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## THE ANATOMY OF CHILD ABUSE: STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AND IMPLICATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated students' perception of child abuse and personality development. The study adopted a survey research design. Four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A structured questionnaire "Child Abuse and Personality Questionnaire (CAPQ)" was used for data collection. Target population comprised all registered adolescent students aged between 10-17 years in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 200 respondents from 14 schools. Data generated was analysed using ANOVA, chi-square, mean, standard deviation and independent t-test. Results indicated that physical abuse, child labour, emotional abuse is significant to personality development. There is a significant relationship between child neglect and personality development, sexual abuse and personality development and the perception of child abuse is not affected by gender. Child abuse impacts negatively on the personality development of the child, concerted efforts should be made to safeguard these human assets.

*Keywords:* Child Abuse, Child's Rights, Personality Development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of child abuse is a global problem, more often than not, one hears tales of children been abandoned, neglected, over-laboured, injured, killed, kidnapped, pregnant, forced into marriage (under whatever guise) and exploited. Children in Nigeria in particular are exposed to the risk of violence, inordinate sexual acts and avoidable accidents. Child labour and use of excessive corporal punishment in the name of child discipline are some examples of child abuse prevalent in Nigeria. A situational analysis of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, undertaken through the medium of the Nigerian newspapers found that child abandonment, sexual abuse, child neglect, vagrancy, kidnapping and hawking are the most reported forms of child abuse and neglect (Ebigbo & Abaga, 1990).

Children are traumatized by physical, sexual and emotional abuses by parents/guardians and caregivers. The fact that child abuse is not abating is evidenced by the increase in the number of children begging in the streets and abandoned in public places.

Children are no longer safe in their homes when they are battered, enslaved, unkempt, poorly nourished, shabbily clothed, uncared for and not given the right to develop well. This situation triggered the interest of the researcher to investigate the relationship/impact of child abuse, the perception of students and personality development of the child.

Child abuse is not a new social phenomenon. In many parts of the world, the problem of child abuse is a frightening reality. Child abuse covers a range of behaviour from actual physical assault by parents and caregivers to neglect of a child's basic needs. Although the extent of child abuse is difficult to measure, it is recognised as a major social problem especially in developing countries like Nigeria. It occurs in all societies irrespective of socio-economic background, financial status, race, religious background, ethnic ground and whether or not it is a rural or urban community. Many children who are abused feel neglected, frustrated and worthless seeing little or no prospect of escaping their wretched lives.

The problem of child abuse has also increased due to apparent lack of interest by researchers and dearth of empirical data which made it difficult to ascertain the prevalence of the incidence of child abuse, particularly in Nigeria where there is dearth of empirical data. There are evidences which support the assertion that the incidence and prevalence of child abuse is on the increase (ANPPCAN, 2012; UNICEF, 2005). However, literature is lacking on the challenges before the Nigerian family in helping to complement government efforts to stem child abuse. Arresting this crippling problem of child abuse is an important issue in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, given its resurgence as evidenced in the increased rate of child abuse ranging from sexual abuse, physical injury, emotional maltreatment, deprivation of necessities and child trafficking. The magnitude of the child abuse menace observed almost on daily basis is no longer an issue for debate, as it is clear that this problem is on the increase with the same rapidity with which new legislations are formulated and backed by the instruments of the law. Child abuse is an important aspect in the mental health of the child, and at the same time, it has important implications for the child's emotional, character and personality development.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 CONCEPT OF CHILD ABUSE

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is every human being below the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2007). The term "child abuse" covers a wide range of acts from actual physical assaults by parents and caregivers to neglect of a child's basic needs. Child abuse as defined by African Network for Prevention against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) (2012) is any act that directly or indirectly hinders the ability of a child to learn, grow and thrive in their environment. It is the physical, emotional or sexual exploitation of children by parents, guardians or others. Child abuse describes any action or failure to act that result in eminent risk of serious harm, death or exploitation of a child under the age of 18 (eighteen) by an adult who is supposed to be responsible for the child's welfare (Onuoha, 2008).

