

Child Abuse Tendencies and Academic Achievement of Junior Secondary School Students in Cross River State of Nigeria

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Abstract - The study examined child abuse tendencies and academic achievement of Junior Secondary School Students in Cross River State, Nigeria. Three (3) research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study, and relevant literature was reviewed. An ex-post facto research design was adopted, which made use of a sample of 2,940 JSS3 students spread across three (3) educational zones (Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja). Three (3) research instruments namely; Child Abuse Tendencies Questionnaire (CATQ), an oral interview with students identified to have been abused, in addition to Pre and Post-text cognitive ability test (PAPCAT) were adopted for the research. The data analysis technique used independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha levels, and the result revealed that all the variables showed high or moderate significant influence on the academic achievement of the subjects. It was recommended that parents, teachers/caregivers and guidance involved in child abuse should be sanctioned in line with the child right act.

Keywords: Child, Abuse tendencies, Academic achievement, junior Secondary Students.

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The problem of academic failure among the junior secondary school students generally in the nation and Cross River State in particular has become worrisome to parents, teachers and other education stakeholders. Many researchers have sought to find out the rationale behind this downward trend in the low academic achievement among secondary school students; most researchers notably research findings of [1],[2], and [2] have attributed the downward trend in students' academic endeavours to effect of family types, poor funding by government, home background, school related factors and also students related factors. [26] And [21] also emphasized that the child growth processes including learning

is largely dependent on the social and economic fortunes of the family, family size and parental child rearing practices.

However, [21] stated that school task and cognitive abilities of learners can significantly be affected by child abuse tendencies perpetuated by teachers (or caregiver) and other significant persons (guidance).

Child abuse is the maltreatment of children that result from human action or inaction that is proximate and maltreatment (UNICEF, 2003). Child abuse is an issue of serious concern globally and in Nigeria it has become a topic of prime importance in the media and also in the minds of the people. Child abuse according to [14] can be sexual, physical or emotional Sexual abuse according to [21] occurs when a parent/teacher (or caregiver) engages in an inappropriate sexual behaviour with the child (or student) whether or not the behaviour involves intercourse: such behaviour could be sexual intercourse, fondling the genital or causing the child to fondle the genital of an adult (teacher or caregiver), or any other forms of sexual exploitation with an immature school child or adolescent girl who cannot fully comprehend thus unable to give informed consent, or sexual activities that violate social norms.

[14], Stated that many school children are still victims of physical child abuse tendencies by teachers which usually take the form of burning with hot objects, beating, kicking, punching, throwing a child against the wall, serve physical punishment, chocking and pulling of the Child's hair, facing the sun, and several other horrible physical abuse tendencies.

[13], Also stated that there is emotional child abuse by teachers and caregivers especially during classroom instructional delivery of lessons. The author noted that very often we hear classroom teachers shouting or yielding at the learners calling them all sort of names including, worthless being, and good for nothing child, or blockhead. Psychologically, such emotional child abuse constitutes an attack on the child's self-esteem or self-concept, which can

make classroom environment to become un-motivating, effecting learner's cognitive abilities.

[21] Conceived that emotional child abuse lower the child's motivation to learn, tend to exhibit withdrawal behaviour and also hinders the child's school adjustment with serious adverse consequences on academic achievement. The author also contended that a school child who is emotionally abused especially by his/her teacher will tend to develop hatred towards the teacher, develop high anxiety and dislike even school subject especially those taken by such teachers.

[18], Opined that emotionally abused children lack even the basic reading and arithmetic skills and few who seem to be competent in reading or mathematics are often unable to apply the skills to solving problems. The author also stated that such learners may sometimes have difficulties in sequencing and general organization of ideas.

[1], Carried out a research on the effects of emotional abuse and student's academic achievement in Oshodi Lagos State. The result showed significant relationship between emotional abuse children and their academic achievement; His finding includes the following:

- Teachers sometimes have a hand in making children have emotional problems.
- Emotional abuse is the most destructive, most cruel of all forms of abuse.
- Emotionally abused children show delay in speech as well as slow cognitive development.

[3], Pointed out that child physical abuse is a global phenomenon, in Nigeria for instance about 10% of school children are physically abused yearly, and out of those abused, an estimated 5,000 end up in hospitals as a result of injuries arising from maltreatment. They also posited that child physical abuse may result to improper education of the child, loss of opportunities in life, poor achievement in schools, fear, anxieties, depression and low self-esteem which are all indicators of poor academic performance.

