

## **Child Abuse: A Significant Contemporary Community Problem**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The definition of child abuses and neglect is fairly broad. Individuals, ethnic groups, religious institutions, professional entities, etc. have different perspectives on it as it happens. Although there are many other types of child abuse and neglect, including physical violence, verbal abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, child labor, child abandonment, and child sexual abuse, they have all been covered in this essay. Additionally, the causes of child abuse and child neglect in our culture were discussed. The effects of seeing child abuse and neglect can have a profound impact on a person's life. It affects a person's physical health and well-being, intellectual and cognitive growth, as well as their emotional, psychological, and behavioral aspects of life. In this study, all of these were critically examined.*

**KEYWORDS:** child, abuse, community, problem

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### **INTRODUCTION**

A child's primary caretaker or parent should accept, value, and cherish every aspect of the child as an individual, including the child's feelings, thoughts, and viewpoints, as well as the child's vulnerability, independence, and rapid development as a human being. Child maltreatment occurs when any of these areas of a child's emotional and social growth are neglected or not given adequate attention (Fayaz, 2019). Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, anybody under the age of 18 is considered a child (UNCRC). An internationally recognised legal organisation has offered this description of a child. Abuse is defined as the use of power or control over another person for the purpose of injury or intimidation. It is an abuse of authority when someone takes advantage of another person's trust in them or their position of influence over them.

18

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Mistreatment of any kind is unacceptable, regardless of whether it is mental, monetary, sexual, or physical. Abuse is defined as the abusive use of power and influence over another person for the purpose of controlling their behaviour, thoughts, or emotions.

Child abuse occurs on a massive scale around the world. Intentional or reckless endangerment of a kid by another person, whether an adult or another child, constitutes child abuse. Physical, psychological, and sexual maltreatment are all forms of child abuse. One form of passive child abuse that can be as damaging as physical abuse is neglect (Fayaz, 2019).

### **Who is a Child?**

A youngster growing up in Nigeria can expect any number of outcomes due to the country's lack of a coherent cultural structure. It is not uncommon for a boy to be considered an adult until when he has been initiated into an age-based society or has reached a level of maturity where he can make substantial financial contributions to the community. In some societies, a child's childhood ends at the onset of puberty. In the United States, a boy must reach the age of fourteen (14) before puberty begins, while a girl must reach the age of twelve (12) before the onset of menstruation in order to be considered a legal adult. However, it is not known if this typical age of puberty onset is also true in Nigeria. Legally, there is no set age that children must be to begin puberty under the old rules. According to Sagay (1999), Yoruba women hit puberty at the age of fourteen (14), whereas men don't do so until they're seventeen (17). Girls can legally begin working in Itsekiri households at the age of sixteen (16), while boys can begin working at the age of twenty (20). According to section 2 of the Children and Young Person Law of Lagos State (1973), which governs the care of children and the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders, a kid is an individual younger than fourteen (14). An individual under the age of fifteen (15) is considered a kid under the Nigeria Labour Act (1974), whereas under the National Child Welfare Policy (1989), this age range applies to everyone under the age of twelve (12). The legal definition of a child in Nigeria is settled once and for all in Section 274 of the Child's Rights Act (2003), which states that a child is someone who has not reached the age of eighteen. Nigeria is a signatory to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, both of which these policies reflect.

It's safe to argue that a kid's upbringing can have a big effect on how they develop as adults. If the law isn't enforced against those who abuse children, the state can do little to stop it. Law in Nigeria has recently shifted to better safeguard citizens' rights and further the country's commitment to equality and justice. Children's inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are protected by law, and the law also creates protections to make sure they can grow and develop to their full potential (Chapter II and IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). The term "child abuse" encompasses any instance in which one individual — be it an adult or another youngster — causes harm to another child. Physical, sexual, and emotional neglect are all possible results of a lack of affection, care, and attention. Child maltreatment, as defined by the World Health Organization (2002, abbreviated WHO), includes "any form of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or neglectful action, or commercial or other mistreatment resulting in definite or possible harm to the child's health, continued existence,

growth, or self-esteem in the context of an accountable, trusting, or authoritative relationship." Physical harm, sexual abuse, or emotional suffering are all examples of child abuse, which is defined as the mistreatment or neglect of a child or children by an adult, generally a parent, guardian, or carer. Any time a parent or carer does something, or fails to do something, that puts a child in danger, that is abuse.

