

ASSESSMENT OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE IN BALANGA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse is a major problem that has been living with man and seen by many as one of his day to day activities. The study aimed at assessment of demographic and socioeconomic consequences of child abuse in Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State, Nigeria, and also to identify the factors associated with child abuse among the children. The study is a descriptive survey design using self-administered interviewer questionnaire. Systematic sampling technique was adopted in sampling subjects. Findings showed that the most common associated factor with child abuse with parent/guardian is poverty (59%). The practices of child abuse are majorly concerned with starving the children (56%) and punishing the children (19%). The effects on the child abuse on the child and family could lead the abused children into early marriage (35%) and unwanted pregnancy (30%). The study indicated that child abuse in Balanga LGA is due to poverty/low socio-economic status. The practices of child abuse borders on physical abuse (34.7%) which may include punishing, starving the child amongst others as the most common type of abuse experienced by children in the study area, the effects of child abuse could lead the children into early marriage and/or having unwanted pregnancy. Therefore, social awareness campaign on child abuse and effects should be adopted and effective child abuse laws should be enacted by the government and stiff penalties and sanctions should be melted out to the offenders

Keyword: Child abuse, Children, demographic and socio economic consequences

INTRODUCTION

Every child is seen as a potential leader of his society in the future and as such the child is accorded national and worldwide recognition (Oteh *et. al.*, 2019). Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment, and individuals may abuse or neglect a child by either inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent it. Abuse can also be a lack of

love, care and attention, which can be just as damaging as physical abuse. Child abuse and neglect can have major long-term impacts on all aspects of the person's health, development and wellbeing, and can last into adulthood. The society is also mindful of the survival, happiness, training and wellbeing of the child because the child is expected to be of great concern to all. Yet the child is denied almost all these rights. In relation to this, it is therefore pertinent to investigate why the child is often abused by those whose responsibilities are solely to protect the child (Oteh *et. al.*, 2019). Nigeria observes May 27 of every year as children's day. In 1959, the United Nations declared child's right and stated briefly that; every child has a right to affection, love and understanding, free education, adequate nutrition and medical care, full opportunity for play and recreation, for a name and nationality, special care of the handicapped and vulnerable children should be accorded primacy in times of disaster. Children must be encouraged to learn to be useful members of the society and develop their individual abilities; they should be brought up in the spirit of peace and universal motherhood and made to enjoy those rights regardless of race, colour, sex, religion, nationality and social origin. In a related development, 1979 was declared the International Year of the Child (IYC) (UNICEF, 2013). Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment, and individuals may abuse or neglect a child by either inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent it. Abuse can also be a lack of love, care and attention, which can be just as damaging as physical abuse. Child abuse and neglect can have major long-term impacts on all aspects of the person's health, development and wellbeing, and can last into adulthood. The society is also mindful of the survival, happiness, training and wellbeing of the child because the child is expected to be of great concern to all. Yet the child is denied almost all these rights. In relation to this, it is therefore pertinent to investigate why the child is often abused by those whose responsibilities are solely to protect the child (Oteh *et. al.*, 2019). Child Abuse & Neglect (CAN) is a worldwide social and public health problem, which exerts a multitude of short and long term effects on children (Srivastava, 2021). Nigeria is home to over 19 percent of the Africa's children, making it the country with the largest child population in Africa. It inherently defines the country's role in becoming a safe haven for children in this ever-changing society (WHO, 2021). There is a growing public concern on child abuse in Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State, in Nigeria as a country and all over the world. Children are forced into becoming the bread winners of their families. Essentially, they appear to be contributing more than ever to alleviating household poverty, more relevant to required labour in agriculture and farm work and generally regarded as economic assets because of their potential roles and productive contributions in income generation in rural communities (Alimi *et. al.*, 2020). The aim of this study is to assess Demographic and Socioeconomic Consequences of Child Abuse in Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State by achieving the following objectives; To identify the causes of child abuse in Balanga Local Government Area, Gombe State, to determine the effects of child abuse in Balanga Local Government Area, to develop measures for effective management of child abuse in the study area.

STUDY AREA

Balanga local government area is located in Gombe state which is found in the Northeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the LGA has its headquarters in the town of Tallase. Balanga exists as one among the 11 Local Government Areas in Gombe state, Nigeria that falls under the southern senatorial district of the state. The towns and villages that make up Balanga LGA are Bambam, Balanga, Tallase, Nyuwar, Kulani, Gelengu, Kwarg Bassa, and Bangu. Islam is the commonly practiced religion in Balanga LGA with a number of popular festivals held in the area such as the Dadiya cultural festival and the Balanga Bird festival (Balanga LGA Diary, 2017).

