

Broken Homes and Child Abuse

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Abstract: The study investigated the relationship between broken homes and child abuse among public secondary school students in south-west Nigeria. A descriptive research design of exploratory type was adopted for the study. A total of 1,440 public secondary school students in 36 schools from 9 Local Government areas in 3 south-western states of Nigeria were sampled for this study. Out of these students, 695 students were found to be abused and their responses formed the data that were analyzed for this study. A self-constructed questionnaire titled Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) was administered on the students after validation. The instrument has construct validity coefficient of 0.756 and a reliability coefficient of 0.83. The statistical technique used was Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result of the analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between broken homes and child abuse among these secondary school students. Based on the finding, it is recommended that focus should be made on ways to separate seriously abused children from continuously abusive parents and also on comprehensive intervention in abusive situation by private social service agencies. It is also recommended that abstinence and marriage education should be taught in schools and that counselors should look out for students from broken homes to monitor and counsel them.

Key words: Broken homes, child abuse, counselling, negligence, emotions, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse refers to the harm that is done to children. Any action which impedes the child's development should be considered as abuse. According to Royal Canadian Police (2006) child abuse is any form of physical psychological, social, emotional or sexual maltreatment of a child whereby the survival, safety, self-esteem, growth and development of the child are endangered. RCP goes further to say that there are four main types of child abuse they are neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Child abuse includes any behaviour which neglects the child's survival and development needs, causes physical or emotional injury, harassment and subject the child to measures, situation and experiences which interfere with the healthy development towards adulthood. According to UNICEF child abuse and neglect are far more common in single-parent families than in families where both parents are present.

Sedkajm and Broadhurst (1996) stated that the growing empirical evidence on child abuse reveals new alarming and distinct patterns of familiar relationship that contribute greatly to this tragedy. In addition to poverty and community environment, the rising incidence of child abuse can be linked to one more factor: whether an abused child's parents are married. Children react in different ways to the onset of divorce. Some will be extremely sad and show signs of depression and even

sleeplessness. Anxiety levels peak as they feel they are going to be abandoned or rejected by one or even both parents. Some divorce situations make the child feel lonely. This may be due to a long absence of one of the parents. No matter what the situation, the child will be affected in some ways by divorce. Some children may become psychologically scarred from the experience.

Child support payments and financial assistance place a monetary strain on one or both parents which directly affects the children negatively. This can lead to physical abuse which involves injuring a child's body by beating them, burning them or breaking their bones. Broken home can also lead to child neglect which can include physical neglect (withholding food, clothing, shelter or other physical necessities), emotional neglect (with holding love, comfort or affection) or medical neglect (withholding needed medical care) confirmed that a child is safest when his biological parents are married and least safe when his mother is cohabiting with a man other than her husband. Children are many times safer living with their biological married parents than in other family configurations. Various features of child abuse negate the United Nations Convention and OAU charter on Rights of the child. The basic principles of children's rights according to the United Nations (1989) among others are that every child has the right to live and be allowed to survive and develop every child is entitled to a name, family and nationality is entitled to adequate

rest and recreation according to his/her age and culture; every child is entitled to protection from any act that interferes with his or privacy, honor and reputation; every child is entitled to receive compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher learning, depending on individual ability. The abused children are costly investment deficits for the society. This is because they are prone to high incidence of personality disorder and lack social skills for dealing with others (Aluko, 1996). Abused children grow up as callous, insensitive adults with varied repercussions for families and society (Adediran, 2003).

Statement of the problem: In Nigeria, there has been public outcry including media campaign against the prevalent exposure of children to this avoidable social misfortune called child abuse. One observes children engaging in petty-trading and hawking for their parents/guardians when they should be in school laying solid foundation for their future. There are also cases of child prostitution in order to get money. The average school teacher today has on his hands a crisis resulting from parents abdication of their responsibilities and many teachers believe this has adversely affected the character and output of students. There are cases of dirty and tattered uniformed students stealing or begging for food, students not coming to school regularly and students sleeping during lessons almost all the time. Some of them are affected with anxiety, depression and passive or withdrawal behaviour. Some of the students engage in aggressive, disruptive, inappropriate acts or delinquent behaviour. Some seek inappropriate affection from other students. All these types of negative behaviour usually affect students academic performance.

The cause of child abuse can be traced to broken homes and having large families. A child in a broken home would not receive as much emotional, psychological and financial support as a child in a settled home. Emery (1989) noted that neglected children often are more seriously disturbed than abused children. The neglected child is treated more as if he were not there or as if his parents wished he were not there and this insidious and fundamental rejection can inflict deep psychological wounds (Fagan, 1997). According to Campbell (1932) a broken home is any home where both parents are not living together with child in a normal family relationship. The break might be due to divorce, desertion or any other cause. She went to say that the broken home has a definite effect upon the child's achievement in school. In a similar vein, Fagan (1999) documented that the root cause of poverty and income disparity is linked undeniably to the presence of marriage. Broken families earn less and experience lower level of educational achievement. Worse, they pass the prospect of meager incomes and family instability on to their children,

ensuring a continuity if not expanding cycle of economic distress. Some studies have shown a correlation between broken homes and delinquency in relation to variables such as age, sex, family structure and substances abuse (Barn-Flowers, 2002). Dissention and conflict in a marriage have been found to be important factors in the onset of delinquency among youths. Ganga *et al.* (1989) did psychosocial analysis of inmates of an approved school; the result revealed that broken home was the reason for the emotional stress which triggered antisocial behaviour. Children want to be with their parents inspite of the injustice done to them. Adult irresponsibility and lack of commitment in matters of sex, love and marriage result in massive suffering for children. Child abuse after robbing children happy childhood is contributing to the growing numbers of violent young people who diminish the freedom to live and walk around safely in the society.

