



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILD ABUSE AND SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN: FOCUS ON JALINGO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF TARABA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The issues surrounding child abuse and neglect have become concern to all and sundry in education sector. Parents and psychologists are particularly worried about the spiral effects of child abuse on children's educational pursuit. In order to ascertain the extent at which child abuse impact on education of its victims. This study therefore examined the relationship between child abuse and school adjustment of primary school children in Jalingo local government area of Taraba State. Two (2) research questions and two (2) research hypotheses guided the study. Two hundred and ninety-eight (298) teachers constituted sample size for the study while self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the answering research questions while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for analyzing the research hypotheses with the aid of (SPSS). The findings revealed significant relationship between child abuse and social skill development; as well as significant relationship between child abuse and cognitive skill development of primary school children. It was therefore concluded that there is strong and significant relationship between child abuse and school adjustment of primary school children in Jalingo local government area of Taraba State. Based on the findings, among others it was recommended that parents should treat their children the same way they want to be treated in order to promote child's dignity, and that concerted efforts should be geared towards combating child abuse by community members in Jalingo in particular and Taraba State in at large.

KEYWORDS: *Child abuse, maltreatment, neglect, social development, cognitive development, primary school children.*

INTRODUCTION

Issues surrounding child abuse and maltreatment have become a topical focus of discussion in this part of the world. This is based on the feelings that abuse has constantly been one of the rationales for poor physical, social, emotional, as well as psychological development of children at early age. Needless to say abuse tends to have long-term and contribute to maladjustment and improper functioning of victims in the school (Chartier, Walker & Naimark, 2019). That is, child abuse impacts on physical, social, emotional and psychological developments of its victims especially when they are exposed to school system where their peers who are not abused are mingled with. According to Norman (2012), the examples of psychological threat associated with child abuse are drug use, suicide attempts, sexually transmitted diseases, and risky sexual behaviour. For Nemeroff (2012), child abuse can lead to increased incidences of major depressive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other anxiety disorders. For instance, the physical health issues that can result from child abuse include obesity, heart disease, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and cancer. This shows that abusiveness of children affects all-round development of the victims, especially during their school age.

The assertion above explains why Fuller and Frank (2010) averred that those survivors who experienced childhood abuse are less likely to adjust to the school system. A search on Google Scholar of child abuse and education revealed negative impact of abuse and maltreatment on educational pursuit of children (see Thornberry, 2014). This author maintained that most of the children who were disengaged from school and have lower expectations for schooling had once been abused. In the same vein, studies by Goldstein (2010) and Farrow (2011) affirmed that the survival of child abuse and maltreatment hinged on alcohol use in order to have educational breakthrough. To this end, child abuse and or child maltreatment are used interchangeably to denote unfair treatment melted on the children.

Little wonder, Fang and Mercy (2012) defined child maltreatment by stating four major types of maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and neglect. For Acharya (2014), child abuse includes the four major

types identified by Fang et al. with the addition of negligent treatment, or other exploitation resulting in actual potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. For the purpose of this study, child abuse revolves activities that could mar social development and cognitive development of the children.

Invariably, issues surrounding child abuse may impact on total development of children as being documented in literatures. For instance, Chartier (2009) reported that victims of child abuse suffer from numerous social and mental health complications, such as smoking, alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, obesity, anxiety and depression. For Keiling (2011), these social and mental health complications can negatively affect educational pursuit of such individuals. Perhaps this explains why Mills (2011) and Spann (2010) concluded that victims of child abuse may have difficulty when it comes to school adjustment. In fact, the study carried out by Mills (2011) revealed significant correlation between child abuse and cognitive functioning of children. In the same vein, Spann (2010) underscored how child abuse may cause disruption and dysfunction in various life domains, including school adjustment. Consequently, the individuals are more likely to drop out of school before graduation.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that child abuse is a serious plight with far reaching negative effects on the lives and education of its victims. This is supported by Fortuna (2011) who highlighted kinds of childhood trauma as (a) life threatening car crash; (b) natural disaster; (c) manmade disaster; (d) child physical abuse; (e) being beaten; (f) being raped; (g) being molested; (h) witnessing domestic violence; and (i) witnessing murder. Simply put, in any of these cases, the child may find it extremely difficult to adjust to the school programme. In fact, studies have shown negative effect of child abuse on cognitive level of the learners (see Coohey, 2011). Also, scholars have revealed the relationship between child maltreatment and social relation skills of its victims (Miller, 2010). Whereas study by Romano (2014) showed negative impact of child abuse on social and mental development of its survivals. To this end, studies in the past have focused only on negative effect of child abuse on its victims without considering how the victims managed to adjust to the school programme.

