

ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT AMONG PARENTS IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS OF RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study took an assessment of factors responsible for child abuse and neglect among parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised twelve thousand eight hundred (12,800) respondents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The Taro Yamane model of sample size determination was used to obtain the sample size of 250 parents (110 males, 140 females). A validated 20-item research instrument titled "Assessment of Factors Responsible for Child Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (AFRCANQ)" was used for data collection. The AFRCANQ questionnaire was patterned in line with the four point Lickert rating scale response pattern of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points, High Extent (HE)= 3points, Low Extent LE = 2points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1point. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained with the test retest method, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics (r). Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the research questions, while Z-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The study among others revealed that associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The study concluded that a parent's demeanor or behaviour sends red flags about child abuse. Warning signs include parents consistently belittles or berates the child. It was recommended among others that there should be public enlightenment programmes to combat mass ignorance and public awareness on the right to all forms of child abuse.

Keywords: Child Abuse and Neglect, Causes of Child Abuse, Factors Responsible for Child Abuse.

INTRODUCTION

In the Nigerian context, a child is a person who is younger than the age of 18' or who is not an emancipated minor. For the people working with children, it is very important to recognize child abuse and neglect when they witness it. For instance, if they know or have any reason to believe that a child is being hit or disciplined in a concerning way, the first question they must ask themselves – is this, or might thus be, child abuse (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2018). If the people believe or suspect child abuse or neglect, then a report must be made to child protection agencies for intervention. What constitutes child abuse and neglect vary between social and cultural groups, and

across time (Coghill et al; Wise, 2011). In general, abuse refers (usually deliberate) acts of commission while neglect refers to acts of omission (McCoy & Keen, 2013; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2018).

Wikipedia (2021) posited that child abuse is physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or a caregiver. It may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools, communities the child interacts with. World Health Organization in Wikipedia, 2021 defined child abuse as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship, trust, or power.

Mayo Center for Safe and Healthy Children and Adolescents (2021) perceived child abuse as any intentional harm or mistreatment to a child under 18 years old. Government of Netherlands (2021) asserted that child abuse is not just physical violence directed at a child. It is any form of maltreatment by an adult, which is violent or threatening for the child. Thus, includes neglect. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in Child's Welfare Information Gateway (2021) averred that child abuse and neglect as, at minimum is any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or any act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk or serious harm.

Achema, Emmanuel & Odinigwe (2014) opined that 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. 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. In the light of the aforementioned facts therefore, the researcher averred that child abuse and neglect is the harm experienced by children or young people under the age of 18 years as a result of the actions, inactions or inability of people with a parental responsibility for them. Parental responsibility in relation to a child means all the duties, powers, responsibilities, and authority which, by law, parents have in relation to children.

Historically, it is difficult to indicate specifically when child abuse started. De Mouse (2004) remarked that history of child abuse and neglect is a nightmare from which we have recently begun to awake. It therefore appears that the origin of child abuse and neglect is closely tied with the origin of man's token freedom of the will. Children down the history of human society have been subjected to innumerable shades and forms of abuse and neglect. Child abuse takes many forms, which often occur at the same time. These include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, medical abuse, and neglect (Government of Netherland, 2021; Wikipedia, 2021). Anusiem (2005) revealed that physical abuse is the most frequently reported form of abuse and this is technically defined as willful physical injury inflicted upon the child which can take the form of shaking, kicking, burning, starving the child and any act that is harmful to the child's body. Emotional abuse is injury of psychological self which may be because of parental hostility in form of humiliating. It includes verbal and emotional assaults such as continually belittling or berating a child as well as isolating, ignoring, or rejecting a child. Medical abuse occurs when someone gives false information about illness in a child that requires medical attention, putting the child at risk of injury and unnecessary medical care. Sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child, such as fondling, oral-genital contact, intercourse, exploitation, or exposure of child to pornography (Mayo Center for Safe & Healthy Children and Adolescents, 2021). 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 incidental.

Franey & Geffner (2000) posited that although, there are many types of child abuse, but the most common type is child labour which is one of the problems that occur because of responses to economic problems. Child abuse and neglect is a social and public health problem as well as children's right issue in Rivers State in particular, and Nigeria as a whole. There is generally not a single factor that results in the abuse or neglect of a child; it is usually a combination of various factors. Most societies expect children and young people to do a kind of work and this is particularly the case in some developing countries like Nigeria where children and young people are expected to play a part in family work from an early age, and, where there is a low socio-economic status of a family. The young children are sent out to trade to raise money for the family (Sobey, 2003). Apart from low socio-economic status, Sobey (2003) identified other risk factors to include single parenthood, young mother of less than 18years, lower social classes, lack of mothering, social isolation, poor family support, post-natal depression, and psychiatric illness. Others include unemployment, poor housing, financial problems, unwanted pregnancy or baby of the wrong sex, unrealistic expectation of baby, recent bereavement, and history of child abuse in one of the parents.