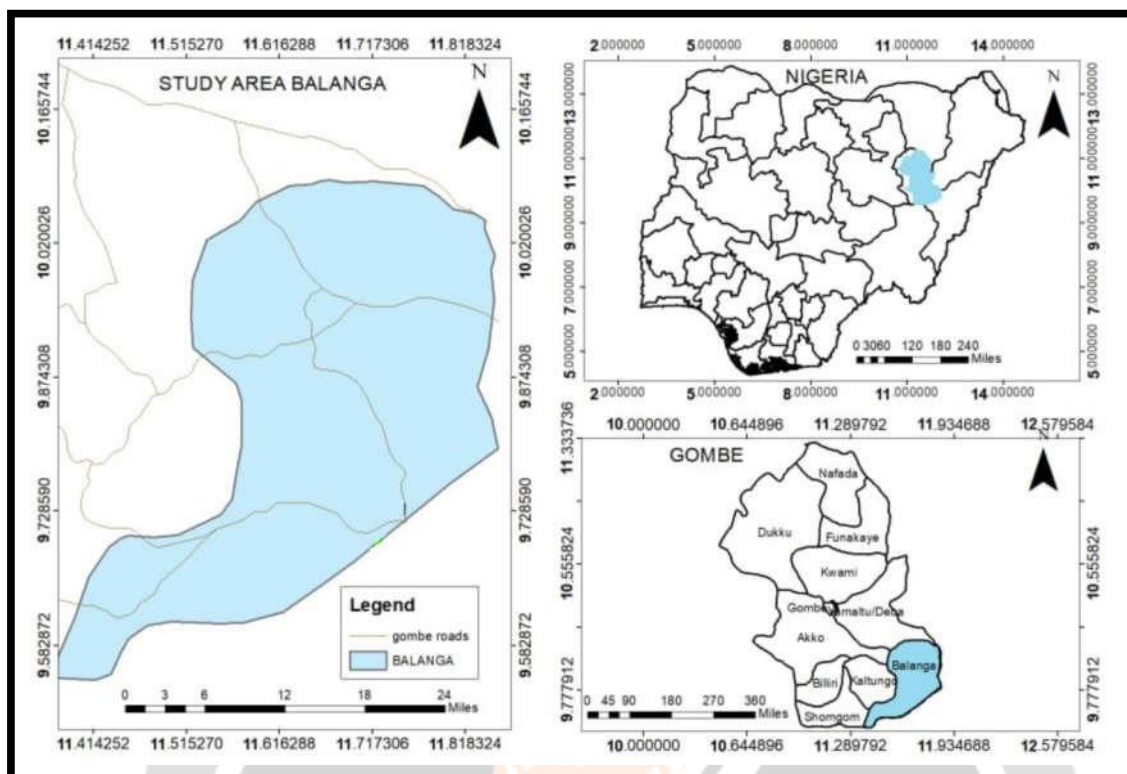


Figure 1: Map of Balanga LGA

Balanga Local Government Area is located at latitude 9°58'N and longitude 11°41'E. Balanga LGA covers a total area of 1,626 square kilometers (Balanga LGA Diary, 2017), the LGA is bounded by Yemaltu-Deba LGA to the North, to the south & east by Adamawa state and then to the west by Shongom, Kaltungo & Akko LGAs. The population of Balanga LGA is estimated at 212,549 at the 2006 census with the vast majority (65%) being members of the Hausa and the Waja tribes with the Hausa and Waja languages spoken extensively in the area (National Population Commission, 2006).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

SEX	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Male	160	30
Female	250	70
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

AGE	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
20-30	63	17.5
31-40	100	28
41-50	153	42.5
51-60	23	6.4
60 above	21	5.6
TOTAL	360	100

The bulk of the respondents were females who formed 70% while the male were the remaining 30%. This therefore shows that, base on the result in the table above, the larger population of the respondents was females

Table 2: Age characteristics

The age distribution of the respondents was collected in the age range of 20-60 years and above. The data has been grouped as shown on the table. The information shows that most respondents were in the age group of 41-50 years with about 42.5%. This was followed by respondents in the age group of 31-40 years with 28%. Age range of 20-30 carry 17.5% while 51-60 years carry 6.4% and the least of all were in the group of 60 years and above which is 5.6% of the total. In conclusion, the population is generally young.