For instance, the study conducted by Child Welfare Information Gateway (2010) reported that abused and neglected children are more likely to have neurological, psychological, and cognitive deficits than their non-maltreated peers. This is supported by Perry (2013) who concluded that the brains of abused and neglected children can be 20 to 30% smaller than their non-abused peers and that shrinkage of the brain occurs in areas responsible for learning, memory, and the regulation of affections and emotions (Neuberger, 2017). For Koenen (2013), maltreated kids often have problems regulating their emotions and affections; and also prone to the risk of cognitive delays and lowered IQ test scores; perhaps as a result of the structural neurological changes that occur from maltreatment.

From the above, it is obvious that little or no study has unveiled the impact of abuse on school adjustment of children. That is, there seems to be no concern about how the survivors of child abuse adjust to school environment and learn like non-maltreated children in the school. This becomes necessary in the face of continuous abuse in our society. In fact, there was an estimated 68,000 victims of abuse in 2015 as reported by Health and Human Rights Society of Nigeria. The occurrence of child abuse is recorded on daily basis across Nigeria with 1,009 cases documented in Taraba State alone in 2017 (Taraba News Report, 2018). While psychological and health related challenges associated with child abuse have been documented wide and far, it is also imperative to examine impact of child abuse on school adjustment of primary school children in Taraba State as a whole and Jalingo Local Government Area in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of child abuse is used interchangeably as child maltreatment, which has attracted the attention of many human right activists, civil society organization and feminist. According to Vopat (2013), child abuse is a social construct that may give different meanings in different situations. For some authors, child abuse may include actions and treatment that expose children to sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect and or physical neglect during the first 18 years of life (Al Odhayani, Watson & Watson, 2013). This explains why Norman (2012) conceived physical abuse as the use of physical force so as to harm a child's overall well-being; whereas sexual abuse is said to be involving a child in sexual acts for which he or she is

not legally able to give consent; also, emotional abuse is failing to provide a supportive environment through the means of threatening or other mentally draining actions; while neglect means failure to meet the needs considered necessary for the wellbeing of the child (see Norman, 2012).

Some scholars have argued that the more severe the abuse, poorer the outcomes tend to be (Nemeroff, 2010). That is, abuse can be deemed as mild, moderate or severe. In the same vein, mild to moderate neglect occurs when a child's needs are not met, however there is no physical harm to the child, while severe neglect occurs when the child's health is endangered (Mennen, 2010). It must be emphasized that abuse or maltreatment of children is perpetrated by parents or other primary caregivers. This is supported by Normal (2012) that parents or other primary caregivers inflict the majority of child abuse. There is research to suggest that abuse from parents or primary caregiver leaves a greater negative impact than abuse inflicted by outsiders (see Wingren, 2012). However, the extent at which the victims of such abuse are able to adjust to school environment and cope with academic activities remains unascertained.

Of course, several studies have shown that child abuse could breed abnormal social development skills, antisocial behaviour (delinquency, prostitution and homicide), and the perpetuation of the cycle of abuse in the child. Alfaro (2011) cited both retrospective and prospective studies which found a higher incidence of child abuse among juvenile delinquents. McCord (2013) found at approximately 40 years post-abuse 45% of abused children had been convicted of serious crimes, become alcoholic or mentally ill, or had died usually young. In other words, abused children are more likely to run away from home and to be chemically dependent, self-destructive (i.e., chemically dependent, suicidal, accident-prone and in legal trouble), and other-destructive (i.e., cruelty to animals and homicidal ideation). This shows that the negative impact of child abuse on social functioning may include difficulties in school, truancy, running away from home, and early marriages (Peters, 2016).

Little wonder, scholars like Courtois (2008) observed that other victims of abuse may react in the opposite fashion, instead of excelling in school in an attempt to temporarily forget about the abuse and to get positive attention. Stressing that abuse may have an impact on later social functioning in the form of prostitution (estimates indicated that about 50% to 65% of prostitutes were sexually abused) and substance abuse (Courtois, 2008). In support of this, Pines

(2011) reported that 60% of prostitutes were victims of sexual abuse and revealed a wide variability across victims from isolation, rebellion and antisocial behaviour to over functioning and compulsive social interaction. For Russell (2016), abuse leads to decreased in religiosity and socially as well as occupationally impaired among the victims of abuse. To this end, it is obvious that child abuse may mar social functioning of its victims as it triggers aggressiveness and difficulty with intimacy in any form of sociality.