Parents/caregivers and guardians are required by law to feed, clothe, shelter, and educate their children, they should be allowed opportunity to enjoy their human and childhood rights-right to dignity, knowledge, artistic expression etc. The prevalence of child abuse within our society has become enormous; over 3 million reports of child abuse are made every year in the United State; in 2007 approximately 5.8 million children were involved in an estimated 3.2 million child abuse reports and allegations (National Child Abuse, 2010). Wilson (2000) opined that 2 million cases of child abuse are committed each year with 3000-6000 children killed as a result.

## 2.2 DIMENSIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Prominent forms of child abuse in Nigeria are child labour, child battering, child sexual abuse, child trafficking, child abandonment and neglect, child emotional abuse and teenage prostitution. The list could be endless because each strand of child desecration process highlighted above may again yield a dozen of abusive patterns to which the child is exposed. For the purpose of this paper, only the above mentioned forms of child abuse will be discussed.

*Child Labour:* Child labour is about children who work long hours under destructive and harmful conditions (Awake, 1999). It is the practice in some parts Nigeria that children should serve the home, work can be an essential part of children's education and a means of transmitting and acquiring vital skills from parents to offspring thus children are often involved in workshops and small-scale services. Child labour is central to the production system of the nomadic Fulani (a tribe in Nigeria), the child herdsman and the girl hawker are important cultural practices among nomadic Fulani (Tahir, 2002). Hiring out children or wards for paid employment in other people's homes is done by some unemployed and underemployed parents to augment their own earning (Oden, 2002). However, while using children for work, their sex, age, ability and health condition should be considered. The State of the World's Children Report 2005 estimates that 39% of children aged 5-14 years in Nigeria within 1999-2003 were engaged in child labour (UNICEF, 2005). One in six children aged 5-14 years are engaged in child labour in developing countries, it is estimated that in sub-Saharan Africa, 32% of this age group are engaged in child labour (UNICEF, 2012).

*Child Battering:* This form of abuse occurs when the child is mercilessly beaten leading to physical injury. Physical abuse is physical aggression directed against a child by an adult. It includes striking, kicking, shoving, slapping, pulling the ears, burning, pulling the hair or any other part of the body, choking, shaking etc. Some parents/guardians abuse their child physically out of a warped sense of discipline (Oden, 2002). The child abuser most often injures the child in the heat of anger albeit unintentionally.

*Child Sexual Abuse:* Newton (2001) defined child sexual abuse as the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of any child to engage in or assist any person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or stimulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct. Genius, Thomlison & Bagley (1991) estimated that victims of sexual abuse are primarily female and are often very young, however, as many as 4-10% of males may also be victims of sexual abuse. Young children are forced and coerced into sex under the guise of marriage. Most of these young children end up emotionally and physically traumatized, some develop medical conditions such as vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). National Child Abuse (2010) reports that 90% of victims of child sexual abuse know the perpetrator in some way and that 68% of these victims are abused by family members. Howard (2006) also agrees with this report saying that most perpetrators of sexual abuse are people the children know commonly a stepfather, an uncle or a mother's boyfriend. He further stated that the children who are sexually abused by a parent or other family member may have conflicting feelings, they may feel emotionally close to the offender yet betrayed. Forty per cent of reported rapes in South Africa in 2004/2005 were committed against children (UNICEF South Africa Country Office, 2007).

*Child Trafficking:* Many children are trafficked to feed growing domestic labour markets, children are recruited from villages and suburbs to assist the affluent in the cities manage their homes (Ebigbo & Ebigbo, 1989). Francis (2005) in Yecho (2008) reported that in 2005, 63 children (mostly girls) were transported from their homes to Lagos (a city in

Nigeria) to be delivered to prospective buyers at the rate of ₦3000 (about \$20) per child. These children end up receiving such unwholesome treatment that is better heard than seen. Adedeji (2005) in Yecho (2008) also reported about a woman in Ilorin (a suburb in South West Nigeria) who attempted to sell her 10year old son for the sum of N70,000 (about \$440) because according to her, she needed the money to offset a debt. A lot is being done about child trafficking but it remains a menace because of the huge gain got by perpetrators. Trafficking affects about 1.2million children each year (The State of the World's Children, 2006).

*Child Abandonment and neglect:* Child neglect is when a responsible adult fails to adequately cater for the various needs of the child which include physical, emotional, psychological, educational and medical needs (denying the child access to available medical services). Child abandonment is when a child is left in circumstances in which he suffers serious harm or the parent has failed to maintain contact with the child or provide reasonable support to the child for a specific period of time, when the parent's identity or whereabouts is unknown, that child is said to be abandoned. UNICEF population report (1996) reported that an estimated 50 million children are living on city streets, such children are largely abandoned or they had run away from home (from parents or foster parents). Most of these children are thus deprived of health care and education and almost all are exposed to the dangers of street life.