Table 3: Occupational characteristics

OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Civil servant	74	20.6
Housewife	108	30
Businessman	63	17.5
Trader	115	31.9
Others	0	0
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

On the occupational status of the respondents, 74 representing 20.6% are civil servants, 108 representing 30% of the respondents are housewives, 63 representing 17.5% of the respondents are into Businessmen, while 115 respondents representing 31.9% are traders. This implies that majority of the respondents are traders.

Table 4: Educational qualifications

EDUCATION	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Non-formal education	66	18
Primary certificate	125	34.7
Secondary certificate	102	28.3
Tertiary	60	17
Others	7	2
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

On the educational qualifications of the respondents, 125 representing 34.7% of the respondents have primary school certificate, 102 representing 28.3% of the respondents have secondary school certificate, 66 respondents representing 18% are people with non-formal education while 60 representing 17% went to a tertiary institution and 7 of the respondents representing 2% indicated others. This implies that majority of the respondents have little or no knowledge on child abuse in the study area.

Table 5: Marital status

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Single	107	29.7
Married	115	31.9
Divorced	50	13.9
Widowed	88	24.4
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

The marital status of the respondents prove that 115 representing 31.9% are married, 107 responses representing 29.7% are single, 50 respondents representing 13.6% are divorced, while 88 representing 24.4% are widowed. This implies that most of the respondent having the highest responses are the married.

Table 6: Gender of child mostly abused

SEX	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Male	157	45.6
Female	203	54.4
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

The bulk of the respondents were females who formed 54.4% while the male were the remaining 45.6%. This therefore shows that, base on the result in the table above, the larger population of the respondents that are mostly abused are the female gender.

Table 7: Age of child mostly abused

AGE RANGE	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
4 to 5 years	35	9.7
6 to 7 years	48	13.3
8 to 9 years	193	53.6
10 to 11 years	84	23.3
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

Data in Table 7 above shows that 193 respondents representing 53.6% are between the age group of 8 to 9 years and who are the mostly abused age range of children in the study area, 84 representing 23.3% fall under 10 to 11 years, 48 representing 13.3% are under 6 to 7 years while 35 respondents representing 9.7% are for the 4 to 5 years. From this question it can be analyzed that the mostly abused children fall under the ages of 8 to 9 years because at this stage, the child is still developing making them most vulnerable to child abuse.

Table 8: Distribution of relationship of the children with the guardian at the time of the abuse

RELATIONSHIP WITH GUARDIAN	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Parents	4	5.6
Stepparents	146	31
Uncle	88	24.4
Aunty	93	26
Others	39	13

TOTAL	360	100
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Source: Field Study, 2021

The distribution of the relationship of the children with guardian at the time of the abuse showed that 31% of the children were staying with their step parents, 26% were staying with their aunts, 4% were being taken care of, and staying with their parents, while 24.4% of the children were being taken care of by their uncles at the time of the abuse, and 13% of them were with other friends and relatives.

Table 9: Responses on associated factors with child abuse

FACTORS	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Poverty	178	59
Ignorance	97	27
Victims of abuse	40	11
Not related to the child	35	10
Others	10	3
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

Table 9 reveals the associated factors with child abuse. Majority of the respondents (59%) said poverty of the parent/guardian was associated with child abuse, 27% associated it with ignorance, 11% of the respondents asserted that it was associated with victims of child abuse; that is if the person abusing the children was abused before while 3% of the respondents indicated that not related to the child is a factor with child abuse and 3% went for other factors.

Table 10: Type of Child abuse

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Emotional abuse	60	17
Physical abuse	125	34.7
Mental abuse	102	28.3
Psychological abuse	7	2
Sexual abuse	66	18
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

On the most common type of child abuse, 125 representing 34.7% of the respondents identified physical abuse as the most common type of abuse experienced by children in the study area, 102 representing 28.3% of the respondents indicated mental abuse, 66 respondents representing 18% are of the notion that sexual abuse the most common while 60 representing 17% went for emotional abuse as the most form of child abuse and lastly 7 of the respondents representing 2% indicated psychological abuse. This implies that majority of the respondents believe that the most common form of child abuse is the physical abuse in the study area.

