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## **The Influence of Child Abuse on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Primary Science in Cross River State, Nigeria (Pp 470-478)**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study was to find out the influence of child abuse on pupils academic performance in primary science. To carry out this study effectively two variables were identified for the study. These were used to formulate the research hypotheses. The design for the study was ex-post-facto. The area of study was Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of study consisted of all primary six pupils in Cross River State in the 2005/2006 school year. This was made up of 68,201 pupils from 994 primary schools in the State. The sampling procedure was stratified random sampling and the sample was 2,940 pupils selected from 49 schools. Two instruments were used: A Child*

*Abuse Questionnaire (CHAQ) and a primary science test to test pupils' academic performance. The independent t-test was used to analyze the data. The result revealed that children that were not abused perform better than their counterpart who were abused. Based on these findings some recommendations were made.*

### **Introduction**

Child abuse is not a new phenomenon in the history of man. It has been going on right from time. In Africa/Nigerian society what constitute abuse today has never been regarded as abuse. It has been seen as a way of training the child to become a well behaved, disciplined and self actualized person in society. It is a normal process that children from birth be exposed to a variety of experiences from parents, caregivers and other adults in the society. This is to enable the children acquire the necessary basic norms and skills for effective participation in the society where they belong and for their personal growth and development.

The process of acquiring these skills is sometimes stressful for the children to bear. Some parents and care givers make the condition for acquiring these skills so difficult that the children may find it difficult to cope. The condition in which children are exposed to as they try to acquire the skills to become disciplined and hardworking individuals is where the problems lies. When these conditions become over-stretched it becomes an abuse. For instance, when a child is taught the skills of becoming a farmer, he is taken to the farm, he practice these skills, and he is kept in the farm doing that same work from dawn to dusk, without any rest, or having a good meal, this becomes an abuse. Also it may be normal if a child is asked to hawk from morning to evening or before going to school he sales and immediately after school he continues until dusk. This becomes an abuse. Orere-Clifford (2004) states that children suffer from child abuse because their parents and guardian demand a great deal from them for more than the children would bear. Most children in our public primary schools find themselves in such situation most often.

Child abuse is found in all societies and social class. It is found in the rich or poor home, as well as illiterate or literate homes. The parents abuse their children by frequently using them in their farm work, trade and businesses. This is to help support the income of the home and sometimes to provide for children needs. They are sometime asked by their parents to do some menial

jobs such as house helps, cooks, baby sitters, and gardeners to help improve the income of the home.

The rich on the other hand have enough to care for their children but they exploit the children they employ as house helps and cooks. This they do by over working the servants in the daily house chores, while their own children are over pampered.

The servants or house helps work 24 hours a day, without any rest. Others do not have good food, clothes and sometimes no good place to lay their heads. Some are treated like animals, they are beaten, kicked pushed, and sometimes, hot oil, water and even acid is used on them.

Many more care called abusive names, such as good for nothing block head, etc. sometimes some are tired hands and feet and locked in a room, for hours and even days. These actions demoralize the child.

Those who go to school may not be attentive in class because of the work they do at home. The classroom may be the only place where they have a rest from such home activities so they may fall asleep in the class. They may therefore not partake in classroom activities and so may not acquire any learning.

The children of the rich parents may not be allowed to take part in the general activities in the home. They may therefore not know how to cook, wash or care generally for the home. This constitutes an abuse because the child needs to be exposed to such activities because it is certain that the child may need such knowledge in future.

The term child abuse is seen as the process by which children are exposed to maltreatments by parents or guardian. Axmaher (2004) defined child abuse as any mistreatment or neglect of the child that result in non-accidental harm or injury and which cannot be reasonably explained. Obekpa (2001) view child abuse as any condition injurious to physical or emotional health that has been inflicted by parents, guardian or other caretakers. Igbo and Ekoja (2004) defines it as a non-accidental injury inflicted on a child by a parent or guardian.