*Child Emotional Abuse:* This is behaviour that interferes with a child's mental health or social development. Such abuse can range from verbal insults to acts of terror. Emotional abuse may not only come from adults but from other children- siblings, neighbourhood or school bullies and peers in school. Emotional abuse can take place in different settings-the home, the schools, neighbourhood, church etc. If it happens at school, the child may be reluctant to go to school. Many times, the victims of emotional abuse may react by distancing themselves from the abuser or fight back by lashing out at the abuser. Females reported more neglect and emotional abuse whereas males reported more physical abuse (Nguyen, Dunne and Le, 2010).

### 3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Several theories have been propounded to explain personality and its development. The different theories vary in their emphasis. The major theoretical foundation for this study is based on the humanistic theory of personality.

The professional meaning of the word "personality" is derived from the Latin word "persona" which refers to the mask used by actors performing on the stage in ancient Greece and Rome (Denga, 1988). With the mask on, it was not possible to know who the actor really was. It was only when the mask was removed that the true identity of the actor could be known. This background of the concept of personality is indicative of its complex and rather subjective nature.

Psychologists have different definitions of the term "personality", however what appears to be the most widely accepted definition of personality is given by Allport in Akume (2010). According to him, personality is the dynamic organisation within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine his/her unique adjustment to his environment. Allport's definition implies that personality consists not just of the psychological aspects of his/her being but also the physical qualities and endowments which combine together to enable the individual behave in a characteristic manner. Personality therefore is the dynamic interaction of these physical and psychological attributes that makes one individual distinct from all others in terms of his/her mood, temperament and behaviour.

The humanistic theory of personality believes that human nature is basically good

and that the core of personality is the desire to perfect our skills and find peace and happiness rather than to fulfil urges towards sexuality and aggression (Kagan, 1979). Examples of Humanistic theorists are Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Carl Rogers (1970) humanistic approach to personality emphasized human personal experiences. His theory highlights the importance of parental show of affection in the personality development of the child. He encouraged parents to raise their children with unconditional positive regard, in which children are accepted, loved and praised no matter how they behave. According to him, children raised with unconditional positive regard will develop a healthy sense of self-esteem and will become in Rogers' term, a "fully functioning" person. Rogers (1970) further opined that the "self" develops out of the organism's interaction with the environment. It may take on the values of other people and see them in a distorted way; the self thrives for consistency; the self is learned, it may change as a result of maturation and learning experience. In Rogers' view, maladjustment or abnormal behaviour is caused by people's failure to integrate all their experiences, desires and feelings into their phenomenological image of self- a failure that often stems from conditional positive regard with its accompanying criticism and punishment.

### 3. THE MODELS OF CHILD ABUSE

The magnitude of violence perpetrated against abused children is a complex issue best considered a phenomenon that should be viewed in the context of diversity of precipitating factors. In view of this fact, it would be expedient to hypothesize that for anyone to be socialized into child abuse, a number of psychological as well as socio-environmental conditions will manifest as causative factors. Based on this, the following schools of thoughts have been proposed as analytical platform that provoke abusive behaviour.

#### 3.1 THE PSYCHIATRIC MODEL

This is the most influential and popular model derived from psychiatric analysis. The psychiatric model believes that child abuse is a product of personality characteristic of people who perpetuate abusive behaviour. The model primarily focuses on the parents as the principal cause (Tapp and Levin, 1977). According to this school of thought, abusive parents are thought of as having personality characteristics that are distinct from other parents. There is also the implicit assumption that the abusive parents are abnormal or "sick" and therefore require extensive psychiatric treatment to overcome their illness.