It could happen in a child's local environment (at home), in a child's educational setting, or in the community at large (Whitaker, 2021). Goldman et al. (2003) define child abuse to include not only physical but also emotional and sexual maltreatment of a kid. He continued by saying that when most people hear the word "abuse," they immediately picture physical pain. Physical violence accounts for around a quarter of abuse instances. Abuse is defined as physical harm done to a child with cruel or malicious intent; however, the law recognises that sometimes a parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the kid, and that the injury may have been the result of physical punishment. If a child is physically harmed in any way, such as by punishment, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or any other physical act, it is being abused. The lives of innocent people can be cut cruelly short in countless ways, including by burns, suffocation, poisoning, and other forms of maltreatment. Multiple injuries can occur in children who are physically abused over the course of their childhood, and many of these injuries may go untreated if the abuse is hidden. In Goldman's view, any diligent observer of a youngster will be able to spot the telltale indications of abuse. Goldman et al (2003) research lends credence to this idea.

### **Forms of Child Abuse**

As a child is abused, their feelings are often the first thing to suffer. Feelings of insecurity, uncare, and isolation are more likely to develop in a youngster who has been subjected to physical punishment, verbal abuse, or long periods of quiet. Four of the most common forms of child maltreatment include physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. One form of child abuse is often a harbinger of more forms of abuse (Hill, 2003).

Child abandonment: Sexual abuse of children is the most widely reported and fatal form of child maltreatment. Neglect, as used here, is the failure to provide for a child's physiological and psychological requirements. All three types of neglect—physical, emotional, and educational—are harmful to children (Adekola, Oyeniya & Gbenga-Epebinu, 2022).

The second most common form of child abuse is physical abuse, which includes any intentional or reckless harm to a kid's body. If a child is physically harmed in any way, such as by punishment, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or any other physical act, the child has been physically abused. Some form of physical harm may be inflicted on a kid during discipline, despite the best efforts of the carer.

Emotional abuse is defined as acts or omissions by parents or other carers that have caused or could cause serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional, or mental issues in children (2006) by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. An act or omission on the part of a caretaker can be deemed emotional abuse if it has a detrimental impact on a child's emotional

health, social development, or feeling of self-worth. In spite of being the most prevalent, harsh, and damaging kind of abuse, it receives surprisingly little attention. It can be difficult to intervene if emotional abuse is difficult to prove. There is a high likelihood of uncovering emotional abuse when other forms of abuse are uncovered. Negative comments such as "no good," "worthless," "bad," or "a mistake," as well as frequent yelling, frightening, or maltreatment, ignoring a child as a reprimand, giving them the silent treatment, limiting physical contact with a child—no hugs, kisses, or other signs of affection, and exposing a child to violence against others are all examples of emotional abuse.

Abuse of children in the form of child labour is widespread in today's culture. In traditional African society, as in other countries with low levels of economic development, children were often utilised as farm labour. The emergence of industry and cities, however, have rendered this practise obsolete and inappropriate; we now refer to it as child labour (Ebigbo, 1989). Human trafficking is an exceptionally dangerous form of child labour. Kidnapping occurs when a parent or guardian transfers legal custody of a minor to another person, either for free or with the goal to profit from the child's labour or body of work.

It is abusive to force a child to work in a street sale. As a result of the abuse, more street vendors end up selling goods illegally, perpetuating the cycle. Defending the honour of women: Child sexual abuse (CSA) is any form of sexual interaction between an adult or adolescent and a child, whether it is in a position of trust or power over the child (Medline Plus, 2008; Gbenga-Epebinu, 2020). The following is a definition of child sexual abuse (CSA): Abuse refers to any instance in which a kid is subjected to physical or sexual contact by an older or more knowledgeable child or adult (stranger, sibling, parent, or carer) with the purpose of satisfying the demands of the older or more knowledgeable child or adult. These kinds of interactions and contacts are carried out against the child by the employment of coercion, fraud, bribery, pressure, or demands (UNICEF, 2001; Miller et al. 2007). What we call "sexual abuse" might refer to everything from an unwanted touch to rape, from prostitution to the production of pornographic media. It is sexually objectionable to subject a kid to sexual circumstances or content, regardless of whether or not physical contact is involved.

