

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN NIGERIA. IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

Children have been subjected to innumerable shades and forms of abuse and maltreatment, the issue of child abuse and neglect has generated much debated and controversy as it concerns its harmful effects. It is based on this understanding that the writers ventured into this area with a view of bringing out its harmfulness, psychological consequences and psychosocial support needed. The writers started by examining the contextual meaning and epidemiology of child abuse, the neglect and the psychosocial support given to the victims. Highlighting the different forms of the phenomenon and its theories, the implication was that the counselors should help the children to understand the law that protect them and how they can benefit from it and most importantly to speak out in face of the abuse and neglect. the reviewer made a case for the total eradication of this forms of social malaise and recommended among others that the government, the family, the church as well as the advocacy groups should cooperate in child welfare matters in the form of exchange of information facilities, training and tracking of duly allocated resourced to children especially the specially needs children.

Keywords: child abuse, child neglect, psychosocial, behavior, counsellor

Introduction

Historically, it is difficult to indicate specifically when child abuse started, hence, it appears that children have always been abused and neglected owing to this line of thought; (Sirajo & Abdullahi 2012) remarked that history of child abuse is a nightmare from which we have recently begun to awake. The further back in history, one goes, the lower, the level of child care and the likely, children are killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized and abused. In ancient human society, child abuse was rife and its ill nature attracted little or no moral consideration (Tyler, Allison & Adam 2006). In about the second century, a Greek physician repeatedly instructed midwives to examine children and eliminate the unfit ones. The Roman law of twelve tables had a prohibition, banning the raising of defective children. In some places in Africa, Children born

as twins were only recently allowed to live (Ogwumike 2001). Evidently, the origin of child abuse is closely tied up with the origin of man's token freedom of the will.

Child abuse is an act which individuals, institutions or processes engages in which directly or indirectly harms the children or damages their prospects of a safe and healthy development into adulthood (Achema, Emmanuel & Odinigwe 2014). The definition of child abuse and neglect has been expanded considerably to include more than just beaten of a child and the likes.

It is viewed as anything done to a child that poses a significant harm or damages to the physical, sexual, emotional and mental development of the child (Eya 2002). It is a problem that can result from a complex combination of factors which will make parents and/or caregivers to abuse the children which are inherent in individuals, families, social factors, single parenthood, poverty, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and mental health problems (Ogwumike 2001). Child abuse is a problem that has been living with man and seen by many as one of his day to day activities and it entails the betrayal of a caregiver's position of trust and authority over a child. It takes many different forms like child labour, trafficking, early marriage, neglect and so on. (Adeyemo & Bamidele 2014) agrees that this abuse in developing country is attributed to poverty, family size, unemployment, bounded labour, unscrupulous employers of labour among others.

Olusegun & Idowu (2016) added that Child abuse is any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, and sexual abuse or exploitation It includes any act or condition injurious to the child's physical and emotional health that has been inflicted on the child by the parents guardians or other caregivers. In the words of words of coleman (2006) child abuse is any form of physical, mental or sexual exploitation of the child or cruelty towards the child by an adult (parent or care) that causes significant harm to its victim. Ebigbo (2000) sees child abuse and neglect as a particular type of parent child relationship which can exist in combination of any other psychological illness and other character disorders. Comer (2006) stated that child abuse is a problem that affects too many children and which has an enormous impact on children's psychological development. He added that child abuse it's the non- incidental use of excessive physical or psychology force on the child by an adult.

Child neglect has been defined as, "a failure to provide basic needed care for the child such as shelter, food, clothing, education, supervision, medical care, and other basic necessities needed for the child's physical, intellectual, and emotional development." (Okafor 2010) There are various categories of neglect such as: physical, medical, environmental neglect, emotional neglect, and educational (Kathleen 2013). Neglected children usually have intellectual, physical, social, psychological and developmental problems. They are often socially withdrawn, suffer from malnutrition, and are susceptible to several fatalities due to the absence of caregivers at critical moments (National Human Rights Commission, 2013).