The psychiatric model of abusive employs all of psychology, sociological as well as anthropological procedures in making attributions for child abuse. In all strands of psychodynamic perspective, the human behaviour is located in the "inner person" (internal personality). The assumption of the psychodynamic approach states that unconscious forces can influence behaviour (Weiten, 1980). However, there is need to exercise caution because child abuse if considered from the context of parental culpability, tends to sound convincing. When viewed along the line of authoritative personality, social psychologists believe that authoritarian people tend to be reared by punitive, status-anxious parents and as a result, they are highly defensive and hold rigid and conventional beliefs (Lippa, 1990). The after-effect of this is that when such people become parents, they act out the "theatre" of experience in them; which they had stored up in their childhood days through social learning. Since they are unable to retaliate to their abusive parents, they now avenge their own feelings on their children. If this is not given a psychological halt, the implication is the whole generation of humanity can be consciously socialized into cruelty. Over the years, the utility of this approach has become questionable, as some authorities have located the cause of child abuse in environmental conditions.

### 3.2 CULTURAL MODEL

In some cultures, there is cultural acceptance of violence as a form of social behaviour. Justice and Justice (1990) proposed a triadic model in which “cultural scripts” described as accepted and expected patterns of interaction between individuals in a society acted as a vector. Cultural scripts are spoken and unspoken assumptions about human behaviour that result from culturally endorsed messages, injunctions and myths about how people should act, feel and think. In many countries, particularly African countries, there are various forms of social behaviour that acts as social incubators in the causation of child-related offences. Child abuse is a social transgression that takes its roots from many cultural sanctioning of physically violent tactics of resolving social conflict, the examples of this that abound include political killings, murders, domestic violence, police brutality, television-induced violence and other forms of “mechanical” behaviour which consistently exposes children to moral lesson that violence is an appropriate means of resolving conflict. All of these represent social learning dimensions to child abuse - a systematic acculturation of the people into obnoxious lifestyles that breed exploitation of others (particularly children) through coercion and violence.

### 3.2 PSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL

Justice and Justice (1990) proposed a more holistic approach which focuses on psychosocial model to look at the problem of child abuse. The model takes into account the shifting dynamic forces at work in the abusive family, in the environment and in the culture in which the family lives. The model is thus primarily concerned with two systems; the family system and the larger system of family, environment and culture. The larger system is depicted in terms familiar to public health: host, environment, agent and vector best described as triad of interaction. When the model is adapted to the problem of child abuse, the host represents the parents, the environment represents physical and social influences and stresses, the agent is the child and its behaviour/temperament, and the vector is the stimulus imported from agent to host that carried the cultural “scripting” that governs interaction between the two. The advantage of the triadal model is that it offers an opportunity for preventive interventions at various levels which occurs in public health practice. Intervention may occur at the level of host (parents), agent (child), environment or vector (cultural scripts).

From the foregoing, the reviewed theories suggest that the spectrum of child abuse is wide. The knowledge of these theories will only help to shape the understanding of child abuse in its ramifications.

### 3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL THEORY MODEL

The proponents of these theories viewed child abuse as a multidimensional problem and place heavy emphasis on stress as the cause. The implication of this theory is that if it were not for adverse environmental factors such as poverty, poor education and occupational stress, there would be no child abuse. The premise upon which the theory is hinged is that economic stresses on the poor people are seen as weakening their self-control and leading to violence against their children. The solution to curb child abuse is therefore in organising programmes to curb poverty.

### 3.4 BIOSOCIAL THEORY MODEL

This perspective has been described as an innovative approach to understanding the relationship among external social stressors, internal psychological stress and child abuse is the parental investment theory. Lancaster and Galles (1987) defined “parental investment” as any investment by a parent in an offspring that increases the recipient’s fitness at the cost of parental capacity to invest elsewhere. The theory emphasizes the limited amount of parental resources (time, energy, attention) that can be apportioned to offspring over the course of life spans of both parent and offspring.

Research evidence has lent credence to the fact that it may not be unnatural for parents to neglect their children or even target a special child for abuse under particular sets of unfavourable contexts of parental behaviour (Klaus and Kennell, 1976). It thus appears that at each step of parenthood, parents are reassessing the current and future prospects of each child, and faced with limited resources and unfavourable circumstance, they may decide to limit or cut off their investment. Cross-cultural research suggests that certain group of children are more likely to be undervalued and consequently seen as a poorer investment of parental resources. The broad groups include the following:

- Children whose health status is inferior, for example malnourished children etc.
- Deformed and handicapped children: With this sort of low value placed on the child, he/she is not likely to be cared for adequately.
- Sex: The value that a particular culture places on a male or female child influences the treatment of the child. Female children are reported to be at greater risk of maltreatment in societies with strong preference for the male child.