No child is ever to be blamed for abuse inflicted on him or her by an adult. There may be no 'child' factors present at all when a child is abused. However, the risk of abuse of a child may be increased if the child has attributes that

make parenting more difficult of has high need. Relevant factors might include being a premature baby, persistently crying, being one of a multiple birth and/or having behavioral or mental health problems (Rosenbaum in Joe Project Store, 2021). Some children may be vulnerable because of emotional difficulties they have that both reflect and exacerbate social isolation. The resulting cognitive and emotional deficits serve as signals of vulnerability and/or interfere with their self-protective skills outside the home. Cognitive and emotional deficits resulting from sustained abuse or neglect at home may increase the risk of a vicious circle of victimization outside the home as well. Thus, experiences such as loss, conflict, deprivation, or turmoil within the home may undermine a child's ability to protect themselves, making them a potential target for bullies or sexual predators (Abram in Joe Project Store 2021).

A child who is being abused may feel guilty, ashamed, or confused. He or she may be afraid to tell anyone about the abuse, especially if the abuser is a parent, other relative or family friend. That is why it is important to watch for red flags. Sometimes a parent's demeanor or behaviour sends red flags about child abuse. According to Mayo Centre for Safe and Healthy Children and Adolescents (2021), warning signs include a parent who: shows little concern for the child; appears unable to recognize physical or emotional distress in the child; blames the child for the problems; consistently belittles or berates the child, and describes the child with negative terms, such as "worthless" or "evil"; expects the child to provide him or her with attention or care and seems jealous of other family members getting attention from the child; uses harsh physical discipline, demands an inappropriate level of physical or academic performance; severely limits the child's contact with others; and offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for a child's injuries or no explanation at all.

Theoklitou et al (2012) opined that child neglect is the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, or well-being may be threatened with harm. According to them, neglect is also a lack of attention from the people surrounding a child, and the non-provision of the relevant and adequate necessities for the child's survival, which would be a lack of attention, love, and nurturing. Some observable signs of child neglect include the frequently absent from school, begs or steals food or money, lacks needed medical attention and dental care, is consistently dirty, or lacks appropriate clothing for the weather (Wikipedia, 2021). The 2010 Child's Maltreatment Report in Wikipedia (2021) found that neglect/neglectful behaviour was the most common form of child maltreatment.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (2018) asserted that neglectful acts are characterized by the absence of a parent or guardian which can lead to physical harm, sexual abuse, or criminal behaviour; by the failure to provide the basic physical necessities, such as a safe and clean home; lack of providing medical care; lack of nurturance, encouragement, and support; by the caregivers lack to provide an education and additional resources to actively participate in the school system; and when the parent or guardian leaves a child alone for a long period of time without a babysitter or caretaker. Children who are victims of neglect have a more difficult time forming and maintaining relationships, such as romantic or friendship, later in life due to the lack of attachment they had in their earlier stages of life according to Australian Institute of Family Studies

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to take assessment of factors responsible for child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study include the following:

1. Examine the extent to which relationship between parents and children act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
2. Determine the extent to which associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factors of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does relationship between parents and children act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
2. To what extent does associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factors of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Hypotheses

Ho₁ There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which relationship between parents and guardians act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Ho₂ There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which child abuse affects the educational achievement of children in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 250 parents was drawn from a population of 12,800 parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The Taro Yamane model of sample size determination was used to obtain the sample size. A validated instrument titled "Assessment of Factors Responsible for Child Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (AFRCANQ)" designed by the researcher and structured on a four point Lickert rating scale response pattern of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points, High Extent (HE)= 3points, Low Extent LE = 2points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1point was used to collect data for the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained with the test-retest method, using The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics to answer the research questions, while Z-test statistics was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Decisions taken were based on the 4points response pattern of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). Values from 3.50 – 4.00 were regarded as Very High Extent, 2.50 – 3.49 were regarded as High Extent, 1.50 – 2.49 were regarded as Low Extent, and 0.50 – 1.49 were regarded as Very Low Extent. A null hypothesis is rejected if the calculated z-value is more than the critical z-value of 1.96 and accepted if the calculated z-value is less than the critical z-value of 1.96.

Results

The results obtained in this study after data analysis were presented and analyzed below.

