Factors Responsible For Child Maltreatment among Students of Secondary Schools in Niger State-Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is on the factors responsible for child maltreatment among students of secondary schools in Niger State. Survey, Focus Group Discussions and In-depth Interviews were adopted as instruments of data collection. The study was conducted on 240 students in a combination of five boarding and three day schools. In- depth interviews were conducted with the principals of the schools and chairperson of African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), Niger State Chapter. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with some teachers in six schools. Survey data were analyzed using frequencies, Chi- square (X^2), and gamma. Descriptive data were transcribed and inter-woven into the survey data. The findings revealed that a higher proportion of male students (53%) were severely maltreated than girls (51%). It was found that more students (63%) who perceived their parents poor suffered severe maltreatment than those (41%) who perceived their parents as rich. The parents of maltreated children are mostly poor (P<0.05). It is therefore recommended that the situation where children are enrolled as day students by parents /guardians to hawk should be discouraged. During the acquisition of skills by the children, they should not be subjected to starvation and severe beatings. Parents should enroll their children in boarding schools to prevent their engagement in economic activities when they are on session. Parents should provide basic necessities of life to their children/ wards unconditionally and without forcing them to earn income for the family.

Keywords: Child Maltreatment, Parent Economic Background, Parents Highest Educational Qualification and Economic Activities.

Introduction

Child maltreatment is synonymous with child abuse and neglect. It is any form of physical, psychological, social, emotional and sexual maltreatment of a child whereby the survival, safety, self esteem, growth, and development of the child are endangered (Alokan and Bimbola, 2010, P. 73). It is a social conduct injurious to the child in the process of interacting with parents and adults in the family.

There is no single known cause of child maltreatment. Nor is there any single description that captures all families in which children are victims of abuse and neglect. Child maltreatment occurs across socio- economic, religious, cultural, racial and ethnic groups. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013a) identifies common factors associated with increased risk of child maltreatment as parents or caregiver factors, child factors, community and environmental and family factors. These factors shall be discussed briefly:

Parents or Caregiver Factors

Some personality characteristics frequently associated with these are physically abusive or neglectful include low self- esteem, depression, anxiety and anti social behaviour. The behavioural experiences and emotional difficulties of some maltreating parents predispose them to vent their angers on children, thereby resulting to child maltreatment.

Environmental Factors

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013b), environmental factors include poverty and unemployment, social isolation, and community characteristics. The emphasis is that when poverty is interacting with risk factors such as depression, substance abuse, and social isolation increases the likelihood of maltreatment among parents.

Child Factors

Children are not responsible for being victims of maltreatment. Certain factors, however, can make some children more vulnerable to maltreating behaviour. The child's age and development – physical, mental, emotional, and social may increase the child's vulnerability to maltreatment, depending on the interactions of these characteristics with the parental factors.

Family Factors

Specific life situations of some families such as marital conflict, domestic violence, single parenthood, unemployment, financial stresses and social isolation may increase the likelihood of maltreatment. For example, children living with single parents may be at higher risk of experiencing physical and sexual abuse and neglect than children living with two biological parents (Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013c).

Reviewing the work of Ale (1988), Kolo (2008a), notes that poverty is the most important factor responsible for child maltreatment in Nigeria. According to him, "poor economic situation in the country has made it difficult for low income earners to provide basic needs such as education, shelter and healthcare for their children (P.13). In discussing the factors responsible for child maltreatment in Nigeria, Eldefunso (1978) cited by Kolo (2008b), observes that urbanization encourages child abuse and neglect in the society. According to him:

Continued growth of urban centres is perhaps one of the most important factors fostering abuse and neglect, because community concern for neglected children is less likely to be expressed on the neighbourhood level in our growing urban areas. This in itself makes maltreatment a more likely occurrence (Pp. 13-14).

Okoro (2001), reports that, parents do not consider hawking as a form of child abuse, but as an act of behavioural training in business activities (P.3). A careful look at most of the factors discussed reveals that they are associated with the general socio- economic problems in the country, such as poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment of parents and cultural practices of the people. Hence, when a society is in trouble, the family is the first victim and the child suffers most. For instance, when a breadwinner is out of job, it affects the mood of the entire household. It leads to anger and desperation which could be displaced in forms of aggression on the children (Adidu, 2005, P.60).