Abuse or neglect of a physical kind is common in cases of neglect. As a form of abuse, physical neglect deprives a kid of the necessities of life, including food, clothing, supervision, and a stable living environment. Since they are so important to our health, not having them can cause problems like slow growth, memory loss, and even mental illness. If a parent consumes all the food in the house without sharing any with the children, this could be considered physical neglect.

Doing your best to avoid getting sick: When a child does not get the medical attention they need, despite having access to it, this is considered medical neglect. This person is in a position to provide for the health care needs of their family members, but has made a deliberate decision not to do so. The law may distinguish between a lack of medical care owing to financial difficulties and a lack of medical care due to a lack of motivation, thus this is very important information to have. If a family doesn't go to the doctor because they can't afford it or don't have access to care,

they will be held to a different standard than one whose child breaks an arm and the parents refuse to take him because it's an inconvenience. Mental health specialists and Child Protection services may not view these wait times as neglect, but rather as the result of a lack of resources. It is unacceptable to wait many months to treat a problem that is currently an issue, especially if the delay in care may have negative consequences.

**Neglecting Schooling:** Educational neglect occurs when a parent or carer of a school-aged child does not provide the youngster with educational learning resources. When a youngster is not enrolled in school, this is an example of educational neglect. A child's emotional health can be neglected in a variety of ways, such as by demonstrating violent or abusive behaviour in front of them (domestic violence), denying them access to mental health treatments, not showing compassion, rejecting them, isolating them, or exploiting them. Lack of emotional development can lead to undesirable results in areas such as social competence, substance misuse, low self-esteem, and risky decision making. If a mother consistently demeans her son and refuses to show him any type of affection or praise, she may be neglecting his emotional needs. Some of the most common risk factors for child abuse are the perpetrator's age (Children's Bureau, 2011), the victim's history of abuse, the perpetrator's own history of substance abuse, mental health issues, financial hardships, and isolation, and the perpetrator's own lack of understanding of child development.

Fetitti (1998) lists racial abuse, failure to enrol a kid in school, begging, hawking, excessive work without compensation, physical punishment that results in pain, and corporal punishment as further forms of child abuse.

### **Child Abuse in Nigerian Context**

Child abuse is a problem, yet nobody seems to care that much in Nigeria. This is likely due to efforts being directed at solving the more widespread problems of childhood, such as hunger and illness. A second explanation is that people in all African societies often believe that their extended families would always love, care for, and protect their offspring. However, certain traditional approaches to parenting have poor outcomes for some children, such as the intentional abandoning of severely disabled children or their twins or triplets in some rural communities. Because of the tremendous social and political shifts that have taken place in recent decades, new forms of child abuse have been uncovered, most of them concentrated in metropolitan settings. These may be viewed as the end result of dysfunctional interactions among a child, his or her parents or guardians, and the larger community. Some examples are the mistreatment of children in urban nuclear families by child minders and the abandoning of healthy infants by unwed or extremely poor mothers in urban centres. Other examples are the rise of child labour and the exploitation of children from rural areas in urban elite families.

### **Management of child abuse**

Those children who have been abused need attention from Medical and mental health professionals.

Responsibility of Pediatrician and Hospital management: At the first point of contact, the emergency department has a crucial role in the detection and management of the abused child. In the history taking, the following points must be noted:

- The timescale between injury and attendance
- The compatibility and consistency between injury and history given
- The parent–child, parent–staff and child–staff interactions
- Relevant previous attendances and those of siblings
- Child protections register list check.

It is essential to make an accurate and complete record of all injuries sustained throughout the assessment. Whenever possible, record the query and the response to an open-ended question, and document the conversation verbatim if the subject admits to abuse. The words, reactions, behaviour, and relationship of the child's parents or primary carers (as well as the child's own responses) should all be recorded. When evaluating these data, it is essential to keep in mind the very stressful nature of being investigated for child abuse. Consultation with the senior physician should be made immediately. The examination needs to be prepared for, performed, and concluded with great care by a competent professional. The evaluation needs to be all-encompassing, factoring in sexual abuse and emotional neglect in addition to physical abuse. If there are any doubts, a senior clinician's opinion should be sought out, and if those doubts remain, the kid should be admitted for observation by a paediatrician.

For the child's own safety and well-being, it is essential that they have a sense of belonging in the family. If a child is being abused at home, the steps outlined below should be taken. When a doctor or other medical professional determines that a kid's safety is compromised at home, it is best to find another environment where the child will be protected. It's possible that hospitals can provide immediate environment. One of the most important ways to safeguard a child is through the legal system.