Table 11: Responses on the effects of child abuse on the child/family

EFFECTS	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Unwanted pregnancy	107	30
Prostitution	22	6
Sexually Transmitted Infections	46	13
Delinquent behaviour	59	16
Early marriage	126	35
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

Table 11 shows that a greater percentage of the respondents (35%) asserted that the effects of child abuse on the child and the family is early marriage practice (the victims marry early in order to move from the settings of an abuse) 30% of the respondents said, the effects of child abuse leads to unwanted pregnancy for the children, 13% said the effect is sexually transmitted infections, because the victims are often lured into unsafe sex, while 16% of the respondents asserted that it leads to delinquent behaviours for the children, and 6% said it leads the victims to engage in prostitution.

Table 12: Most people who abuse children do not belong to the child's family

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agreed (SA)	107	30
Agreed(A)	126	35
Undecided (UD)	46	13
Disagreed (D)	59	16
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	22	6
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

Data in Table 12 above shows that 107 respondents representing 30% strongly agreed that most people who usually abuse children do not belong to the child's family, 126 representing 35% agreed, 46 representing 13% are undecided, 59 representing 16% strongly disagreed while 59 respondents representing 16% disagreed. From this question it can be analyzed that most people who usually abuse children do not belong to the child's family.

Table 13: Most of the time children are abused when they are alone, at night and outside their homes

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agreed (SA)	127	35
Agreed(A)	108	30
Undecided (UD)	57	16
Disagreed (D)	48	13
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	20	6
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

Data in Table 13 above shows that 127 respondents representing 35% strongly agreed that most children are abused when they are alone at night or outside their homes, 108 representing 30% agreed to this fact, 57 representing 16% are undecided, 20 representing 6% strongly disagreed while 48 respondents representing 13% disagreed. This indicates that most children are abused when they are alone at night or outside their homes.

Table 14: Rate of increase of child abuse in Balanga LGA, Gombe State

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY(F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very rapid	20	8
Rapid	48	12
Steady	125	34
Slow	110	30
Very slow	57	16
TOTAL	360	100

Source: Field Study, 2021

From Table 14 above, it shows that 125 respondents representing 34% said that child abuse in the study area is increasing steadily, 110 representing 30% are of the opinion that the rate of increase of child abuse in Balanga LGA is slow, 57 representing 16% said the increase is very slow, 20 representing 8% indicated that the increase is very rapid while 48 respondents representing 12% said the increase is rapid. This indicates that child abuse in the study area is at a steady rise and needs to be mitigated.

SUMMARY

In summary, from the responses in table 6, the larger population of the respondents that are mostly abused are the female gender (54.4%). Data in Table 7 above shows that mostly abused children fall under the ages of 8 to 9 years (53.6%) because at this stage, the child is still developing making them most vulnerable to child abuse. The distribution of the relationship of the children with guardian at the time of the abuse is shown in Table 8, 31% of the children were staying with their step parents making them to be prone to abuse. Table 9 reveals the associated factors with child abuse. Majority of the respondents (59%) said poverty of the parent/guardian was associated with child abuse, 27% claimed and associated it with ignorance. On the most common type of child abuse (table 10), 125 representing 34.7% of the respondents identified physical abuse which may include punishing, starving the child amongst others as the most common type of abuse experienced by children in the study area, 102 representing 28.3% of the respondents indicated mental abuse.

Table 11 shows that a greater percentage of the respondents (35%) asserted that the effects of child abuse on the child and the family is early marriage practice (the victims marry early in order to move from the settings of an abuse). Data in Table 12 showed that 107 respondents representing 30% strongly agreed that most people who usually abuse children do not belong to the child's family, 126 representing 35% agreed, this means that most people who usually abuse children do not belong to the child's family. Data in Table 13 showed that 127 respondents representing 35% strongly agreed that most children are abused when they are alone at night or outside their homes, 108 representing 30% agreed to this fact, indicating that most children are abused when they are alone at night or outside their homes. From Table 14, it is shown that 125 respondents representing 34% said that child abuse in the study area is increasing steadily.

CONCLUSION

Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. Child abuse is a serious problem around the world. The effects of child abuse are devastating. Children are abused usually in four ways physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect as seen in this study. The outcome of child abuse can result in both short and long term consequences ranging from early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, prostitution, sexually transmitted infections and delinquent behaviour. At the same time, there are primary preventive measures that can be taken to avoid child abuse public awareness, alleviation of poverty, Child Rights Act 2003, sex offender treatment programs, parents are expected to play an important role in determining whether or not a child will be abused, implementation of laws, collaboration and cooperation between government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), good governance, judiciary, and domestic violence against women should be discouraged

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