### 4. CHILD ABUSE AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

From the moment one is born, the process of development begins. As the child begins to learn to sit, speak and co-ordinate, his/her personality begins to develop. In the words of Oladele (2005):

“Personality is a growing and dynamic entity. Every child has a certain endowment that helps him to develop his personality as he grows and interacts with his environment. The child gradually finds him or herself as he experiments with various roles and finally achieves personal identity” (Oladele 2005:288).

Frazer in Awake (2003) observed that the experience a child is exposed to in the early years of his life influences how that child’s personality develops. Iwundu (2007) is of the opinion that, “A child that is rejected feels abandoned and helpless. As he grows into adulthood, low self-esteem emanating from inferiority complex gradually continues to build” (Iwundu 2007:40).

Child abuse can make the victim develop fear of physical contact, aggression towards others, extreme fear of any new situation, unable to form social relationships, abused children are often frightened. Child abuse seems to be related to the development of multiple personality- the individual develops two or more distinct personalities (Fisher & Pipp, 1994). A study carried out by Lafrancious (1993) shows that adults with behavioural and emotional problems (for example delinquency and criminality or mental disorder) have often been abused as children. It was found that most individuals suffering from this disorder seem to

have been subjected to several abuses as young children. This agrees with the study of Briscoe-Smith and Hinshaw (2006) who found an association between child abuse and girls with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and raised questions of aetiology and the possible role of abusive trauma in children with ADHD. Emery (1989) emphasized that the long term effects of child abuse are highly varied and often unpredictable. They include increased probability of higher aggression, problem with peer relationships, impaired social development, lack of empathy, depression, poorer performance on cognitive tasks. As stated by Kinanee (2006), “the family is the first external world that shapes the personality of the child, beginning with the mother-child relationship. How a child is shown love or rejection early in life affects him/her as he/she grows up. If the child is shown rejection for instance, he/she will likely be aggressive, rebellious or quarrelsome later in life” (Kinanee 2006:155).

#### 4.1 CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE

The problems posed by child abuse and neglect not only affect the children’s physical health and safety, but also their psychological adjustment, social relations and academic achievement. The impact of abuse goes beyond emotional and behavioural disorders; it affects children’s view of the world and of themselves, their expectations for future happiness and their moral development (Garbarino, Kostelny & Dubrou, 1991). Researchers opined that different forms of child abuse have short and long term effects or consequences. Starr (1998) reported that physically abused children tend to become aggressive later in childhood or violent in adulthood which includes among others, date rape and spousal abuse. Other behaviours include substance abuse in adolescence and adulthood, attempting suicide, having emotional problems which include anxiety and depression and lower intelligence quotient as well as poorer school performance.

Child labour as identified by Noodum (2004) has many negative effects on the child and the entire society. It exposes the child to health hazards, sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies, contraction of different diseases such as HIV/AIDS and venereal diseases among others; physical, verbal and psychological/emotional abuse; falling prey to ritualists, fatigue and lowered academic achievement among others. Furthermore, it predisposes the child to joining bad gangs, cultism, engaging in criminal activities and other social vices such as gambling and so on.

Feldman (1999) stated that sexual abuse has short and long term consequences. Some of the immediate effects include eating and sleeping disorders, uncontrollable anger, withdrawal and guilt, often appearing anxious and afraid. Other immediate effects include depression, hostility and aggression. Some long term effects of sexual abuse include poor self esteem, post traumatic stress disorder; such disorders include sexual dysfunction. Other long term consequences include depression and self-destructive behaviour, feeling of isolation, anxiety, difficulty in trusting others and substance abuse. In yet another study, McCandles and Trotter (1977) concluded that a child who is constantly abused sexually could experience ill health and negative self concept. According to them, even a child who is achieving and happiness and constantly abused sexually may end up with a low self concept. Healthy self concept results when the right balance is attained.

