

THE ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, AND EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE

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Abstract

Child abuse which refers to any act or failure to act on the part of parents or caretaker which results to in-depth serious physical or emotional harm or sexual abuse or experience negatively affects the future of children and destroys the image of the community in particular and the nation in general. Children suffer from various forms of abuse such as child labour, child marriage, kidnapping, molestation and neglect, among other forms. Consequent upon the fact that children are extremely vulnerable and incapable of defending themselves, it makes them ideal targets for victimization. The consequences of child abuse and negligence are really serious, and in most case do negatively affect the victims and the society in which they live. Beside psychological trauma, it can inflict spiritual wounds on its victims. As research has proved, sometimes it is difficult to detect child abuse, unless one creates an enabling atmosphere that would encourage a disclosure by the child being abused. That is why there is a real need for a successful management based on the prevention of child abuse and the protection of children. Official reports do not capture all cases in which child abuse and neglect is suspected or even detected and acted upon. Many laws and policies have been put in place at national and international levels with the purpose of protecting children from abuse. However, they have not being effective for reasons like poor law enforcement mechanism, corruption, poverty, lack of rehabilitation of sexual offenders, ineffective judicial system, and negative attitude of some parents. The thrust of this article is to trace the origin, explore the development and effects of child abuse.

Introduction

Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child especially by a parent or a care giver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a care giver that results in actual or potential harm to a child and can occur in a child's home or in the organization, schools or communities the child interacts with. In Nigeria this cankerworm has been eroding the moral mental and psychological lives of many

children, with throes and woes in its wake. The effects of child abuse in the society are devastating and catastrophic not only on the victims but on the society at large. The aim of this article is to bring to the fore the origin, development and effects of child abuse.

The Origin of Child Abuse

History across societies contains references to acts that may be described as child abuse. McCoy and Keen (2013) maintained that professional inquiry into history or origin of child abuse is generally considered to have started in the 1960s. "The Battered child -Syndrome", the July 1962 publication by Henry Kempe in the Journal of the American medical Association represents the moment that child maltreatment entered mainstream awareness. Before the above publication, injuries to children including fractures were not commonly recognized as the results of intentional trauma. Instead, physicians often looked for undiagnosed bone diseases or accepted parent's account of accidental mishaps such as falls or assaults according to Young-Bruehl, (2012) by neighbours and bullies.

Young-Bruehl's work was not carried out in Nigeria or Africa but in Connecticut. It is imperative to observe that the study of child abuse emerged as an academic discipline in the early 1970s in the United States. There is substance in accepting or maintaining that despite the growing numbers of child advocates and interest in protecting children which took place, the grouping of children into "The abused" and the "non-abused" created an artificial distinction that narrowed the concept of children's rights to simply protection from maltreatment, and blocked investigation of the ways in which they are discriminated in society such as Nnewi. Another effect of the way child abuse has been studied was to close off consideration of how children themselves perceived maltreatment and the importance they place on adults' attitudes toward them. When the belief in children's inherent inferiority to adult is present, all children suffer whether or not their treatment is labeled as abuse. Majority of the girls are abused because of the high level of poverty in their families. Hunger and lack of parental care are not left out. The girl child is this made vulnerable and easy prey to various forms of abuse.

Development of Child Abuse

Awareness of the risks associated with unguided upbringing could be linked to young people being or receiving information about being abused and about help they can receive from social network or protective agencies. It must be noted that

girl and boy child do not truly have the freedom to refuse or give their consent in a truly independent manner. Keeping the various child abuse secret has fuelled and sustained its development in Nnewi, Anmabra State. Some families would collect a token sum of money, especially in sexually abuses case and there the case closes.

People have attributed the foregoing largely to poverty and under-development. The various large scale risks are ignored or undermined. It is an obvious fact that some parents and guarding use children for financial exploitation. This is despite societal strides in reducing the handicapping conditions that promoted child abuse and neglect in Nnewi in particular and Anambra State in general. Onyekachi Benjamin (personal communication, 4-3-2020) is of the view that this is not because there are shortages of resources for improved standard of living. It is neither because efforts have not been made to utilize the resources or even pool more resources to liberate people from the grip poverty. The question which does not seem to have been answered is how child abuse and neglect develop to its alarming state in Nnewi.

The development of child abuse and neglect started since the pre-historic period asone school of thought says that man is a rebellious prone being. The magnitude or the tempo of the evil, bad, immoral and condemnable actions became more pronounced during and after the Nigeria- Biafra civil war (1966-1970). In the pre-colonial era child abuse issues came in form of inter-tribal and ethnic skirmishes, killing of twins, slavery and burial of kings with human beings especially their slaves. The proliferation of arms, unemployment, hunger, poverty, diseases and lack of shelter led many people including youth into child abuse like prostitution, rape, incest, armed robbery, stealing, and slavery.

The process of rehabilitating, rebuilding and transforming Nnewi in particular and Nigeria in general was not easy. The civil war negatively affected the value system and greatly compounded the development, progress or backwardness of south. In eastern states the principle of right and wrong behavior which affected a number of people in a particular place, time and situation, explained the development of child abuse. The government takeover of schools from the missionaries did not help the teaching of moral instruction, religious education and moral education, the implication of which was the development of child abuse.