Research Question 1: To what extent does the relationship between parents and children act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Participants on the Extent the Relationship of Parents and children Act as a Factor of Child Abuse and Neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. (N = 250)

S/N	Items	Male N = 110			Female N= 140		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Parents saying degrading things to children.	3.46	0.75	High Extent	3.31	0.87	High Extent
2.	Parents being there for children as they grow up.	2.24	0.90	Low Extent	2.36	0.89	Low Extent
3.	Child having good relationship with their parents.	2.18	0.90	Low Extent	2.33	0.95	Low Extent
4.	Parents sexually abusing children.	3.39	0.80	High Extent	3.30	0.88	High Extent
5.	Parents emotionally abusing their children.	3.39	0.94	High Extent	3.28	0.94	High Extent
6.	Parents physically abusing their children.	3.18	0.92	High Extent	3.30	0.96	High Extent
7.	Parents giving false information bout illness to avert medical care.	3.29	0.86	High Extent	3.19	0.90	High Extent
8.	Parents exposing children to	3.28	0.90	High Extent	3.18	0.90	High Extent

pornography.

9.	Parents expecting children to provide them with attention and care.	3.28	0.90	High Extent	3.20	0.86	High Extent
10.	Parents jealous of other members getting attention from their children attention.	3.30	0.94	High Extent	3.22	0.91	High Extent
Grand Mean/SD		3.10	0.88	High Extent	3.07	0.91	High extent

Source: Field Work (2022)

Data on Table 1 shows that Items 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 with mean scores of 3.46, 3.39, 3.39, 3.18, 3.29, 3.32, 3.38, 3.30 and standard deviation values of 0.75, 0.80, 0.94, 0.92, 0.86, 0.92, 0.90, 0.94 for male participants; and 3.31, 3.30, 3.28, 3.30, 3.19, 3.18, 3.20, 3.22 and standard deviation scores of 0.87, 0.88, 0.94, 0.96, 0.90, 0.90, 0.86, 0.91 for female participants respectively fell within the range of high extent. Items 2, and 3 with mean scores of 2.24, 2.18 and standard deviation scores of 0.90, 0.90 for male participants; and mean scores of 2.36, 2.33 and standard deviation scores of 0.89, 0.95 for female participants respectively fell within the range of low extent. Therefore, with a grand mean of 3.10 for male participants and 3.07 for female participants, it was accepted that the relationship between parents and children to a high extent act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent do associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on extent associated family factors (poverty or ignorance) act as factor of child abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State? (N = 250)

S/N	Items	Male N = 110			Female N= 140		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	
11.	Child's parents separating And left the child in the care of a single parent.	3.36	0.88	High Extent	3.13	1.02	High Extent
12.	Child frequent absent from school.	3.27	0.96	High Extent	3.23	1.02	High Extent
13.	Child begging or stealing food or money.	3.35	0.88	High Extent	3.18	0.99	Low Extent
14.	Child lacking medical or dental care.	3.30	0.97	High Extent	3.16	0.89	High Extent
15.	Child remains consistently dirty.	3.32	0.98	High Extent	3.24	0.90	High Extent
16.	Child lacking appropriate clothing For the weather.	3.33	0.94	High Extent	3.31	0.92	High Extent
17.	Parent leaving child alone for a long period of time without a caretaker.	3.30	0.90	High Extent	3.12	0.87	High Extent

A member of the family committed suicide.

18.	Child's physical and emotional care neglected by the parent or guardian.	2.11	0.93	Low Extent	2.01	0.85	Low Extent
19.	The family financial situation was difficult.	3.31	0.95	High Extent	3.32	0.96	High extent
20.		3.30	0.90	High Extent	3.27	0.88	High Extent
	Grand mean	3.20	0.93	High Extent	3.10	0.88	High Extent

Source: Field Work (2022)

Data on Table 2 shows that Items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19 and 20 with mean values of 3.36, 3.27, 3.35, 3.30, 3.32, 3.33, 3.30, 3.31, 3.30 and standard deviation values of 0.88, 0.96, 0.88, 0.97, 0.98, 0.94, 0.90, 0.95, 0.90 for male participants; and mean values of 3.13, 3.23, 3.18, 3.16, 3.24, 3.31, 3.12, 3.32, 3.27 and standard deviation values of 1.02, 1.02, 0.99, 0.89, 0.90, 0.92, 0.87, 0.96, 0.88 for female participants respectively fell within the range of high extent. Items 8 with mean value of 2.11 and standard deviation value of 0.93 for male participants; and mean scores of 2.01 and standard deviation value of 0.85 for female participants respectively fell within the range of low extent. Therefore, with a grand mean of 3.20 for male participants and 3.10 for female participants, it was accepted by parents that associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) to a high extent act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent the relationship of parents and children act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Table 3: Z-test Analysis of the Difference between the mean scores of male and female participants on the extent associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as a factor of child abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-tab	Ls	Decision
Male	110	3.10	0.88					Ho ₁
				248	0.26	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Female	140	3.07	0.91					