According to Boney-McCoy & Finkeher (1995), exposure of children to abuse and neglect may alter the timing of typical developmental trajectories by disrupting children’s progression through age-appropriate developmental tasks. For example, exposure to abuse and neglect in young children can result in regressive symptoms such as increased bed wetting, decreased verbalisation or separation anxiety (Osofsky, 1995) which may in turn affect children’s socialization skills or ability to concentrate in school. In addition, the impact of abuse and neglect goes beyond the period of exposure and the immediate aftermath, and



sometimes occurs many years later affecting individuals into adulthood (McDevit & Ornirod, 2004). Black and Dubowitz (1999) stated that the consequences of neglect include low self-esteem, poor intimate relationship, withdrawal, depression and apathetic behaviours; others include failure to thrive in the face of difficulties, increased dependency and anger and general development lags. As children get older, the effects of neglect become more severe as a result of the accumulation of effects of such neglects. Egeland (1988) opined that neglected children suffer hurts in their bodies, minds, emotions and spirits hence their personality is affected. Physical neglect include lack of food, shelter and clothing, unsanitary conditions in the home, presenting spoilt or little food to children, untreated injuries and unsafe home conditions. Researchers e.g. Dodges. Bates & Petti (1987) have shown that psychological abuse engenders aberrant behaviours such as withdrawal and isolation, hypothesized to be precursors of depression which mediates the development of learning problems. Consistent with the above finding, Emery (1989) showed that abused children exhibit low self esteem.

Short and long term effects of emotional abuse have been equally identified. Lack of mutual infant-caregiver regulation resulting from insensitive and unresponsive care-giving lead to an anxious attachment pattern (Aber & Allen, 1987). Such babies tend to lag in social and cognitive development which may continue into adolescence and adulthood. A feeling of being innately bad and unworthy of love is created in such children (Sarason & Sarason, 1987). Furthermore, child neglect is linked to criminality in adolescence and adulthood especially violence (Wisdom, 1989; Stern, 1998). Neglected children talk less and make fewer social responses, apart from engaging in little exploratory or inquisitive behaviour and feeling depressed (Sarason & Sarason, 1987).

Good parental care usually serves to guarantee the development of a healthy personality. That is why in all cultures, parents and caregivers should give adequate attention, love and care to their offspring or wards (Isangedighi et al, 2009). This finding is backed up by the United Nations' universal declaration on human rights (UNICEF 2001 and 2003) that childhood is entitled to care and assistance. It also adds that the child, for full harmonious development of his/her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. All these consequences demonstrate the link between child abuse and a balanced personality development.

## 5. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study adopted the survey research design. This was necessitated by the need to collect detailed factual information which describes the nature of child abuse and effects of personality development, patterns among others. This design was also preferred because the independent variables were not manipulable since their manifestation preceded this investigation. A structured questionnaire tagged "Child Abuse and Personality Questionnaire (CAPQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and had a reliability estimate of  $r=0.77$ . The target population comprised all registered adolescent students aged between 10-17years in public secondary schools in the Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria. Fourteen (14) schools were randomly sampled for the study; a simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 200 respondents. The data generated was analysed using mean percentages and independent t-test. The mean and percentages were used to answer the research question while the independent t-test statistics was used to answer the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The following research hypotheses stated in the null form guided the study:

- There is no significant relationship between physical abuse, child labour and emotional abuse on personality development.
- There is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and personality development

- There is no significant relationship between child neglect and personality development
- There is no significant difference between male and female perception of child abuse on personality development.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 6.1 RESULTS

*Hypothesis 1:* There is no significant relationship between physical abuse, child labour and emotional abuse on Personality development.

Table 1: Analysis of variance of physical abuse, child labour and emotional abuse on Personality development (ANOVA) and their combined influence

R = 0.367      standard error of estimates = 5.14984 R = 0.196      Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.191					
ANOVA					
Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F	sig
Regression	2332.671	3	777.557	8.389	.000
Residual	18259.474	197	92.687		
Total	20592.145	200			

The result above indicates that physical abuse, child labour and emotional abuse is significant to personality development. Analysis yielded F-ratio ( $F_{3, 197}$ ) = 8.389;  $P < 0.05$ . Also a co-efficient of multiple regression (R) = 0.367 and Adjusted Multiple Regression of 0.191 was observed. This indicates that 19.1% of the variance is responsible for respondents' personality development. Hence, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is a significant relationship between physical abuse, child labour, emotional abuse on personality development.