Instead of emphasizing on sound moral and spiritual principles, some missionary schools embarked on indoctrination. The curriculum for moral education was left out and the gardening of the mind of man and children aimed at directing and shaping man's relationship and conduct in good moral integrity was difficult if not impossible. The danger of negligence of good moral formation at early stage contributed to the development of child abuse.

There is culture conflict between western values, traditional values, and Christian value system as they relate to child abuse in Nnewi town. The fundamental child values had existed since the beginning of man and comprised the doctrine of most regions. However moral education as an instrument of character reformation has not been allowed to have a firm grip on people's attitude vis-à-vis establishing a healthy relationship with children. According to Uchendu (1965), "public spheres of life in Nnewi has reached a deplorable condition despite increased religiosity and fast rate of phenomenal growth in religious participation in Anambra State." (p.132).

From the foregoing, it is observed that the deplorable state of decay explains the monumental corruption, avarice, armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, child abuse, trafficking, molestation, and other forms of unpatriotic activities. The complex nature of the above situation seems to compound the lack of moral fiber, attitude to economic and social issues in life. Relating Nigeria to abuse, Falaranmi (2012) states that, "mention anything negative, corruption, violation of human right, fallen standard of education, electoral malpractices, epileptic power outage, incessant strike, unemployment, fraud, greed, and the rest, Nigeria is in the fore - front." (p. vii).

In the history of the development of child abuse in Nnewi, the moral vices are portrayed as moral decay, negative image, uncomplimentary attitude, and immoral disposition of Nigerians towards children. The high rate of unemployment, poverty, corruption and insensitivity of government gave rise to increased anomie. The culturally approved goals became meaningless as the political leadership is characterized by large scale fraud, corruption, exploitation, selfishness, avarice and other forms of bad image which had dangerously deteriorated the moral life of the people. Lawed (2012) is of the view that life expectancy seems to be decreasing because people's life are being disposed off cheaply through different means such as armed robbers, hired assassins, kidnappings and death traps on most of our high ways.

The history of the development of child abuse cannot be complete without mentioning the long military rule that gave rise to moral dilemma as the military joined multitude to do evil. Their forced occupation, institutionalized avarice, corruption, armed robbery, bad leadership, drug pushing and other vices that had cast aspersion on Nigerians as indecent, notorious and disgraceful. The same military rule and sit tight syndrome that bedeviled the socio-economic and political life in Nigeria introduced policies and programmes such as ethical revolution by former president Shehu Shagari in 1979 which was aimed at combating moral decadence in Nigeria. Former president Mohamadu Buhari introduced war against indiscipline (WAI) in 1983 which tried to justify military takeover by emplacing the eradication of the vices associated with indiscipline such as greed, dishonesty, imperialism among others. National Orientation Agency (NOA) that birthed Mass Mobilization for Self-reliance, Social justice, and economic recovery (MAMER) in 1981 as programme of the federal government could be seen as an effort aimed at expurgating, according to Igbara and Apenda (2002), "ignorance and liberation of the Nigerian citizen from the chain of incapacitation." (p. 31).

Effects of Child Abuse

The consequences of child abuse are devastating for decades in the society. Experts in the field have described the effects in terms of physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioral development of the affected children. The consequences of child abuse affect not only the victims themselves but also the society in which they live. More to this reality is that many complexities challenge our understanding of not only factors but relationships that mitigate the consequences of abusive experiences in Nnewi. The majority of children who are abused do not seem to show signs of extreme disturbance. Low intelligence is a consequence of abusive experience in the early childhood. In recent years, much attention has been devoted to the consequences of child sexual abuse especially the adult sexual behavior of the victim. It is noted that less attention has been given to the short and long-term consequences of child maltreatment.

Psychological consequences

This is another abuse children face in Nnewi, and the society in general. Psychological effects entail chronic low self-esteem to severe dissociative states.

Beyond this, there is a strong feeling that certain signs of severe neglect such as when a child experiences dehydration, diarrhea or malnutrition without receiving appropriate care may lead to developmental delays, attention deficits, poorer social skills, and less emotional stability.

Studies carried out by Cicchetti (1989), Cicchetti and Barnett (1991), and Crittenden and Ainsworth (1989) indicate in strong terms that deficiencies in the development of stable characters are traceable to early child abuse. In addition, it was discovered that children who had been maltreated exhibited changes in genes associated with various physical and psychological disorders, such as cancers, cardiovascular disease, immune disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression.

Medical effect

Physical abuse in the infants and young children, according to Dykes (1986), can lead to brain dysfunction and sometimes death. A child does not need to be struck on the head to sustain brain injuries. Dykes (1986) says that infants who are shaken vigorously to the extreme may sustain intracranial and intraocular bleeding with no sign of external head trauma. It is observed that early neglectful and physically abusive practices have increased the negative effects for these small victims.