Children from broken home are at great risk in terms of psychological problems. This is supported by the report of London Institute of Psychiatry (2008) which says that people from broken homes are more prone to psychotic illness such as schizophrania. This is mental illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought, emotion and behaviour; leading to withdrawal from reality and personal relationships. Abused children grow up in a world of uncertainty, inconsistency, lies, violation, pain and abandonment. Abandonment does not necessarily mean just when a child is left on his own, it also means emotional abandonment leaving a frightened young child all alone to deal with the inner turmoil brought about by abuse. Some abused children often repeat the vicious cycle by becoming abusive parents. To this end, the following research hypothesis was raised.

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between broken home and child abuse.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher used descriptive design of exploratory type. The plan of study involved the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test the hypothesis raised in the study. The target population for this study was made up of public secondary school students in south-west Nigeria who were within the age range of 9-18 years. Multistage random sampling was used in drawing out the sample. Since the study is on south west Nigeria as a whole, the researcher recognized the states, local government and schools. The researchers, therefore selected the sample in stages. Out of the six states in the south-west Nigeria, three were selected by simple random sampling technique. In each local government, four secondary schools were selected. In each school, 40 students were selected. Copies of questionnaire were given out to 1440 students in 36

schools. Exploratory method was then used. Out of these questionnaire, the researcher bought out those of abused students that is those who scored 200 and above out of the 300 score obtainable. The respondents that scored 200 and above were used in data analysis. A self-designed questionnaire called Child Abused Questionnaire (CAQ) was used for this study. Part A was designed to collect information on background characteristics of respondents; part B consisted 28 items which elicited students responses on child labour, sexual abuse, physical abuse and child neglect while part C consisted 32 items which brought out such psychosocial factors as poverty, broken home, death of parents, psychological disorder and family interaction.

The methods used in validating the instrument were face, content and construct validities. For face validation, the experts determined at face value the appropriateness of the instrument in measuring what was being studied to ascertain if the instruments elicit the intended responses on child abuse and the psychosocial factors. Expert judgments were used in determining the content validity. The experts checked the extent to which the items were representative of contents, practices and factors specified by the theoretical concept being measured. The scores of the test administration on 30 abused secondary students were correlated with that of Child Abuse and Neglected Test using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, a correlation coefficient of 0.756 was obtained. This indicated that the research instrument used (CAQ) clearly measures the same construct with CANT.

A reliability test was also carried out on 20 abused secondary students using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. On the basis of these psychometric properties, the instrument was found to be suitable for data collection. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher and the school counsellors to a sample of 1,440 students in 36 schools. Researcher's presence during administration enhanced better understanding of the items in the instruments. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion by the researcher. The data generated were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Test of hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationships between broken home and child abuse. In testing this hypothesis, the data obtained on broken home were analysed by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 shows that the mean total score of broken home is 9.36 with standard deviation of 2.25 while

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation summary on broken home and child abuse

Variables	N	X	SD	RCAL	R-table
Broken home	695	9.36	2.25	0.414	0.195
Child abuse	695	90.25	12.42		

p<0.05

the mean total score of child abuse is 90.25 with standard deviation of 12.42. Since r-calculated (0.414) is greater than r-table (0.195), the hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there is a significant relationship between broken home and child abuse.

The probable explanation for this could be found in the fact that emotional loading of the word home include the warmth of companionship, care and affectionate concern for mutual welfare ranging from provision of food to worries about physical safety. When all these are not in place, the stage is set for child abuse. In broken home, most often, responsibilities of two people turn to become only one person's responsibility; this may lead to inability to provide for the needs of the child. There is also the probability of frustration in the single parent and this could lead to maltreatment of the child indirectly. Child abuse is the opposite of child love. The married family is based deliberately on a decision by husband and wife to build their lives and family on the love they have for each other made public in a solemn contract before God and community. Such a decision has a significant impact on the incidence of child abuse. The result of this study agrees with that of Fagan (1997) which stated that child abuse is higher when that structure of family love is rejected or broken.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from the study has led the researcher to conclude that many secondary school students in south-west Nigeria experience child abuse and one of the major causes of child abuse is broken home. Fundamental changes are needed to correct the social drift toward family and community disintegration. Many of these fundamental changes must take place within the most basic of institutions the family. They must be supported by changes in local communities and reinforced by community institutions like religious bodies. These institutions and organization can have the greatest effect in re-establishing the centrality of marriage and promoting the married family unit as the best environment for raising children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Government should focus the resources of state social service agencies on ways to separate seriously abused children from continually abusive parents
- There should be promotion of comprehensive intervention in abusive situations by private social service agencies. This could be done by providing a home environment, support for the completion of education, guidance on marriage choices, friendship and companionship
- Abstinence and marriage education should be taught in school. This should include instruction in what is required to enter into and sustain a life long marriage
- Religious and community leaders should undertake the task of making the society know that marriage is the center beam of any society and it should be cherished and not rejected
- Counselor should be on the look- out for students from broken homes to monitor and counsel them

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