*Hypothesis 2:* There is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and personality development

Table 2: Sexual Abuse And Personality Development

N	Calculated $\chi^2$	Critical $\chi^2$	Remarks
200	61.77	5.99	Significant

The result in Table 2 above clearly depicts the  $\chi^2$  calculated is 61.77 while the critical  $\chi^2$  is 5.99, this shows that the calculated  $\chi^2$  is greater than the critical  $\chi^2$ . Therefore, we conclude that there is a significant relationship between the effects of sexual abuse and personality development of children. The hypothesis that says that there is no significant relationship is rejected.

*Hypothesis 3:* There is no significant relationship between child neglect and personality development.

Table 3: Child neglect and Personality development

N	Calculated $\chi^2$	Critical $\chi^2$	Remarks
200	5.24	3.84	significant

Data from Table 3 above showed the relationship between child neglect and personality development. The calculated  $\chi^2$  (5.24) is greater than the critical  $\chi^2$  (3.84).

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, given the calculated values, the difference is significant.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant difference between male and female perception of child abuse on Personality development

Table 4: Means, standard deviation and t-test of independence means comparison of male and female perception of child abuse on Personality development

Variables	N	X (means)	Standard deviation	Df	t-calculated	t-table
Male	72	81.4250	17.6328	198	1.68	1.960
Female	128	75.5167	13.89853			

*Significant at 0.05level of significance (2-tailed)*

The result in Table 4 showed that there is no significant difference in male and female students' perception of child abuse on personality development.  $t\text{-calculated} = 1.68 < t\text{-critical} = 1.960$ ,  $df = 198$ ,  $P < 0.05$ . This implies that perception of child abuse is not affected by gender. The hypothesis that says that there is no significant difference is upheld.

## 6.2 DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 indicated a significant relationship between physical abuse, child labour, emotional abuse and personality development. The result of the study is in line with the findings of Santrock (1995), Dacey and Travers (1996), Starr (1998)) which all reported negative consequences on the social and psychological development of the child. Researchers are of the view that physical and emotional abused children tend to become depressed, aggressive and hostile depending on the severity of the abuse. Also the result of this study agrees with the finding in a National Survey of parents by Straus and Gelles (1986) in which most of the parents admitted using severe forms of punishment including kicking, biting, punching, beating, hitting with the hand or an object or wielding a gun or knife against their children. The Nigerian society also tends to condone violent rather than non-violent approaches to the discipline of children. Researchers have confirmed that excessive physical punishment is a contributory factor to juvenile delinquency.

The finding on child labour is in consonance with that of Dunapo (2002) who stated that children were deployed to the streets to hawk for long hours usually commencing from dawn to dusk. Children were used as domestic servants, farmhands, factory labourers, bus conductors, beggars, touts, sometimes hired out as prostitutes and sold out as child slaves. This form of abuse according to researchers is often closely related to the level of family income and cultural background.

Table 2 shows that sexual abuse has a significant influence on personality development. In other words, the students who were sexually abused had a low self - perception which in turn drastically and negatively impacted their personality. This confirmed that findings from previous studies (McCandles & Trotter, 1977). Sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy are highly prevalent in Nigeria today. The problem is further compounded by the fact that most sexually abused girls do not really report to the counsellor, teacher or even to their parents because of secrecy, intense feelings of shame and the bid to protect their self-esteem and personality. Child sexual abuse is evil and may have a serious painful and damaging psychological impact on the life of a growing child and adolescent and consequently mar the child's future.

Table 3 indicated a significant relationship between child neglect and personality development. This finding agrees with the assertion of Sarason and Sarason (1988) that child neglect and maltreatment have implications for the development, behaviour and mental health of the child both in childhood and adulthood. Child neglect has been reported as one of the most commonly reported type of abuse in the area. Children are most of the time neglected by

depriving them of the basic necessities of life. Child neglect was found to be associated with poverty. The poverty level of the family influences the extent of the neglect of children. This was attested to by Onye (1984) and Isangedighi (1996). They are of the view that children whose parents are in higher economic class are more able to cater for the needs of their children, in respect of better nourishment, warmth and psychological stability than those in the low income group. Due to poverty, parents cannot fulfil the legitimate needs of their children.

The result in Table 4 is a surprise to the researcher. Gender on the other hand has been a subject of intense research. It is believed that gender plays a positive role in the personality development of individuals but this cannot be all cases because there are other factors such as genetic make-up, individual personality, temperament and others that constitute a gender being. Moreso, the subjects of the study sees child abuse as a label applied to injury patterns as an outcome of a judgement process by an observer irrespective of their gender.