### **Consequences of Child Abuse**

Child abuse and neglect can have serious repercussions that can last for a very long time. The consequences may have an impact on a person's development in a number of ways and can manifest in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. From modest physical injuries, low self-esteem, attention difficulties, and bad peer relationships to serious brain damage, severely violent behavior, and death, these repercussions range in severity (Egeland, 1993).

1. Health and physical effects: These can include the immediate effects of bruises, burns, lacerations, broken bones, blows to the head or body, violent shaking, scalding with hot water, or asphyxiation, as well as from neglect (such as inadequate nutrition, a lack of adequate motor stimulation, withholding medical treatments, hemorrhages, and permanent disabilities, among other things).

2. Another health issue: Both direct and indirect effects of abuse can have a negative impact on a person's health. For instance, those who have experienced sexual assault may contract sexually transmitted illnesses including syphilis and the human immunodeficiency virus. According to

studies, women who had suffered sexual abuse were more likely to suffer from long-term health issues like obesity, gastrointestinal issues, headaches, persistent pelvic discomfort, and other gynecologic issues.

3. Intellectual and cognitive development: The results of current studies on the effects of abuse on cognitive development, language skills, and problem-solving ability vary. According to some research, children who have experienced abuse perform less intellectually and cognitively than children who have not, while other studies find no changes. Maltreatment increases the chance of lower academic attainment and unsatisfactory school performance, according to research.

4. Emotional, psychosocial, and behavioral repercussions: Any form of abuse can have an impact on a child's emotional and psychological health and result in behavioral issues. These effects could manifest right away or years after the wrongdoing.

5. Emotional and psychological effects include low self-esteem, anxiety and despair, PTSD, attachment issues, eating disorders, poor peer relationships, and self-destructive behavior (such as suicide attempts).

6. Violence, drug abuse, and other issues: Behaviours People who experienced child abuse are more prone than non-victims to participate in violent behavior as an adult, juvenile delinquency, and adult crime.

7. Resilience: Not every youngster that is mistreated will suffer from the above-mentioned harmful effects. Personal qualities like optimism, strong self-esteem, intelligence, or a sense of hopefulness are examples of "protective variables" that seem to mediate or function as a "buffer" against the impacts of the bad events. The discovery that the availability of support from parents, relatives, professionals, and others can have a significant impact on the severity of negative consequences suffered by victims has crucial implications for prevention and early intervention.

### **Prevention as a Strategy**

Preventative measures are those taken in advance of a problem occurring in order to mitigate its effects. Child abuse and neglect prevention involves many different types of services, such as public awareness campaigns, parent education programmes, and home visits, aimed at everyone from the general public to those who have harmed or neglected a child. Neighborhood groups, charities, institutions, and educational citizens may all pitch in to provide such aid. Preventive actions are taken so that problems can be avoided, health can be preserved, and progress can be made toward one's goals in life. The Children's Bureau (2011) notes that family support services are an integral part of the effort to reduce the prevalence of child abuse since they help to fortify families, hone parents' abilities to care for their children, and ensure a safe and nurturing home environment. Child abuse and neglect prevention programmes may target a single risk factor or a combination of them. Protection for children and families is a major focus of many prevention efforts; this includes teaching children how to protect themselves from sexual abuse, fostering constructive relationships between children and their parents, and equipping guardians with the resources they need to bring up happy, healthy children.

### **Recommendations**

The subject of child abuse should be brought to the attention of parents. Some parents confuse discipline with domestic abuse. More people in Nigeria need to know what to do if they suspect

child abuse is happening. Parents should know what constitutes child abuse and recognise the signs of abuse. Abuse is sometimes confused with punishment, but the two are not the same thing. Parents must be aware of the thresholds at which discipline becomes abuse and vice versa. In addition, not all parents know how to raise their children properly. Some parents in Nigeria clearly need guidance. The research recommends that governments at all levels, NGOs, and faith-based organisations all offer training and education to the general population to help with this issue. There needs to be some kind of orientation programme set up in schools to help youngsters learn to recognise and avoid harmful circumstances. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognise any instances of possible child abuse and report them immediately to the police or other relevant law enforcement body. Finally, the clergy of our various faiths should counsel their institutions and preach against all forms of child abuse and neglect.

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