[4], Stated that corporal punishment as a means of enforcing school discipline in not only brutal but have undesirable effects of hardening the child which may stop his learning. The author further emphasized that the hostile attitude of such teachers might make the child hostile to other pupils, alienate himself from school and thus cause disruption in school learning.

In a bid to solve the problem of child abuse, the state government enacted child's right Act (2001) that it is the responsibility of the State to take care of children where the immediate parents fail to do so. The state is also responsible in

the provision of basic amenities for the child's welfare. These amenities are conceived in the area of health, education, recreation and legal service to ensure the optional growth and development of the child.

In spite of all the rights given to children as contained in the child's right Act, there is still a great preponderance of child abuse. In some teacher-learner relationship is rather a source of distress, trauma and unbelievably tragic realities.

The paradox of it is that, some teachers and caregivers still see relationship with their children as a paradigm of the old concept of "spare the rod and spoil the child". They thus see themselves maltreating neglecting or even failing to provide the necessary love, care and attention the child needs. They rather inflict pains and injuries on the child's body in the process of beating, hitting, kicking, shaking, punishing, biting or any act or omission that is not an accident, but that which brings some injuries to the child's body in the name of proper discipline of the child.

In schools, learners are equally abused socially and psychologically. Social neglect by teachers or caregivers involves failure to provide for the child's needs as a social being. This includes among others, failure to provide appropriately for the child's educational needs, failure to expose the child to appropriate level of social interaction or appropriate social event in school. Psychological neglect include among others, lack of or inadequate expression towards the child classroom affection, poor attention to the child as well as the absence of adequate emotional support.

The consequences of all these according to [21], include the following:

- Permanent deformity due to injuries sustained in the form of cuts, bruises etc.
- Creation of social distance or vague relationship between the abused child and the abusive caregiver or teacher with consequences on later social development.
- Making the abused to exclude the abusive teacher from his adult life and tending to be withdraw.
- Making maltreated children to replicate parental aggressive and abusive behavior thus creating a vicious cycle of child abuse.
- Producing fearful attachment with teacher leading to related vices such as substance abuse, criminality and being out of school.
- Impairment of the child's physical development.
- Mental and psychological trauma leading to low cognitive ability or low achievement in school task or low achievement motivation in the abused child.

Recent research publication especially those of Ada and [3],[5], [7], and [8] and highlights in national dailies, television debates and commentaries indicate that child abuse tendencies by caregivers/teachers in secondary schools have caused to significant extent low achievement level among the students. According to [21], the problem is a global one and is not different in Nigeria. Various governments in collaboration with international agencies and chapters brought about preventive measure (child rights Act), yet these negative behaviour are still begin carried out in most schools. It is thus in response to the above that, child abuse tendencies and academic achievement of junior secondary school students in Cross River State of Nigeria has become the focus of our research project.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Concern has been expressed by parents, teachers, government and other education stakeholders especially in the study area over the poor attitude as well as poor performance of public secondary school students in both internal and external examinations.

Governments at all levels feel concerned over the poor quality of our secondary product because of the huge finance spent on the infrastructure and personnel. Members of the public are worried because these students involved in poor academic achievement end-up dropping out of school system and thus become also involved in criminal acts within the society.

Most researchers are equally worried because the problem has become hydra-headed or complex. Some teachers and caregivers in the school system are involved in child abused tendencies especially aspects that have to do with the child's physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

In response to the situation, some studies have also been carried out and the need to address factors such as home, school environment and child rearing practices stressed, Besides, governments and agencies have organized teacher-retraining workshops and seminars aimed at improving teacher professional skills and ethics. In spite of all these, the problem of low quality of secondary school products and child abuse tendencies by teachers still remains. The above reason inspired the researchers to this study.

1.3 Objectives/purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of child abuse tendencies on general academic achievement of junior secondary school students in Cross River State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study will also examine whether;

- 1) Sexual abuse tendencies significantly influence student's academic achievement.
- 2) Physical abuse tendencies influence students' academic achievement.
- 3) Child labour significantly influence students' academic achievement.

1.4 Justification of the study (with particular reference to Nigeria)

Extensive empirical research work has been done on home background, child abuse and student's academic achievement, especially in primary school level by various researchers notably; [14],[27],[10], and [15]. What is perhaps new and justifies carrying out this research project is the application of school management/government regulatory policies concerning child abuse tendencies by caregivers or teachers in the school system. This is because teachers/caregivers are either not being seriously punished.

Thus, this research project sought to examine or investigate the impact of child abuse tendencies on the general academic achievement of junior secondary school students in Cross River State of Nigeria.