In Nigeria for example child abuse is either seen a bye product of poverty or as a societal norm. Whatever way, one looks at it: most cases of child abuse in Nigeria can be ascribed to poverty rather than character disorder. This may explain why abuse may see the situation as part of life

rather than avoidable phenomenon. Epidemiological study of child abuse and neglect showed that at least 5 percent and 26 percent of children in United states are physically abused yearly (AMPPCAN 2006). Surveys suggests that one of every 10 children in the developed world e.g united states here are psychologically abused such as being kicked, bitten, hit, beaten or threatened with a knife or gun (Corner, 2006)

The cause of child abuse and neglect include inherited cruelty which is mistake for a pattern of rearing (Ogwumike 2001). Many abusers do not know any other pattern of child rearing. Very often an abuser was abused as a child, thus they models themselves after the mother and projects established that basic trust which Tyler et al (2006) says is important for later social interaction. The abuser may not have had the emphatic mothering experience as child; hence as an adult, they took upon for the lost love and care in their own children, and making this demand when the child is totally unprepared leads to child abuse.

The abuser as a child had harbored ill feelings towards the mother. She could not then act out against the mother but as an adult, she then acts out on her children. Having an unwanted baby can result to child is even abandoned after birth. Apart from the afore- mentioned causes of child abuse, the rest include alcoholism, drug addiction, impossible living conditions, unbearable stress etc. whatever the cases, both the culprit and victim of abuse need help. Against this backdrop necessitated this write up on the psychosocial support of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria. Implication for counseling that is aimed at addressing this national problem while proffering solution to it.

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Forms of child abuse

Children have been subjected to innumerable shades and forms of abuse and maltreatment. (Olusegun & Idowu 2016) identifies abuses to include physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse; others non-sexual abuse includes child labour, kidnapping, and neglect. The physical abuse is the most frequently reported form of abuse and this is technically defined as wilful physical injury inflicted upon the child. (Okafor 2010) asserted that, it can take the form of shaking, kicking, burning, starving the child and any act that is harmful to the child's body. Emotional/Verbal abuse as injury of psychological self which may be as a result of parental hostility in form of continuous terrorizing, rejection, insult, criticism or in form of humiliating (Adeyemo et al 2014). Sexual abuse which is not largely reported by children may be due to threats, rape, incest, sexual assaults and violation while Incest is the most secretive, and discovery is accidental

The following are the most forms of child abuse and neglect on Nigeria, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, nutritional abuse, medical abuse, education abuse, recreational

abuse, and institutional abuse. Others include physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect, sexual neglect, institutional neglect and medical neglect.

Physical abuse and neglect: involve child battering leading to pain and injuries or inflicting a body injury the abusive a parent may inflict on the child. There are wide varieties of physical injuries which include bearing, pushing against an object, twisting the ear or lip, flogging or pouring hot water on the whole body This is the most prevalent form of abuse in Nigeria (Achema 2014). Physical neglect on the other hand involves activities or acts which disregard or encourage disregard for body care and physical outlook.

Emotional abuse and neglect: include verbal insult, scolding ridicules, threats, intimidation, victimization and suppression of opinions of children by adults mostly parents or care-givers and (Kathleen 2013). In emotional abuse, the parent is so dependent on the child that the parent-child role is reversed. The child with his limited capabilities cannot meet the demands and therefore becomes frustrated. He may want to run away from the family environment and its hardship. These days of mass retrenchment and unemployment of parents, one can suspect that many Nigeria children are suffering from emotional neglect which can result to poor or retard development which can lead to physical, mental, social and psychological problem this makes some children to hawk wares before and after school session each day and they are left with no time to relax, play or think for themselves. Verbal abuse is the most commonly used. This included insults on the child, shouting or screaming at them and calling them names “you not worth kobo” “you are worthless”. Thus demoralizes the child leading to low self concept (esteem), indecision and ambivalence. Emotional abuse can even lead to poor school achievement with poor national development as the end result or product. Emotional neglect includes all acts or behaviours aimed at ignoring or rejection of the child. This is mostly psychological and it includes lack of denial of warmth, affection, tenderness, love and participation. (Okafor 2010) added that it can be the most damaging of all the abuses. This is where the parents show no sign of love towards the child. Thus, the child feels empty, frustrated and dejected. This is lead to low self concepts with its ate need consequence. In Nigeria, parents are prone to demonstrating their love for the children through actions of favour and are not given to the verbal ‘ I love you’ syndrome as found in the western world. Also closely related is medical abuse which is emotional neglect; involves total disregard to medical needs of the child or acts of self-prescription.

