in the U.S.A in 2008, each victim of child abuse cost \$210,012, which includes \$7,999 in special education funds, \$144,360 in productivity losses; \$32,648 in childhood health care costs and \$7,728 in child welfare costs. The report further disclosed that this burden on the U.S economy rivaled the funding of other important sectors in the U.S.A, with negative implication on the US economy.

In Australia, a report by The Leadership Council [19] revealed that there were approximately 177,000 abused children in 2007. The report further showed that the financial commitment to the society of the implications of child abuse in 2007 in Australia was estimated at \$13.7 billion. The results of this report shows that child abuse is crippling Australia financially which negatively affect its economy.

Countries in East Asia and the Pacific are spending approximately \$209 billion each year on child abuse, which is the same as 2 percent of the region's Gross Domestic Product [21]. Furthermore, the research disclosed that 42 percent of girls in the region are affected by emotional child abuse which costs the region \$65.9 billion, that physical and sexual abuse cost the region \$39.9 billion each year, while neglect is costing the region \$32.4 billion per annum, and finally witnessing domestic violence costs the

region \$31 billion each year. These spending have negative effect on the region's economy.

In Africa, Ariyo [22] asserted that in Western and Central Africa, more than 200,000 children are traded and abused for slavery yearly. Under the Ghanaian Trokosi traditional ritual, innocent children are often used as slaves to cover up for sins perpetuated by their family members in the community. The cost of child abuse in Africa is unquantifiable as the African economy losses billions of Dollars thus continually subjecting the economy to poverty and lack.

A study on child labour and its consequences on the Nigerian economy using 500 respondents by Bassey, Baghebo and Otu [23] revealed that 52 percent of children are abused in Calabar city. In addition, the study revealed that child abuse and poverty, unemployment & school dropout is related. This negatively affects the growth of the Nigerian economy. The study did not however link the impact of child abuse on the academic performance of the children who are abused. Similarly, World Bank Development Indicators [24] reported that the International Labour organization estimated that approximately 24.6 percent of children of ages 10 to 14 years are abused annually in Nigeria, which has negative consequence on their academic performance and the country's economy.

Togunde and Carter [25] in a report on child labour in urban Nigeria reported that findings from a sample of 1,535 children in Nigeria showed that over 50 percent of the interviewed children work for an average of 4 hours each day in order to assist their households financially. Most of these children are not punctual in school and therefore perform poorly in their academics with consequent implications on their future and the economy generally. In the same vein, Aliyu and Garba [26] disclosed that child abuse leads to child poverty in Nigeria, that 36 percent of Nigerian children are deprived of educational opportunities as a result of child abuse with negative effect on the Nigerian economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents should not wait until children around them are abused before taking necessary steps. Safe and secured environment should be provided for the children. Children should be watched and warned against unhealthy relationship and environment. They should be taught sex education and sexual related behaviour. Parents should be aware of changes in their

children's behaviours such as bed wetting, sulking, anxiety, afraid of the dark or been left alone with strangers, begging for food, theft and changes in academic performance. Children should not be left alone in the house with opposite gender and with personalities that cannot be trusted. Parents should find time to discuss with their children and meet their needs. Care-givers should provide adequate needs for their wards. Interest and support should be given to abused children. Parents should also have listening ears and monitor their children's academic performance as a decline in performance could be as a result of abuse.

Teachers and school authorities should take note of behavioural changes in their students. Any drop in academic performance should be reported to parents. They should be friendly and free with their students. Words of encouragement should always be given to students. Victims of abuse should not be castigated or looked down on. Their self-esteem, confidence and morale should be developed. Meals and snacks should be provided in schools for students. This will reduce theft and help in brain and cognitive development which will have some positive effect on academic performance. Any teacher or student seen as threat should be punished and sent away. Extra curricula activities should be organized by schools to help students' foster relationship with others. The law should not spare those that abuse children.

Government should recognize child abuse as a social problem which has a negative effect on the economy, and the full wrath of the law should be meted out on those who violate these young ones through speedy hearings in the courts or special tribunals as justice delayed is justice denied. A more cursory look into divorce cases should be taken before separating couples as often times the hapless condition of young ones from broken homes makes them more vulnerable to abuse. The government can also help by taking full custody of helpless children. In addition, the establishment of counseling units should be made compulsory in schools so that parents, teachers and children can be consistently counseled on societal ills such as child abuse. Finally, welfare workers should be dispatched to the streets to caution and enlighten youth workers such as street workers and the like on the dangers of child abuse on their academics and the economy.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, physical, sexual and psychological types of child abuse negatively influence the child

because children belong to the defenseless and disadvantaged group of the society. They should not be harmed or maltreated in any way because it has a negative effect on their academic performance in school as they do not know the dangers and effects of abuse on their future development. In addition, the quality of the citizens of any economy determines the growth and development of such economies. Child abuse not only deprives an economy the opportunity of developing its citizens' full potential academically, but also deprives it the opportunity of benefitting from such talent for the needed manpower necessary for the growth of the economy.

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