General Objectives

The objective of this study is to determine the factors responsible for child maltreatment among students of secondary schools in Niger State.

Research Questions

The following questions are asked to guide the discussion of the paper.

1. What is child maltreatment?
2. What are the factors responsible for child maltreatment in Niger State?
3. Identify ways of minimizing child abuse and neglect of children in Niger State.

Methodology

Techniques of Data Collection

Techniques of data collection adopted include Survey, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs). Two hundred and forty questionnaires were administered to the purposively sampled students by the researcher. Students socio- demographic data, socio- economic attributes of parents and severity of maltreatment suffered were collected. Six (6) FGD sessions were conducted. Four (4) for male teachers and two (2) for female teachers in the studied schools. Each group was made up of eight participants. Four Area Social Welfare officers and the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect Chairperson, Niger State branch were interviewed.

In- depth Interview schedule (IDI) was employed for discussing with the selected persons. Issues of inquiry among others include prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the state, factors responsible for child maltreatment and ways of minimizing child abuse and neglect in Niger State.

Selection of Schools and Students for the Study

Niger State was categorized into four Educational Areas namely Bida (A), Minna (B), Suleja (C) and Kontagora (D). Two schools were purposively selected in each Educational Area. In areas A- Bida, B- Minna and D- Kontagora area, one rural day and one urban boarding school were selected. This was to reflect rural- urban spread of schools in each area. However, in Suleja area, one urban boarding and one rural boarding school were chosen. This is because Government Science College Izom is the only science secondary school in the area.

Out of the eight selected schools in Table 1, six of them have three or more streams of SSII, while two of them have only two streams. On account of this, two streams were purposively selected in each school according to their designation (SSII A and SSIIB). This is done across all schools for uniformity. Two hundred and forty (240) SSII students from eight (8) schools were included in the study. The schools selected in the Educational Area are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Educational Areas / Schools, Types and Location of Schools.

Educational Areas	Schools Selected		Urban / Rural	Day- Boarding Status
Bida Area 'A'	(a)	GSS, Bida	Urban	Boarding
	(b)	CCTV, Vunchi	Rural	Day
Minna Area 'B'	(a)	GGSS, Minna	Urban	Boarding
	(b)	GDSS Maikunkele	Rural	Day
Suleja Area 'C'	(a)	GSS, Suleja	Urban	Boarding
	(b)	GSC, Izom	Rural	Day
Kontagora Area 'D'	(a)	GGSS, Kontagora	Urban	Boarding
	(b)	GDSS, Tegina	Rural	Day

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

Selection of Students in Classes

In order to identify maltreated children in each of the selected classes, 480 preliminary questionnaires were distributed to all the SSII students in eight (8) schools. To achieve this, 30 questionnaires were distributed among 30 students each in two SSII classes in each school to determine the maltreatment status of the children. Questionnaires contain forms of maltreatment to which they were required to indicate the degree or frequency to which they underwent such treatments as applicable.

The responses of each student on the questionnaires were summed up as index of maltreatment. Fifteen students with the highest index of maltreatment were considered maltreated, while those of them with low index were considered non- maltreated. Fifteen (15) most maltreated and fifteen (15) least maltreated students were selected from each school for the final stage of the study.

Techniques of Data Analysis

The quantitative data (survey) was cleaned up, coded and processed using the Statistics Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS). Percentages, Chi- square (X^2), and Gamma were used to measure significance and strengths of relationships between variables. In the descriptive analysis, data generated through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were transcribed and are inter- woven into the survey data.

Factors Responsible for Maltreatment

Predisposing factors associated with child maltreatment in this study include among others: sex of the child, economic conditions of parents, occupation and educational qualifications of parents. Table 2 shows the sex of children and degrees of maltreatment.

Table 2: Sex of Students and Severity of Maltreatment

Sex	Maltreatment					
	Mild		Severe		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	66	46.8	75	53.2	141	100
Female	48	48.9	50	51.0	98	100
TOTAL	114		125		239	

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

$X^2 = 0.11$, df= 1, p> 0.05
Missing case=1

Note: Maltreatment is categorized into severe, moderate and mild forms of punishments.