Based on this, the research project is important for the following reasons:

- It is the researcher's view that the findings of this project will be of immense benefits to parents, policy makers, government, planners of educational programs, students, teachers and caregivers etc.
- For teachers who may read this work, they will be adequately informed on the various dimensions of child abuse and the effects on student's academic achievement. The teachers and caregivers will therefore become equipped for healthy teacher-learner relationship devoid of all forms of child abusiveness (labour, physical, emotional, sexual).
- The information from this study may help emotional administrators and inspectors to establish monitoring committees to recommend the way forward for victims of abuses and appropriate punishment for perpetrators.

Also, it is the intention of all researchers to solve one problem or the other in the society. Therefore, this study will expose many researchers to problems associated with child-abuse tendencies, their different backgrounds or sources and may stimulate them to carry out further researchers in the area using additional study areas and variables other than the ones in the study.

II. Review of Related Literature

The review is carried out under the following sub-headings:

2.1 Sexual abuse tendencies and student's academic achievement

According to [21], sexual abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver (teacher) engages in an inappropriate sexual behaviour with the child, whether or not the behaviour involves intercourse.

Among such behaviours' are sexual intercourse, fondling the child's genitals or causing the child to fondle the genitals of an adult, or any other form of sexual exploitation with an immature child or adolescent who cannot fully comprehend thus unable to give informed consent, or sexual activities that violate social norms. Sexual abuse according to Ada and [3], include rape, touching/fondling or involving a child in pornography or an adult who exposes himself to a child, sexual harassment, allowing kids to witness sexual activity, subjecting the child to pornography.

Research findings of [24],[4], and [12], all revealed that child abuse variables such as sexual abuse amongst others significantly result in poor academic achievement. Similarly, [24] observed that the girl child who is sexually abused suffers a dramatic jeopardy in life achievements especially in education.

Also, [23] and [9], stated that children who are abused sexually are often fearful, anxious, depressed, angry, hostile or aggressive, feel isolated and stigmatized leading to feelings of helplessness in terms of poor result and low grade in school.

[14], In her research work stated that most of the children who are sexually abused especially by caregivers (teachers) are threatened into silence and submission leaving a lasting effect on their emotional, psychological as well as intellectual development.

2.2 Physical Abuse Tendencies and students' academic achievement

A lot of children in this 21st century are still victims of physical abuse. [22], stated that physically abused includes burning with hot objects, or fire, hitting a child with dangerous objects, kicking, punching, throwing a child against the wall, severe physical punishment, choking, pulling the hair, scalding water, poisoning, preventing sleep etc.

Some parents and caregivers (teachers) adopt these measures as child rearing or control practices. According to world health organization [29], extreme stress can impair the development of the nervous and immune system of the child,

putting the child at risk for behavioural, physical and especially mental problems.

Okoye (2009) reported that child physical abuse may result to improper education of the child, loss of opportunities in life, poor achievement in school, dropping out of school, fear, anxieties, depression and even low self- esteem, which are negative indicators of academic achievement of students.

Travers (2000) and Withare (2008) maintained that some physically abused children have conditions that involves muscular skeletal or central nervous system and thus affect their ability to move around and participate in academic and social activities like others in the classroom.

Similarly, Ada and Anake (2015), Neji (2017) and Enyia (2020) pointed out that physically abused children often exhibit disruptive deviant behaviors' which may result in interpersonal confrontation with peers and most times with teachers; such situations they say becomes difficult for the child to concentrate and acquire proper learning, leading to poor academic achievement.

2.3 Child Labour and Students' academic Achievement

In Nigeria, children have always worked in farming, fishing, cattle herding, trading and in all kinds of craft work for their parents or guidance; such practices had no negative connotations before now [6].

Recently, children are often being used as source of cheap labour in the form of hawking, prostitution, sales girls/boys, house help jobs, arms begging, transporters of good etc.

According to [10], some children are given irksome domestic tasks that are far above their age level and competence. These gruesome jobs according to him sap energies and render the children rather stressed and vitiated. Similarly,[19], [28]and [14]in their various empirical research work stated that children involved in child labour are most often found in dirty conditions, some involved in negative behaviours' such as stealing and violence and are deprived of education among many other basic rights for the sake of money.