A child is said to be abused when the parents or care givers action leads to physical, emotional and sexual abuse of the child. It also involves failure of the parents to provide the necessary love and care for the child. An abuse according to Isanghedehi (2004) could be seen in three perspectives physical,

emotional, and sexual abuse. To Oniyama, Oniyama and Asamaigbo (2004), child abuse manifest in four main categories viz; physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Physical abuse refers to any contact with the body of the child, which may result in an injury. Such contact may involve beating, hitting, kicking, shaking, punching, biting or any act or omission that is not an accident but that which brings some injuries to the child's body.

Emotional abuse is any act on the part of a parents or caregiver that has the potential for or has actually caused serious emotional cognitive, mental or behavioral disorders. Emotional abuse is evident when a parent or care giver uses abusive words such as blockhead, good for nothing, a mistake, on the child or when the child is locked up in a room, tired both hands and feet, or not allowed to make friends. Mba (2003) maintained that emotional abuse implies constantly blaming the child, belittling and or berating the child, being unconcerned about the child's welfare and overtly rejection of the child by parents or caretakers or caregivers.

Sexual abuse occurs when a parent or care giver engages in appropriate sexual behaviours with the child. This may take the form of actual sexual intercourse, kissing, or fondling or genitals or either the abuser or the abused. According to Uzoezie (2004) sexual abuse occurs when an adult or older person uses his or her power over a child. The abuse may trick, bribe, threaten and if possible force a child to take part in sexual activity.

Neglect according to Okpara (2001) include inadequate feeding, shelter and lack of supervision, inadequate body care, poor clothing, poor and denial of medicinal attention and inadequate provision of educational materials and supervision. Other aspects of neglect may include letting the child live in a filthy environment and non provision of proper nourishment.

Other aspects of child abuse may include child exploitation, slavery, trafficking and abandonment. The different forms of abuse affect the child in all spheres of life including academic attainment.

It has been observed of late that the academic performance of children in public primary schools in the State is becoming low especially in subjects such as primary science. One wonders if such low academic performance in primary science is as a result of the maltreatment children are exposed to. The study therefore seeks to find out if child abuse has any influence on the academic performance of primary school pupils. Specially, the question is

does physical and emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils?

The major objective of the study is to determine the influence of child abuse on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Cross River State, specifically, the academic performance of pupils who are physically and emotionally abused.

### **Significance of the Study**

In a society where children's academic performance in most public schools is getting lower, any study which will discover some of the causes will be very relevant. Many research studies have been carried out outside of Cross River State on child abuse and its effect on pupils' academic performance. There is need therefore for such a study to be carried out in our locality with different cultural settings. The result of this study will be an added advantage to governments stand on child's right act and care, if it shows a significant influence. Parents, caregivers and the general public will find the result of this study useful, as it will reveal to them the need for effective care and protection of their children, especially the importance of providing educational needs for a higher academic performance.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated as a guide to the study:

- 1) There is no significant difference in the academic performance in primary science between pupils who are physically abused and those who are not.
- 2) Emotional abuse has no significant influence on pupils' academic performance in primary science.

### **Methodology**

The design for this study is Ex-post Facto. The study was carried out in Cross River State, Nigeria to find out the influence of child abuse on academic performance of primary school pupils in primary science.

The population for this study consisted of all primary 6 pupils in all the public primary schools in Cross River State in the 2005/2006 school year. This was made up of 68,201 pupils from 994 primary schools.

The stratified random sampling procedure was used in this study. Cross River State was stratified into three education zones in the State. Out of 994 public schools in the State 49 schools were selected, the subjects were selected

using a hat and draw method of sampling. 2,940 pupils were selected from a total population of 68,201. 2,940 pupils were therefore used for this study.

The instruments used to collect data from this study were two. A well validated questionnaire, tagged Child Abuse Questionnaire (CHAQ) and a primary science test was constructed by the researcher and validated by experts in the field of measurement. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A sought for demographic information such as age, sex, class, type of family and socio-economic status of parents. Section B was constructed based on the variables, identified for the study. These are physical abuse and emotional abuse. Each of these variables has eight items which were used to find out the rate at which the children were abused. These were rated on a four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

The second instrument was a primary science test which had 50 items. These were used to collect the data.