Even after diagnosis and treatment, the psychological effect of emotional neglect persists. Polansky, Chalmers, Bittenwieser and Williams (1981) are of the view that young adolescents who in their infancy were diagnosed as failure to thrive were defiant and hostile. Factors that trigger nonorganic failure to thrive and child neglect should be separated from factors that maintain these behaviors.

Abuse and neglect may result in serious health problems or challenges and according to Elmer and Gregg (1967) that can adversely affect children's development and result in irremediable lasting effect. Green, Gaines and Sandgrund (1974) are among the early scholars on physically abused children who documented significant neuromotor handicaps. Martin, Beezley Conway and Kempe (1974) included central nervous system damage, physical defects, growth and mental retardation and serious speech problem. The above are serious indications of issues of great public health importance in the society.

Morse, Sahier and Friedman (1970) contend that physically abused children have been found to have more mild neurologic signs, serious physical injuries, skin markings and scars than their non-abused peers. Experts have not been silent

concerning children who have been sexually abused and those who have been physically neglected. Kolko, Moser and Weldy (1990) are of the view that children who have been sexually abused, and some children who have been physically neglected have shown heightened sexuality and signs of genital manipulation. Then above serious biological effect of child and adolescent sexual abuse is the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including Staph, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Gonorrhoea and Syphilis.

Physical Effect

There are a number of physical effect of child abuse. Evidence abounds that physical effect of child abuse range, according to Onyekachi Benjamin (Personal communication, 4-3-2020) from minor injuries like lacerations, incisions, to severe brain damage and even death.

Behavioural Effect

Child abuse manifest in the behaviours of the victims in Nnewi, Anambra State and beyond. According to Dike Obasi (personal communication, 2-9-2019) the effects of child abuse range from poor peer relationship all the way to extraordinary violent behaviors, like bad temperament, antagonism, absent mindedness, hostility, and others.

Cognitive Effects

The cognitive effects of abuse according to clinician Onuigbo Nze personal communication (15-08-2019) range from attention problems and learning disorders to severe organic brain syndromes. A number of recent findings by Augustinos and Azar (1987), Barnes and Twenty man (1988), show that cognitive and language deficits in abused children have been noted clinically. Similarly, Fantuzzo (1990) believes that abused and neglected children with no evidence of neurological impairment have also shown delayed intellectual development especially in the area of verbal intelligence. Shading more light on cognitive effects of abuse, Hoffman-Plotkin and Twentyman (1984), and Perry, Doran and Wells (1983) found towered intellectual functioning and reduced cognitive functioning in abused children. Others are struggling to establish differences in intellectual and cognitive functioning, language skills, or verbal ability.

Eckenvode, Laird and Doris (1991) identified problematic school performance among abused children to include low grades, poor standardized test scores, and

frequent retention in grade. Salzinger, Kaplan, Pelcovitz, Samit and Krieger (1984) point to the neglected children appearing the most adversely affected in the society. Another cognitive effect was brought out by Alessandri (1991), Allen and Oliver (1982) who reiterated that others have not found differences in intellectual and cognitive functioning, language skills, or verbal ability.

Dodge, Bates and Pettit (1990) found that physically harmed 4-year old children should have deviant patterns of processing social information related to aggressive behavior, at age 5. They also discovered that physically harmed children, unlike non-physically harmed children, were significantly less attentive to social issues. They were also observed to be more inclined to hostile intent, and less able to manage personal problems. They explained possible cognitive deficit in abused and neglected children by suggesting that physical abuse affects the development of social information processing patterns, which in turn lead to chronic aggressive behavior. According to Dodge, Bates and Pettit (1990), "the experience of severe physical harm is associated with the acquisition of a set of biased and deficient patterns of processing social provocation information" (p. 167). Differences in research findings on the cognitive and intellectual effects of childhood maltreatment may be related to the perceived failure to control the important variables, which include socio-economic status, and the lack of statistical power of small sample sizes. The tendency of earlier studies to aggregate different types of maltreatment or the inclusion of children who had neurological dysfunction to begin with can dramatically influence cognitive and intellectual performance. Lewis and Shanok (1977) excluded children with obvious neurological impairments. The study notes that early maltreatment can cause injury to the central nervous system that result in future cognitive impairments. Traumatized children, according to Elmer (1977) need a follow up, in order to enhance their intellectual and cognitive functioning.

Conclusion

The negative and uncomplimentary impacts of child abuse should no longer be ignored for the sake of humanity and human conscience. This monster has, for years dwarfed children's potentialities and nibbled off their opportunities. It has painfully undermined their integrity, efficiency, and enthusiasm for life. In view of these devastating effects of child abuse, concerted efforts of the agencies saddled with the responsibility of protecting children from abuse should be more assertive. Religious bodies should also lend its voice through appropriate operational

mechanisms in stemming the tide of this hydra-headed monster called child abuse. These efforts will not only restore sanity to the society, but will save the destinies of the victims of this malady from sinking into complete oblivion, as well as make them contribute meaningfully to economic development of their father land.

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