[27], Observed that the phenomena of child labour is arguably the highest challenges that impacts directly on the school enrolment, attendance, academic achievement, completion rate as well as health risk. The International Labour Organization (ILO) as presented by [30] indicated that more than 40 million children between the ages of 6-15 worldwide are forced to work instead of acquiring education. These children according to [16], work in dangerous

occupation including factories, street vending, and refuse recycling but receive low salaries.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Ex-post factor design was adopted in the study. The design studies phenomena after they had already occurred, thus the design is aimed at investigating possible cause and effect relationship [10]. In other words, child abuse tendencies as independent variable is studied after exerting influence on the academic achievement of the students as the dependent variable.

3.2 Area of study

The study covered Cross River State of Nigeria. It consists of 18 Local Government Areas with Calabar as its capital. The state is categorized into four (4) educational zones namely; Calabar, Ugep, Ikom and Ogoja. The state also occupies a total landmass of 23,674.245 square kilometres, situated in the tropics and lies between latitudes 50.50 and 90.28 East, North of the equator and east of the Greenwich meridian respectively. The State has a population of about 4.6 million people, rich in natural resources with a thick forested land of about 6,101.29 square km. The people of the present Cross River State are made up of the Efiks, Quas and Ejagham in the South and others are found mainly in the Northern part of the state (Bekwarra, Ekois, Bette). The people have three (3) major languages namely: Efiks, Ejagham and Bekwarra.

3.3 Population

The population of the study comprised of all junior secondary (iii) students in all public secondary schools in Cross River State. The estimated population is 18,692 JSS (3) three students comprising males and females drawn from 308 public schools in the state.

3.4 Sample and sampling technique

Stratified and simple random sampling technique was employed in the data collection process. This is a probability sampling technique used so as to obtain an adequate representative sample of the schools and subjects required for the study.

The state was first stratified into three Education Zones; Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja. By simple random sampling a total of (49) forty nine schools were selected and a sample size of (2940) two thousand nine hundred and forty was obtained (see table 1).

Table 1: Sample distribution of schools and gender

S/N	Educational zone	No. of schools selected	Sex Male	female	Total	Percentage
1.	Calabar	14	430	410	840	28.5
2.	Ikom	16	460	500	960	32.7
3.	Ogoja	19	510	630	1140	38.8
	Total	49	1400	1540	2940	100

Sources: field, data, report, 2023

3.5 Instrument for data collection

The following research instruments were used in the study;

- 1) Child abuse tendencies questionnaire (CATQ)
- 2) An oral interview with students identified to have been abused.
- 3) Pre-and post-test cognitive ability test (TAT)

3.5.1 Validity and reliability of the instrument

The instruments were subjected to preview and independent expert judgment for face and content validity which was certified correct. Also, Cronbach coefficient methods were used to analyse data that were trail-tested. The internal constituency sub-scales were adjudged to be valid and reliable before being used for this study.

3.6 Statistical analysis technique

The data obtained from the field was analyzed using two (2) types of descriptive statistics:

- 1) Independent t-test and
- 2) One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha levels.

IV. Results and Discussion

General description of research variables

The study investigated child abuse tendencies and academic achievement of junior secondary III students in Cross River State, Nigeria. The independent variable in the study was child abuse tendencies while the dependent variable was academic achievement. The sub-variable identified under independent variable was; sexual abuse, Physical abuse and child labour. The mean score and standard deviation of all dimensions of the independent variable are shown in table II.

Table II: General Descriptions of research variables

S/N	Variable	N	Mean	SD
1.	Sexual abuse tendency			
	Low sexual abuse	1526	40.93	5.40
	Moderate	1286	40.77	5.41
2.	Physical abuse tendencies			
	high	114	41.23	5.29
	Low physical abuse moderate	58	41.88	5.36
3.	Child labour			
	High	1964	41.06	5.29
	Moderate influence	904	40.39	5.63
	Low influence	1427	41.04	5.37
	Moderate influence	1439	40.75	5.46
	High influence	60	39.75	5.09

4.1 Presentation of results

Hypothesis one (1): Sexual abuse has no significant influence on the academic achievement of JSS3 students in Basic Science.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is sexual abuse categorized as (High abuse, moderate and low abuse), while the dependent variable is academic achievement in Basic Science. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analysis the data. The result is presented in table III.

Table III: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the influence of sexual abuse on JSS3 student's achievement in basic science

S/N	Groups	N	\bar{X}	SD		
1.	Low sexual abuse	1526	40.93	5.40		
	Moderate sexual abuse	1286	40.77	5.41		
	High sexual abuse	114	41.23	5.29		
	Total	2926	40.87	5.41		
2.	Source of variation	SS	DF	MS	F-ratio	P-value
	Between groups	32.957	2	16.478	0.563	0.569
	Within groups	85477.693	2923	29.243		
	Total	85510.649	2925			

Significant at 0.05 level; $df=2923$; critical F-value = 2.991

From analysis in table III, the calculated F-value (0.563) is less than the critical F-value of 2.991 at 0.05 alpha level. The result however implies that there is no significant influence of sexual abuse on academic achievement of students in Basic Science.