Perhaps Lamphear (2015) was right to have observed that physically abused children have numerous behaviour problems (i.e., noncompliance, aggression), have poor peer relationships, show social skill deficits, are less socially involved, have less empathy, and hardly adjust to school environment. Simply put, abused children have more behaviour problems which make them to be more aggressive and have greater difficult in adjusting to school programmes. It could be deduced that abused children have school adjustment difficulty based on their inability to maintain peer interactions, which mostly serve as source of attraction for primary school children.

Moreover, studies have shown that maltreatment and abuse negatively impact on child's cognition. Put differently, abuse during infancy and early childhood affect brain and cognitive development of the child. Several studies in the field of science have shown how the brain develops and how early experiences affect that development. Lamphear (2015) pointed out that altered brain functioning is an evident of early abuse and maltreatment. In other words, positive experiences can assist with healthy brain development while children's experiences with maltreatment or other forms of toxic stress, such as domestic violence or disasters negatively affects brain development. The neuronal pathways that are developed and strengthened under negative conditions prepare children to cope in that negative environment, and their ability to respond to nurturing and kindness may be impaired (Shonkoff & Philips, 2010). Furthermore, studies have indicated that child abuse may bring about intellectual impairments such as retardation, impaired cognitive development, poor school adjustment, as well as lowered academic performance in the victims (Gelardo & Sanford, 2017). Scholars like Friedrich (2013) established relationship between child abuse and impairment in verbal abilities (e.g. memory and fluency), nonverbal memory, and attention but no difference in persistence to tasks. For Erickson (2013), abused children may suffer challenges

when presented with problem solving situations as they are mostly less creative and constantly display greater negative affections (i.e., anger, frustration, aggression and noncompliance) and less positive affections. Invariably, abuse or maltreatment impacts negatively on the skills, work habits and retentive power which subsequently leads to lower cognition formation among the victims.

However, research has revealed that specific effects of abuse may depend on other factors as the age of the victim at the time of abuse, whether the abuse was a one-time incident or chronic, identity of the abuser (e.g., parent or other adult), whether the child had a dependable nurturing individual in his or her life, the type and severity of the abuse, the intervention, how long the abuse lasted, and other individual and environmental characteristics. In all of these, McCrory (2010) emphasized that abused children tend to have decreased volume in the cerebellum, which helps coordinate motor behavior and executive functioning. Little wonder, National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2012) averred that severely abused children tend to have smaller prefrontal cortex, which is critical to behaviour, cognition and emotion regulation. The Council concluded that children who experienced severe abuse early in life while in institutional settings often have decreased electrical activity in their brains, decreased brain metabolism, and poorer connections between areas of the brain that are key to integrating complex information. As noted, by Prado and Dewey (2012), malnutrition, a form of abuse, may impair both brain development (e.g slowing the growth of neurons, axons, and synapses) and function (e.g neurotransmitter syntheses, the maintenance of brain tissue). Obviously, the victims may suffer serious damage in brain and other organs of the body thereby affecting his or her cognitive development.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There is no gainsaying that child abuse, neglect and maltreatment have attracted attention of human right organizations (HROs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and all tiers of governments globally. For scholars like Corpus (2010), justice must be sought for children who have been abused in one way or the other. On the contrary, researchers like Widom (2010) dug into factors that contributed to the abused children's decision to pursue education. In spite of this, research on enabling factors for ensuring school adjustment of child abuse

is scarce. To date, most of the research focuses on high school dropout rates, and family and school factors (Porche, 2011). Other studies focus on school success of abused children using teachers' variables such as evaluation technique and standardized scores, rather than qualitative life experience for school adjustment. In order to examine the impact of child abuse on school adjustment of primary school children, this study will specifically ascertain:

1. The impact of child abuse on social development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State.
2. The impact of child abuse on cognitive development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the impacts of child abuse on social development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State?
2. What are the impacts of child abuse on cognitive development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between child abuse and social development of primary school children in Jalingo LGA of Taraba State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between child abuse and cognitive development of primary school children in Jalingo LGA of Taraba State.

