



## Perspective

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## Viewpoint of Nigerians towards sexual abuse and molestation of children: A call to proper education

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Dating back to several years in Nigeria, there was a new development on the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child[1]. This treaty promised to be the “silver bullet” supporting children’s health, protection, and enjoyable childhood. The development is the world’s most rapid ratified human rights treaty, with 120 signatories[2].

Unfortunately, in the 21st century, children’s rights are significantly unrecognized in Nigeria. Children suffer different forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse, not only from strangers in society but also in their homes and schools, where they should be most protected. Recent unrest occurs in the South-West part of Nigeria due to attempted child-rape allegations against a local celebrity[3]. The event has aroused several opinionated debates. The majority of them are negative and insensitive towards child abuse. People’s poor and rigid perceptions and responses to child molestation are dreadful on the wellbeing of society and, most importantly, on the healthy future of children.

The frequency of tales regarding child molestation has suddenly soared in Nigeria; this has caused the false impression that child molestation is novel. However, the opposite is the case. Sexual violence against children knows no boundaries, and sometimes children experience this violence at the hands of people they trust in their homes or outside their homes.

In a developing nation like Nigeria, where child labor persists, children are exposed to exploitation and abuse and left in the hands of society or strangers on the streets. However, when these homes do not protect the children and hide the cases of rape in the bid to preserve their family status, or when the society perceives child molestation as insignificant, an issue that should be discussed and reported, then who will protect these children? These harmful attitudes pose grave risks to boys and girls worldwide. As was earlier

mentioned, poor reporting of these cases blocks off information on the severity of the situation. In Nigeria, child molestation statistics have risen above 60% in the past years[4].

Infringement on children’s rights causes a ripple effect in a society where the children themselves could grow up to become pedophiles, for instance, a study reported that pedophiles were more likely to have been sexually molested as children and that these pedophiles experienced more exposure to sexual abuse and pornography[5]. Such pedophiles could be diagnosed with idiopathic pedophilia, and a similar disorder is acquired pedophilia which is often presented in previously non-pedophilic men due to brain insult.

A big problem here is that because of the limited diagnosis and therapy for such conditions in Nigeria, and both categories are not adequately differentiated to process the severity of the problem further. Debates arise when the punishment for pedophilia is being decided. A study reported that since causes or manifestations of idiopathic and acquired pedophilia differ, the legal implications also should. The study highlighted why treatment rather than retributive punishment should be considered in cases of both pathologies[6].

Statistics have shown that 25% of girls and 10% of boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18 and that less than 5% of both genders receive any therapy[7]. This is a poor statistic, and to stop the

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cycle, counseling and other effective forms of interventions need to be made available not only to victims of child molestation but also to children in difficult situations who may or may not be at risk. Child advocacy centers such as the Cece Yara Foundation and Save the Children exist to protect these children's rights[7]. To be better armed in ending this problem, we need more such centers in Nigeria that are devoted to protecting the rights of children.

The Nigerian Government has engaged above 400 new labor inspectors and authorized the National Social Behavioral Change Communication Strategy for Elimination of Child Labor in Nigeria (2020–2023), but Nigerian children are exposed to terrible kinds of child labor, namely artisanal mining, commercial sexual exploitation, and use in armed conflict[8]. Only 25 out of the 36 states in the country has appropriated the child's Right Act, left with 11 states in the Northern part of the country with legal statutes that do not meet international standards for the interdiction of child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and illicit activities[8].

There will be a need to materialize the child Rights Act throughout all the states in the country. In a country like Nigeria, where the youth population is high, the need for such laws cannot be overstated. Protecting the mental stability of the next generation of Nigerians and equipping them with their rights is very important if Nigeria wants to forge ahead as a nation.

There is a need for people to rethink and rebuild the narrative surrounding child molestation to preserve the lives and the well-being of Nigerian children. Nigerians must work on their attitudes and perceptions and gain a sense of responsibility to protect and fight children who fall victim to molestation and sexual abuse. Until that is the case, we will never produce a good society where children will grow and have healthy and prosperous lives. There is a need to stop the justification about who is right and wrong in molestation and sexual abuse cases. As far as the child is molested and sexually abused, there shouldn't be room for knowing how and when. It is about time we save the future and the children, for they are the future of tomorrow!

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### Authors' contributions

ATA, AOO, TAH, AOA supervised and were involved in study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, writing manuscript, and critical revision. ATA, AOO and AOA contributed to reviewing the manuscript, verified the critical revision for intellectual content. All authors finally approved the version to be published.

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