The finding shows that a higher proportion of male students (53.2%) were, maltreated than girls (51%). It implies that in Niger State, a high proportion of boys are subjected to severe forms of maltreatment than their female counterparts.

However, ANPPCAN Chairperson observed that a higher proportion of girls are subjected to moderate categories of maltreatment which include hawking:

Children are seen hawking on the streets especially the girl- child. These girls hawked goods with the belief that, they can save money for their needs and marriages (ANPPCAN Chairperson Niger State Chapter during an interview).

A teacher commented that:

Girls are also engaged in hawking and selling of goods in shops. Most of these girls engage in economic activities in order to augment their needs, such as food and school materials (A teacher in a day school in a discussion session).

Discussing the type of economic activities carried out by boys, a teacher in a day school observed that some of them are hired to work on the farms in order to procure food, clothes and school materials. Another day school teacher noted that some boys engage in part- time motorcycle taxi businesses when schools are in session and on full-time basis during holidays.

The economic conditions of parents determine the degree of maltreatment suffered by their children. For instance, children from rich homes are more likely to enjoy basic necessities of life and better treatment from their parents than children of poor parents. Table 3 shows that more children who perceived their parents poor suffered severe maltreatment than those who perceived their parents as rich.

Table 3: Perceived Parents' Material Conditions and Reported Severity of Maltreatment

Parents' Perceived Materials Conditions	Maltreatment					
	Mild		Severe		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Rich	47	40.9	68	59.1	115	100
Poor	55	62.5	33	37.5	88	100
TOTAL	101		102		203	

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008

Gamma = -0.41 (P< 0.05)
Missing cases = 37

The gamma value -0.41 (P< 0.05) signifies that poorer parents maltreat their children more severely than the rich ones. Thus, there is a significant difference between parents' material conditions and degree of children maltreatment. According to ANPPCAN Chairperson:

Poverty is responsible for maltreating children. As a result of poverty, parents force their children to hawk or trade inorder to supplement the income of the family (ANPPCAN Chairperson, Niger State Branch, during interview).

The people of Niger State largely depend on agriculture and its auxiliaries such as fishing and animal husbandry. They engage in small- scale business activities such as buying and selling of farm produce, household materials and other items. These economic activities are carried out on subsequent basis and proceeds from them hardly meet the basic needs of the parents and their children. Describing the economic situation of the people of the state, a teacher stated that, "poverty and economic problems are causes of maltreating children in our society today". A welfare officer observed that most parents are so poor that they do not have money to send their children to school. Discussing the factors responsible for child maltreatment, a principal noted:

Because of poverty, some parents engage their children in hawking, while some force their children to work for others so as to provide additional money for their families (principal of a day school in a rural area during interview).

In rural areas, male children in particular engage in agricultural activities by helping their parents in the farms either before or after school hours. Similarly, girls are engaged in selling snacks like boiled maize, groundnuts, groundnut cake and other items in public places and institutions located in both towns and villages. Table 4 describes the occupation of fathers and forms of maltreatment suffered by their children.

Table 4: Fathers' Occupation and Maltreatment

Parents' Occupation	Maltreatment					
	Mild		Severe		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Civil Service	49	57.6	36	42.3	85	100
Farming	27	39.7	41	60.3	68	100
Business	22	42.3	55	62.5	52	100
Total	98		107		205	

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008

$X^2 = 5.72$, df = 2, P > 0.05, Missing cases= 35

Table 4 reveals a higher proportion of children whose parents are engaged in farming and business activities. They also suffer more severe forms of maltreatment than others. There is no statistically significance difference between maltreatment and father's occupation. Parents in Niger State normally engage their children in their vocations, except those whose parents are civil servants. This is done on part- time basis when schools are in session and on full- time during holidays. Table 4 shows that children whose fathers are businessmen tend to be more severely maltreated than those whose fathers are civil servants. A teacher of a day school in rural area observed during discussion that:

Businessmen ask their children and wards to either hawk or sell in shops. Similarly, fathers who rear animals engage their children/ wards in the vocation from morning to evening. In the process, they are being starved and over worked (Teacher of day school during FGD session).