METHODOLOGY

It is a quantitative study of a selected public primary schools in Jalingo LGA of Taraba State. The study adopted correlational research design and the target population stood at one thousand sixty-seven (1,067) primary school teachers in the study area. Simple random sampling was used to select twenty (20) teachers from fifteen (15) primary schools in the study area. On the whole, three hundred (300) primary school teachers constituted sample size for this study. The respondents were requested to respond to questionnaire titled "Child Abuse in relation to Children's School Adjustment Questionnaire (CACSAQ)". The self-developed questionnaire was validated through discussions with experts regarding content, format employed and its general suitability to the respondents as well as their appropriateness to the purpose of the research. The

reliability co-efficient was 0.78. The data presentation was based on two hundred and ninety-eight questionnaires that were duly filled and returned. The data collected were subjected to descriptive statistics for proper analysis such as arithmetic mean, percentage table, and standard deviation while Pearson Product Moment Correlational Analysis was utilized for research hypotheses with the aid of *SPSS*.

RESULTS

Table 1:

Demographic data of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	72	24.2
Female	226	75.8
Total	298	100
Experience	Frequency	Percentage %
0-5	73	24.4
6-10	160	53.6
11 and above	65	22
Total	298	100

Source: Field study (2021)

Table 4.1 reveals bio-data of the respondents as seventy-two (72) males indicating twenty-four point two percent (24.2%) while the remaining two hundred and twenty-six (226) respondents with seventy-five point eight percent (75.8%) are females. This shows that female respondents are more than male respondents. Similarly, the table reveals seventy-three (73) with twenty-four point four percent (24.4%) fall within the experience 0-5 years, another one hundred sixty (160) respondents representing fifty-three point six percent (53.6%) fall within the experience of 6-10 years while the remaining sixty-seven (67) respondents indicating twenty-two percent (22%) have 11 years and above teaching experience. Therefore, the majority of respondents has 6-10 years teaching experience.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What are the impacts of child abuse on social development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State?

TABLE 4.2:

Mean ratings of respondents with regard to impact of child abuse on social development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State.

S/N	Items on Impact of Child Abuse on Social Development of Children	Valid N= 298	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Child abuse brings about abnormal social skills in its victims.	298	2.77	1.0257	Accept
2.	Abused children tend to perpetuate the cycle of abuse.	298	3.05	2.5006	Accept
3.	Abused children are prone to aggressiveness and difficult intimacy.	298	3.12	0.8337	Accept
4.	Child abuse triggers poor peer relationships among children.	298	2.93	0.8545	Accept
5.	Most of abused children have less empathy.	298	2.89	1.1642	Accept

Source: Field study (2021)

Table 2 above indicates the opinions of respondents on the impacts of child abuse on social development of primary school children. Based on the table, the mean scores of the respondents- 2.77, 3.05, 3.12, 2.93, and 2.89 with their corresponding standard deviation for items 1 to 5 respectively seem to be within the criterion mean of 2.50 – 3.49 for acceptance level. The results from the table indicated that all respondents affirmed that items 1-5 negatively impact on social development of primary school children in Jalingo local government area. The results revealed that child abuse brings about abnormal social skills in its victims, abused children tend to perpetuate the cycle of abuse, abused children are prone to aggressiveness and difficult intimacy, child abuse triggers poor peer relationships among children as well as most of abused children have less empathy with mean scores of 2.77, 3.05, 3.12, 2.93, and 2.89 respectively impact social skill development of primary school children.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

What are the impacts of child abuse on cognitive development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State?

TABLE 4.3:

Mean ratings of respondents with regard to impact of child abuse on cognitive development of primary school children in Jalingo L.G.A of Taraba State.

S/N	Items on Impact of Child Abuse on Cognitive Development of Children	Valid 298	N=	Mean	SD	Remark
6.	Abuse and maltreatment of a child leads to altered brain functioning.	298		3.34	0.7838	Accept
7.	Abusiveness is responsible for inability of a child to develop sense clemency.	298		2.92	0.8583	Accept
8.	Abused children are more likely to develop intellectual impairment.	298		3.21	0.7722	Accept
9.	Abused children suffer soundness of memory and fluency.	298		2.94	0.8484	Accept
10.	Abused children tend to have decreased volume in the cerebellum.	298		2.63	1.0838	Reject

Source: Field study (2021)