Source: Field Work (2022)

Table 3 above shows the summary of mean, standard deviation, and z-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent the relationship between parents and children acts as a factor of child abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 0.26 while the critical z-value stood at ± 1.96 , using 248 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value was less than the critical z-value, the researcher therefore, accepted the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which the relationship between parents and children acts as factors of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factors of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-test Analysis of the Difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-tab	Ls	Decision
Male	110	3.20	0.93	248	0.84	1.96	0.05	Ho ₂ Accepted
Female	140	3.10	0.93					

Source: Field Work (2022)

Table 4 above shows the summary of mean, standard deviation, and z-test of difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 0.84 while the critical z-value stood at ± 1.96 , using 248 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value was less than the critical z-value, the researcher therefore, accepted the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Summary of Major Findings

The following were major findings of the study:

1. The relationship between parents and children acts as a factor of child abuse to a high extent in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
2. Associated family factor (poverty or ignorance) acts as a factor of child abuse to a high extent in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
3. The study found that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which relationship between parents and children act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
4. The study found that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on the extent to which Associated family factor (poverty or ignorance) acts as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings of this study were done under the following sub-heads.

Relationship Between Parents and Children as a Factor of Child Abuse and Neglect

On the extent to which the relationship between parents and children act as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State, this study found the following as factors: parents saying degrading things to children, parents sexually abusing their children, parents emotionally abusing their children, parents physically abusing their children, parents giving false information about illness in children that require medical attention, parents exposing children to pornography, parents expecting children to provide them with attention and care, and parents jealous of other family members getting attention from their children. These findings are in line with the assertion of World Health Organization (WHO) in Wikipedia (2021) that child abuse and neglect are all forms of physical and/or emotionally treated, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.

Results from Table 3 of this study produced 0.26 z-test analysis of difference in the mean responses of male and female participants on extent to which relationship between parents and children acts as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. This implied that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of parents on the extent to which their relationship acts as a factor of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Associated Family Factors (Poverty, Ignorance) Act as Factors of Child Abuse and neglect

On the extent to which associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factors of child abuse and neglect, the findings of this study revealed the following: child's parents separating and left in the care of a single parent, child frequently absent from school, child begging or stealing food or money, child lacking medical care or dental care, child remains consistently dirty, child lack appropriate clothing for the weather, parent leaving child alone for a long period of time without caretaker, child's physical and emotional care neglected by the parent or guardian, and the family financial situation was different.

The above finding is in agreement with the assertion of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2018) that neglectful acts are characterized by the absence of a parent or guardian which can lead to physical necessities, such as a safe and clean home, by the lack of providing medical care, by the lack of nurturance, encouragement, and support, by the caregivers lack to provide an education and additional resources to actively participate in the school system, and when the parent or guardian leaves a child alone for a long period of time without a babysitting or caretaker.

Results from Table 4 of this study produced 0.84 z-test analysis of difference in mean responses of male and female participants on extent to which associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factors of child abuse and neglect. This implied that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of parents on the extent associated family factors (poverty, ignorance) act as factors of child abuse and neglect in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Conclusion

No child is ever to be blamed for abuse inflicted on him or her by an adult. There may be no child factors present at all when a child is abused. However, the risk of abuse of a child may be increased if the child has attributes that make parenting more difficult. A child who is being abused may feel guilty, ashamed, or confused. He or she may be afraid to tell anyone about the abuse, especially if the abuser is a parent. That is why it is important to watch for red flags. A parent's demeanor or behaviours sends red flags about child abuse. Warning signs include parents showing little or no concern for the child, consistently belittles or berates the child, describes the child with negative terms, and expects the child to provide him or her with attention and care.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Government should ensure improvement in living standard of the people so that they would not continue using children as hawkers and cheap labourers.
2. Education should really be free and made compulsory for children in all states of the federation to reduce incidence of child abuse and neglect.
3. The National and all states' House of Assembly should deem it fit to pass the Child Rights Act to guide against child abuse and neglect.
4. The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should invigorate their efforts on massive campaign against child abuse and neglect.
5. There should be public enlightenment programmes to combat mass ignorance and public awareness on the right to freedom from all forms of child abuse

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