However, a welfare officer in an interview noted:

Most children / wards receive vocational training and acquire basic skills from their parents. Consequently, such children are engaged in the economic activities of their parents in the process of socialization. As such, many of them are beaten and starved in the process of acquiring skills (social welfare officer during interview).

In this welfare officer's view, what the children consider as maltreatment are socialization processes for their parents' occupations. In Niger State parents train their children to acquire basic skills and knowledge alongside their vocations so as to make them productive and to be gainfully employed after graduating from school.

Table 5 shows the relationship between the father's highest level of educational attainment and the degree of maltreatment inflicted on their children.

Table 5: Fathers' Highest Educational Qualification and Maltreatment

Parents Education	Maltreatment					
	Severe		Mild		Total	
	f	%	F	%	F	%
Tertiary	46	47.0	52	53.1	98	100
Secondary	36	56.3	28	43.8	64	100
Prim-/ Koranic	35	59.3	24	40.7	59	100
Total	117		104		221	

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008

Gamma = -0.19 (P > 0.05)
Missing cases= 19

The gamma value of -0.19 (P>0.05) shows a low negative association. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference between fathers' education and severity of maltreatment, although poorer fathers tend to maltreat their children more severely. Such parents include those who have primary and koranic education. A teacher commenting on parents' education and child maltreatment noted that:

Low level of educational attainment of parents is responsible for child abuse and neglect in this society. For instance, some parents feel that their children belong to them and they can be treated as personal properties. The children might lack necessities of life such as educational materials and basic health care. Thus, parents with low level of educational attainment might maltreat their children/ wards more severely than others (Teachers in a boarding school in urban area during discussion).

It is evident from these accounts that the socio- economic conditions in Niger State like poverty, unemployment, low level of educational attainment of parents and cultural practices of the people constitute factors for maltreating children in secondary schools. For instance, 55 percent of children who perceived their parents being poor reported severe maltreatment in contrast to 46 percent of those who reported that their parents are rich. As to be expected, poverty and economic problems are to be associated with hardship and frustrations on parents. As a result, parents vent their angers on the children for offences through physical beating and corporal punishments such as throwing objects at and pouring hot liquid on.

Discussion

The conditions in most families, such as poverty, unemployment, low level of parents' education and frustration play significant roles in the maltreatment of children in Niger State. Thus, the phenomenon of child maltreatment is a product of the economic background of parents, such as their occupation, educational qualifications and sex of the children. Thus, these conditions and other practices in most families in Niger State provide the avenue for parents to engage their children in street trading, overworking the children, physical punishment and other forms of maltreatment. The findings are similar to the study of the U.S Government's Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) on socio- economic background of parents as a factor responsible for child maltreatment. The study found that compared to families with incomes over $30,000 a year, children in families with income less than $15,000 a year were almost 14 times more likely to be harmed by some variety of abuse. They are almost 16 times more likely to be a victim of physical abuse and almost 18 times more likely to be sexually abused (www.zeritactics.comm;10th June, 2014).

Conclusion

The causes of child maltreatment are multi-faceted and cannot be narrowed down to a single factor. Often times, there are multiple factors at play. It was found that poverty, unemployment, low level of parents' education and frustration play significant role in the maltreatment of children in Niger State. Thus, child maltreatment is a product of the economic background of parents, such as their occupation, educational qualifications and sex of the children.

Recommendations

Child maltreatment affects the physical and mental development of the child. The following suggestions are made to reduce the incidence and causes of child maltreatment in Niger State.

1. The situation where children are enrolled as day students by parents/ guardians so that such children can be available to hawk and do other works before and after school hours should be discouraged.
2. When socializing children in the vocation or occupation of parents, children should not be subjected to starvation and severe beating by their parents.
3. Parents should endeavor to enroll their children in boarding schools to avoid the temptation of engaging them in economic activities when schools are on session.
4. Parents / guardians should provide basic needs for their children/ wards unconditionally. A situation where children are engaged in economic activities for the purpose of augmenting the income the family and enhancing their welfare is unacceptable. Such and other related practices should stop.

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