From the table 3 above, the opinions of respondents on the impacts of child abuse on cognitive development of primary school children were captured. In line with the table, the mean scores of the respondents- 3.34, 2.92, 3.21, 2.94 and 2.63 with their corresponding standard deviation for items 6-10 respectively seem to be within the criterion mean of 2.50 – 3.49 for acceptance level. The results from the table indicated that all respondents affirmed that items 6-10 negatively impact on cognitive development of primary school children in the study area. The results revealed that abuse and maltreatment of a child leads to altered brain functioning, abusiveness is responsible for inability of a child to develop sense of clemency, abused children are more likely to develop intellectual impairment, abused children suffer soundness of memory and fluency, as well as abused children tend to have decreased volume in the cerebellum with the mean scores of 3.34, 2.92, 3.21, 2.94 and 2.63 impact cognitive development of primary school children.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS 1:

There is no significant relationship between child abuse and social development of primary school children in Jalingo LGA of Taraba State.

Table 4.7: An “r” statistical table showing the relationship (a measure of impact) between Child Abuse and Social Development of Primary School Children

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-cal	Sig. Value(p)	Decision
Child Abuse	298	38.87	6.47				
				195	0.160*	0.025	Reject H₀
Social Development	298	9.70	3.83				

Source: Field study (2021)

The result shows calculated ‘r’ (r- cal. =0.160) at 195 degrees of freedom given that the obtained level of significance (p-value) is 0.025 0.05 (*statistical benchmark*). By implication, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected, hence, there is significant relationship between child abuse and social development of primary school children.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS 2:

There is no significant relationship between child abuse and cognitive development of primary school children in Jalingo LGA of Taraba State.

TABLE 4.9:

An “r” statistical table showing the relationship (a measure of impact) between Child Abuse and Cognitive Development of Primary School Children

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-cal	Sig. Value(p)	Decision
Child Abuse	298	22.83	6.85				
				195	0.170*	0.210	Accept H₀
Cognitive Development	298	9.70	3.83				

Source: Field study (2021)

The result shows calculated “r” (r-cal. = 0.170) at 195 degrees of freedom given that the obtained level of significance (p-value) is 0.0210 0.05 (*statistical benchmark*). By implication, the null hypothesis is therefore

rejected; hence, there is significant relationship between child abuse and cognitive development of primary school children.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed significant relationship between child abuse and social development of primary school children. This is in alignment with Peters (2016) who reported difficulties in school adjustment, truancy, running away from home and early marriage as negative impact of child abuse on social functioning of its victims. The result of this study is supported by Pines (2011) who reported that 60% of prostitutes were victims of sexual abuse and revealed a wide variability across victims from isolation, rebellion and antisocial behaviour to over functioning and compulsive social interaction.

Also the findings indicated significant relationship between child abuse and cognitive development of primary school children. This is in line with the findings presented by Friedrich (2013) that there is relationship between child abuse and impairment in verbal abilities (e.g. memory and fluency), nonverbal memory, and attention. In his study, Lamphear (2015) found out that early child abuse and or child maltreatment may lead to altered brain functioning. Similarly, Gelardo and Sanford (2017) in their study discovered that child abuse brings about intellectual impairments such as retardation, impaired cognitive development, poor school adjustment and lowered academic performance in its victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion in this study, it would be appropriate to recommend that:

- Parents are advised to keep away their wards from anyone who abuses substance as most of them tend to abuse children.
- Parents, guardians, caregivers and adults generally should treat children the same way they would want to be treated. If value is attached to life as expected, the cases of child abuse, maltreatment, and neglect would be reduced to the barest minimum.
- Also, everybody is encouraged to report suspected abuse or neglect whenever there is such case. If reports are made then the perpetrators could face the weight of the law. In fact, human right activists and

agencies against child molestation and related offenses should be made strong to pursue cases concerning child abuse and neglect so as to discourage further foment of such heinous acts.

- Finally, parents are encouraged to make their homes a violence-free zone since children tend to recycle what they experience. In other words, peaceful home will grow peaceful children and by extension, peaceful children will produce peaceful society with zero abuse cases.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it could be inferred that as far as Jalingo Local Government Area is concerned, to a very large extent, there is negative and significant relationship between child abuse and school adjustment of primary school children. In addendum, the indexes of school adjustment of children such as social skill development and cognitive skill development are destructed as a result of abuse melted on the children.

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