The instruments were administered to the subjects personally by the researcher at the different schools that were selected. The subjects were given instruction on how to go about filling the questionnaire and answering the test items.

The statistical tool employed for the study was independent t-test. This was used to assess the significant difference in performance between pupils who were abused and those who were not.

### **Findings**

This section presents the findings as a result of the data analysis in accordance to the earlier stated research hypotheses.

The result of the statistical analysis of the first hypothesis indicated that the calculated t-value (-9.33) is greater than the critical t. (1.96). This implies that significant difference existed between the two groups. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Further observation of Table 1 shows that pupils who were not physically abused had higher means performance ( $x = 61.55$ ) than pupils who were physically abused ( $x = 55.57$ ). The findings mean that pupils who do not suffer physical abuse performed significantly higher than pupils who suffer physical abuse.

The result of the second hypothesis showed that the calculated t-value (-3.35) is greater than the critical t (1.96). This means that there is a significant influence of emotional abuse on pupils' academic performance in primary science. The null hypothesis was rejected. As can be observed on table 2, the

pupils who were not emotionally abused had a higher mean performance ( $x = 60.01$ ) than pupils who were emotionally abused ( $x = 57.79$ ) it therefore mean that pupils who were not emotionally abused performed better in primary science than those who were abused.

### **Discussion**

The outcome of the statistical analysis of the two hypotheses formulated for the study indicated clearly the significant difference that exist between children who are abused and those who are not abused.

The result of the first hypothesis revealed that pupils who were not physically abused performed higher in primary science than those who were abused. The reason for this result may be that the effect of the abuse on the child may be so severe that the child may be unable to attend school for weeks or months. Such severe cases where a physically abuse persons may not be able to attend school may include burns, fracture, and brain damage. The result supports the findings of some researchers such as Awe (1999), Gaba (1998), Falaye (1998) and Oniyama, Oniyama and Asamaigbo (2004) who found that physically abused children may experience a wide range of personality disorders such as increased fears, anxiety, anger, depression, hostility and aggression. The influence of such experiences on the child may lead to lack of interest in schooling, truancy, irregularity in school attendance, and lack of concentration in class. Consequently, this may lead to poor academic performance.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that pupils who were not emotionally abused performed better in academics than pupils who were abused.

This result supports Ndifon (2004) Awe (1999) Eweniyi (2003) Bukoye (2004) and Mba (2003) who maintained that emotionally abused children showed increased depression, anger, hostility, aggression and do not have the desire for schooling. They may lack concentration, and may not have the desire to achieve basic learning skills such as reading and writing.

The explanation for this may be that emotionally abused persons are constantly worried about their condition so that most of the time they do not seem to pay attention in class and may not take active part in class or school activities.

For instance, a child who is constantly called names, or locked up in a room, or not allowed to make friends, etc would surely not pay attention in class.

Instead, he would be pre-occupied with such thoughts. This may lead to poor academic attainments.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the finding, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) That parents and caregivers should see beating, hitting, burning etc as physical abuse and not a way of discipline and so should desist from using it on their children under their care.
- 2) That abusing the child emotionally may demoralize them and may make them feel that they are of no value in the home as well as in the society.

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Table 1

<b>Group</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>
Physically abused	1279	55.57	17.04	
Not physically abused	1661	61.65	18.10	-9.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>2940</b>	<b>59.00</b>	<b>18.00</b>	

Significant at .05; df 2938; critical t = 1.96.

**Table 2**

An independent t-test analysis of influence of emotional abuse on pupils academic performance in primary science.

<b>Group</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>
Emotionally abused	1335	57.79	17.66	
Not emotionally abused	1605	60.01	18.04	-3.35*

Significant at .05; df = 2938; critical = 1.96.