Hypothesis two (2): Physical abuse has no significant influence on the academic achievement of JSS3 students in Basic Science. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data obtained from the field.

Also, the independent variable was categorized as (High, moderate and low). The result is presented in table IV.

Table IV: Summary of one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the influence of physical abuse tendencies on JSS3 students' academic achievement in basic Science

Groups	N	\bar{X}	SD	F-ratio	P-value
Low physical abuse	58	41.88	5.36		
Moderate physical abuse	1964	41.06	5.36		
High physical abuse	904	40.39	5.29		
Total	2926	40.37	5.41		
Source of variation	SS	DF	MS	F-ratio	P-value
Between groups	338.668	2	169.334	5.811	0.003
Within groups	85171.981	2923	29.139		
Total	85510.649	2925			

Significance at 0.05 level; $df=2923$; critical F-value=2.991

The result in table IV indicates that calculated F-Value of 5.811 and the critical F-value of 2.991 at 0.05 alpha level are significant with DF 2, and 2923 respectively.

The result therefore implies that there is significant influence of physical abuse tendencies on the academic achievement of JSS3 students.

Hypothesis three (3): child labour has no significant influence on the academic achievement of JSS3 students in Basic Science. The independence variable (child labour) was categorized as (high, moderate and low) while dependent variable is academic achievement of the students. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data obtained from the field.

Table V: Summary of one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the influences of Child Labour on JSS3 students' academic achievement

S/N	Groups	N	\bar{X}	SD		
1.	Low influence	1427	41.04	5.37		
	Moderate influence	1439	40.75	5.46		
	High influence	60	39.75	5.09		
	Total	2926	40.87	5.41		
2.	Source of variation	SS	DF	MS	F-ratio	P-value
	Between groups	1337.160	2	68.580	2.348	0.096
	Within groups	85373.489	2923	29.207		
	Total	85510.649	2923			

Significance at 0.05 level; $df=2923$; critical F-value = 2.991

The result as presented in table V shows that calculated F-value (2.35) was less than critical F-value (2.99), thus rejecting the null hypothesis. This implied that child labour does not significantly influence the academic achievement of JSS3 students in Basic Science.

4.2 Discussion of findings

Sexual abuse tendencies and academic achievement

The result revealed no significant influence of sexual abuse on academic achievement. This however contradicted the research findings of [12], [21], and [14], Their findings showed that sexual abuse has a significant relationship with personality disorder, and the children who were involved in

sexual activities were exposed to negative behaviour which led to maladjustment in many areas including academic achievement. Perhaps, these students involved themselves frequently in sexual activities and this has no influence on their studies since it became normal to them.

Physical abuse tendencies and academic achievement

The result revealed significant difference and influence on academic achievement of the students.

This result agrees with the findings of [20],[4], [3] and [7] who found out that victims of physical abuse tendencies are affected by truancy, violence and brain disorder, may experience fear and poor motivation to learn and in several cases become hospitalized and thus unable to attend school resulting from burns, fracture and brain damage.

Child labour and students' academic achievement

The result of this hypothesis also revealed that no significant influence existed between child labour and the academic achievement of the students. This result is at variance with the views of [23] and [30] who found that children who were involved highly laboured were involved in negative behaviour such as stealing and violence, and that children introduced to money at an early stage may not have the desire for education.

The research findings however supported the views of [23] who asserted that while there is clear evidence of the negative impact of labour on the minors' education, a minimal devotion to labour does not seem to have significant effects on the education of the children and youths.

V. Summary and Conclusion

The study centered on the influence of child abuse tendencies and the academic achievement of JSS3 students in Cross River State, Nigeria. On the basis of the findings, it was concluded that sexual abuse tendencies and child labour has moderately significant influence on academic achievement of JSS3 students, while physical abuse tendencies has high significant impact on the academic achievement of students. Therefore parents, teachers/caregivers involved in physical abuse of children should be sanctioned in line with the child right Act. Also, parents should not wait until children are abused sexually or physical/child labour, they should keep close watch on their children and warn them against unhealthy relationship in and outside the school. Finally, sex education and child rights Act should be thought in School.

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