Sexual abuse and neglect: comprises all sexual overtimes made to a girls by a man with the aim of taking an undue advantage of the girl buton, oral sensitization, organ exposure and carnal penetration. Sexual neglect involves giving wrong sexual information to girls and blanker ban on all forms of sex education (Sirajo 2012).

Nutritional abuse: involves outright starvation, inadequate feeding and malnutrition. Nutritional neglect encompasses inadequate feeding menu, practices and schedules. Timed feeding by lactating mothers is an example of this while the act of given a particular brand of food to a child constitutes another.

Educational abuse: comprises all acts or activities which hamper the child intellectual attainment e.g, late admission to school, no schooling inability to provide writing materials to the child, non- payment of school fees and no provision of school late and reading without desk. While Educational neglect involves inability to provide adequate materials and dumping the child at school without attention such as visiting the child regularly. This is a typical of parents mentally retards children (National Human Rights Commission 2013).

Effects of child abuse and neglect

All type of child abuse and neglect leave lasting scars. Some of those cars might be physical, but emotional scaring has long lasting effects throughout life, damaging a child's sense of self, ability to have healthily relationship and ability to function at home, at work and at school. Some affects include:

- i. **Lack of trust and relationship difficulties:** if you can't trust your parents, who can you trust? Abuse by a primary caregiver damages the most fundamental relationship as a child that you will safely, reliably get your physical and emotional needs met by the person who is responsible for your care. Without this base, it is very difficult to learn to trust people or know who is trustworthy. This can lead to difficult maintaining relationships due to fear of being controlled or abused. It can also to unhealthy relationship because the adult doesn't know what a good relationship is.
- ii. **Care feelings of being 'worthless of damaged':** if you been told over and over again as a child that you are stupid or no good, it is very difficult to overcome these core feelings. You may experience them as reality. Adults may not strive for more education, or settle for a job that can do it or are worth more. Sexual abuse survivor, with the stigma and shame surrounding the abuse, often especially struggle with a feeling of being damaged.
- iii. **Trouble regulating emotions:** abuse children cannot express emotions safety. As a result the emotions can struggle with unexplained anxiety, depression, or anger; they may turn to alcohol or drugs to numb out the painful feelings.

Theories of child abuse neglect

A lot of theories have been involved by scholar to explain child abuse and neglect (Ogwumike, 2001 Eya, 2002). They include psychodynamic theories, social learning theories, social psychological theories and sociological theories.

- i. **Psychodynamic theories:** this theory focused on the personality trait of the abusive parents of adults. Theorists here argue that abusive parents have some personality

- problem or character defects. Such character defect include low psychological arousal, unrealistic expectations or impulsivity (Eya,2002)
- ii. The social learning theories: this emphasis the effect of reinforcement and modeling in the development of the child maltreatment (abuse). Theorist here argued that abusive parents were themselves abused when they were young. This view was supported by (Ogwumike 2001) reported that men and women who observed violence in their parents were more likely to be violent with their children.
 - iii. The social psychological theories: this theory provides a kind of compromise between psychodynamic theories (which emphasized individual orientation) and social learning theory (which focused on environmental factors). Theorists focused on the interaction between the individual and environment. Hence, the victims physical and personality attributions as well as his behavior are contributory to his being maltreated. Thus, children who are mental retarded or physically handicapped have high tendency of being abused.
 - iv. The sociological theories: these emphases docile factors as the primary cause of maltreatment. Such factors includes poverty, unemployment, high mobility, family size such as large families etc. theories here blame the society and government as the causative agents of child abuse and neglect.

The current situation of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria

In Nigeria, deviations from normal, whether physical or especially, mental are feared, despised and ridiculed. Most Nigeria still sees the disabled child as resulting from the curse from gods. Most Nigerian cultures identity two offences against god/gods as the likely cause of handicapping conditions and as a result in some cases are neglected. These are:

1. Refusal of the family to worship or sacrifice to the god or gods and
2. Refusal to pay vow to such god/gods

Thus, when this neglect is made, the gods bring this disobedient family to order by causing the birth of handicapped children in the family. Certain cultures also belief that there are bad gods who derive pleasure from causing harm to people and that gods roam about the street in the mid-day and mid night inflicting harms on pregnant mothers whom they meet and cursing them to produce handicap children (Tyler 2006) other cultures still view the child as the cause of his/her disability. Olusegun et al (2016) reported that some cultures believes that gods will punish child who misuses his/her organ against them. For example the dumb might have talked ill of hid gods while mentally retarded child might have used his/her wisdom to cheat in his/her former world and so he/she is now denied such powers. This explains why soothsayer is normally invited in such cases to explain the sources of the handicap and proffer solutions of all kinds. Usually, the soothsayer announces that the brings an ill luck to the family and should therefore be killed directly or indirectly. Some tribes exile the parental of the handicapped for months while others put the culprit in the chief house to serve as a servant for two years. This superstitions belief system exists alongside with chief house to serve as a servant for two years. This superstitious belief system exists alongside with chrisstain beliefs and practice and it is difficult to state that these beliefs and practices are things of the past. In some areas, handicapped children are thrown

away or starved to death. They are seen as animal or abnormal beings that can turn into animals like snakes or lions. They have taken human forms probably to punish their parents and relationship evil they committed in the past. They must therefore be killed or they will kill other children (Eya 2002) reported that the most handicapped children do not survive due abandonment, lack of care, poor feeding, poor medical attention and general neglect. In some families, mothers, mother in laws and grandmothers, can decide to remove a child by starving to death or when the child is sick, no medical attention is sought for him or her.

Educational and vocationally, the mentally retarded children are seen as useless and worthless with no hope for the future, therefore educating them is regarded as a waste of money, time and energy because they will never be able to support their families and maintain their parents at old age, very often parents do not pay adequate attention nearly enough to these vocationally, those trained and rehabilitated are denied employment under the predictions that they cannot be managed or that they are not profitable (Adeyemo 2014).

Implication for counselling

Counseling as a tool is used to modify the behaviour of individuals, including parents, teachers, and students inclusive. Abuses in all its forms are a daily reality for many Nigerian children and only a fraction ever receive help. The child abuse and neglect has been expanded considerably to include more than just the beaten of the child and the likes. Mounting of programmes aimed at mass education and public enlightenment of the populace on the dangers of child abuse and neglect.

The facts remain that child abuse and neglect in Nigeria is an identified problem, that needs to be solved. Hence, the identify major causes of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria which are poverty, unwanted pregnancy, cultural factors, lack of family planning and so on should be addressed by the relevant stakeholders.

child abuse and neglect is one of the predominant problems that the societies are facing nowadays. Counsellors should embark on enlighten programs to discourage child abuse and neglect. Such enlightenment could inform the relevant stakeholders on the consequent of child abuse and neglect to the society

The school counselor should enlighten parents on the impacts of child abuse and neglect at any forum and opportunity for parent and guardian to pay attention to children and avoid abuse and neglect of the children especially the vulnerable ones.

The counselor should encouraged parents to give birth to numbers of children they can adequately care for, and the government should ensure that the wealth of the Nation are evenly distributed in such a way that the poor would be able to benefit from the nations abundant wealth and children welfares services. above all, the law enforcement agencies should

encouraged to be alive to their duties in punishing wrongdoing relating to child traffickers, child molesters and child abusers.

Encourage family planning breast feeding and good parenting especially in this hard time. Monitoring and gathering of data on the state of children especially in the area of children abuse and neglect to help government put the necessary policy and measures in addressing the welfare of those children abuse and neglect

The counselors should help the children to understand the law that protect them and how they can benefit from it and most importantly to speak out in face of the abuse and neglect.

Recommendations for the eradication of child abuse/neglect.

A problem identified is a problem solved. Hence, since the major cause of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria has been identifies. The only regret is that people do not recognize the argent needs to tackle child abuse and neglect. From all the fact, Nigerian children should as a matter of urgent is protected from all maltreatment in under to ensure their proper growth.

These are put further as recommendation and measures to tackle the issue of child abuse and neglect:

- a) Mounting of programmes aimed at mass education and public enlightenment of the populace on the dangers of child abuse and neglect and eradication of all form of social malaise
- b) Review of the children and young people laws and other laws relating to children to make them more relevant to the needs of children
- c) Organization of conferences, workshop and seminars on the child abuse and neglect especially at the grassroots level.
- d) Monitoring and gathering of data on the state of children especially in the area of children abuse and neglect.
- e) The nation wealth should be evenly distributed in such a way that the poor would be able to benefit from the nations abundant wealth and children welfares services.
- f) The government, the family, the church as well as the advocacy groups should co operate in child welfare matters in the form of exchange of information facilities, training and tracking of duly allocated resourced to children especially the specially needs children.

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