In the Nigerian culture where child abuse is mistaken for training and therefore shields the abusers from social sanctions, abused children come to school with all sorts of physical and psychological deficits that interfere with learning and school experience. Academic failure blamed on abuse elicits further emotional assault such as humiliation, denigration, addictive components of the stultification of learning. Parental behaviour that suggests mental cruelty are instances of psychological abuse with serious consequences on the personality of the child and can engender a variety of developmental deficits including cognitive and behavioural deficiency. Children who survive abuse grow up more likely to negatively impact our society in many ways, not just by handing the legacy abuse to their own children. Child abuse bursts out of the family and infects our society with callousness and cynicism, anger and violence, crime, drugs and disease.

Beyond the obvious effects of child abuse, victims of emotional, physical, sexual and verbal abuse experience psychological damage that can last a lifetime. The result of abuse may include a chronic depression, anxiety, behaviour problems and problems in school. Another disturbing aspect of abuse is the experiential restraints it puts on children. If the child fears doing anything new because of the chance that it will lead to a violent attack or because an abusive parent keeps extremely tight control over them, the child will lose his/her sense of curiosity and wonder at the world and will stop trying new things, consequently the child never achieves his/her intellectual potentials.

Finally, children have different levels of resiliency or hardiness and different personality attributes so different children respond differently to similar abusive situations. Basically, children are supposed to learn everything they need to thrive in this world from their caregivers. Abusive parents provide the opposite of what children need; instead of teaching and nurturing growth, they distort and destroy.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The paper attempts an understanding of the dimensions that underlies the endemic problem of child abuse and its relationship with personality development and the implications of its continual perpetuation particularly in Nigeria.

The theories of personality and child abuse reviewed with an intent of to uncover the underlying characteristics of the abused child. On the basis of these characteristics, the study identified the dimensions child abuse to include: child labour, child battering, child sexual abuse, child trafficking, child neglect and child emotional abuse. The theories of abuse revealed that the causative agent of abuse is multidimensional. Based on this, the Psychiatric perspective, Cultural perspective, Environmental theories, Biosocial theory and Psychosocial model were proposed as analytical platform that provoke abusive behaviour.

Child abuse in whatever form deprives the Nigerian child of his fundamental human

rights, privileges and welfare, which may lead children to the devastating consequences of committing violent crimes, terrorist activities and the likes. The need to protect children from all forms of abuse and provide adequately for their basic needs becomes imperative. Early intervention and prevention strategies coupled with observance of child's rights are the surest actions for curbing child abuse both at home and in school.

The paper therefore concludes that given the knowledge of the dimensions of child abuse on the personality development of the child, every corrective measure should be employed to safeguard the "child" who is not only the future of the parent but also that of the nation. All hands must therefore be on deck in achieving this objective for a relatively stable and crime free society for all Nigerians.

Given the grave implications of child abuse, it is important to suggest intervention processes and preventive measures to stem the prevalent rate of abuse. The following suggestions are hereby proffered *inter alia*. Efforts should be made by parents, psychologists, social workers, guidance counsellors, health workers and medical personnel to help prevent sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy and at the same time, rehabilitate the already distressed ones through counselling. There should be provision for proper sex education and information in homes, schools, counselling units and in fact through mounting enlightenment programmes to help children on sex issues.

Given the fact that many children are exposed to social and psychological problems, as revealed by the study, it is the opinion of the author that the Federal Government of Nigeria and non-governmental organisations should carry out independent surveys to assess the seriousness of the problem of child abuse and take urgent steps to redress it in Nigeria.

Social support network and psychotherapeutic interventions should be provided for both offenders and victims. These measures will help them to appreciate their conditions better and become well disposed to prevent further abuse. The Child Right Act which has been signed into law should be implemented by taking appropriate measures to punish offenders. The Act should also be incorporated into the school curriculum to educate children of their rights. Thus children should be encouraged to report to the appropriate bodies when their rights are violated. A separate agency should be put in place with the responsibility of detecting offenders and protecting victims from further harm or molestation as done in most developed countries of the world.

In addition, the government should improve the economic conditions of its citizens to reduce the risk factors predisposing people to engage in child abuse and neglect. These and other procedures may help lessen the tragic instances of child abuse.

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