

Child Battering Tendencies in Nigeria: A Complementary Approach to Child Abuse Eradication

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Abstract

Considering the pattern and manner of constitutional passages of child related laws and the contract of ambition of National Philosophy of Education in Nigeria which requires the promotion of physical, emotional and psychological development of all children, much is required from the educational sector to salvage the situation. This paper therefore identifies and describes an aspect of child abuse – child battering, with particular reference to the form and dimensions it is taking in the society for the purpose of identifying factors that predict the abuse. The path and cues that could aid in identifying potential victims and batterers are presented and it is recommended that rather than over concentrate on child abuse laws, a predictive approach that emphasizes the need to fund test instrument development for predicting child battery tendencies should be undertaken.

Introduction

Child abuse is both an old and a new phenomenon as it was widespread in an ancient Greek and Roman times when infanticide was a common practice in medieval Europe (Smith, 1998). Today, child abuse refers to a situation in which child is suffering serious physical injury inflicted by other than accidental means, is suffering harm by reason of neglect, malnutrition or several abuse, is going without necessary basic physical care or is growing up under conditions which threaten his or her physical and emotional survival (Kempe, 1980).

From the definition above, child abuse covers all kinds of physical and mental maltreatment or torture of the child battering perhaps because of the inseparable nature of cultural and religious concepts from the principles of parenting and educational of a child. Despite the above, it is still the wish of society as stated in the National Policy Education (NPE, 1998) that Nigerian education will be focused at the promotion of physical, emotional and psychological development of all children. Prevalence of child battering in the society move the wheel of educational intentions of the nation in the negative direction. Child battering will therefore form the focus of this paper particularly as it pertains to identifying the basic characteristics of potential batterers and the development of diagnostic instruments as a way of predicting the tendency.

Child Battering

Child battering could be described as a pattern of behaviour used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. Battering happens when one person believes he is entitled to control another (Celebrity bodies).

Battering is an act that escalates. It often begins with behaviours like threats (I'll beat you) name calling (Stupid), violence (such as pinching a fist) and damage to objects. It may escalate to restraining, pushing, slapping, biting and throwing. Finally it may become life-threatening with serious behaviours such as choking, breaking bones or the use of weapons. Unfortunately for the educators, the concept is usually treated with reservations and mixed feelings because most of the players are product of cultures or religious that encourage acts such as flogging and spanking. Many still cling tenaciously to the dogma-spare the rod and spoil the child. Some quote from the holy books for them to justify battering. This condition therefore highlights the prevalence of what the Allina Foundation called child maltreatment in our schools, home and society. Moreover, each school child is from the society, he comes from a home and attends school. Where child battering continues unabated, there is bound to be multi-type maltreatment which reflects the postulations of Fox and Gilbert (1994) that 32% of physically abused respondents reported other type of child maltreatment Acts.

Types and Specific Acts of Sa Tiering in the Society

From a wider and psychological point of view, battering could be in various forms. Physical battering involves physical attacks or aggression on the victim (Child) and such attacks can range from bruising or murder. Some times too it begins with what is excused as trivial contacts which develops into more frequent and serious attacks. All kinds of ritual killings, incisions, tribal marks are child battering acts.

Sexual abuse is a different kind of abuse entirely but an aspect of it is subsumed under child battering as a, result of the violence involved. Where a woman is forced to have sexual intercourse with her abuser, violence, physical attacks often ensue.

Psychological battering includes constant verbal abuse, harassment, isolating child from friends and families, deprivation of physical and economic resources and destruction of personal property of the child. A child is as welt "mentally scalded" when his locally constructed model is destroyed or when launch is diverted for the reconstruction of what he has mistakenly destroyed.

Battering could also be viewed from the standpoint of location or abuser. In terms of location, Battering could take place at home. This includes those carried out by parents, siblings, neighbours, brothers and sisters, criminals. In the environment children could be abused by peers or terrorists. At school children can be battered by the teacher, bullies or senior students abusers are batterers and they include all those mentioned earlier. In the typical Nigerian set up which includes the environment, home and school, some of the following battering instances have been heard or noticed. Children who wet their beds are forced to urinate by standing over fire thereby at risk of burning. Application of pepper on incisions made at a child's back or any sensitive part of the body when parents' money is stolen piece(s) of meat disappear from the pot. Making child drink kerosene as punishment. Plunging child's hands into hot water to check misbehaviour. Locking and beating adopted children for days without food for minor offences or to extract "Confessions" in cases of allege witchcraft of failure in guardians business. Making student/child dig unprofitable holes on the field on a sunny day. Flogging the child deliberately on a sensitive part where the scar/pain

will be excruciating. Adoption and maltreatment of the child in retaliation of parent's offence or business (Women in Nigeria, 1992; UNICEF 2001).

From the above, it is appropriate to begin to ask of the implications of these dimensions of child battering on the previous generation and measures to be taken to salvage children from *impending* trauma. In whatever way the salvaging will be pursued, it is clear that rather than concentrating on outlawing abuses generally, the need to identify and "focus the potential abusers (batterers) in this case is more paramount.

Implications and Effect of Child Battering

Having described child battering, for school age children in particular who need to have positive attitudes towards their studies and interacts with school environment, poor mental and physical health resulting from battering would be inimical to national goals of education. The following will therefore be likely effects of battering on the individual child in Nigerian schools: life long trauma or negative experience; poor academic achievement; drop out of school; permanent scar/permanent disability; death/suicide; disregard for value of life; learns how to batter and poor mental, physical and emotional health.

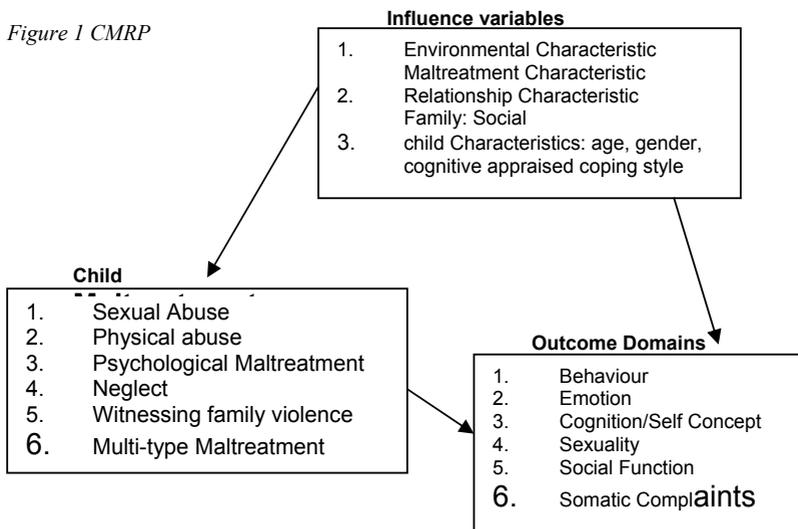
Obviously, children liable to the above effects require some protection either by the law or prognostic devices. A step towards a predictive approach would require ideas from various research efforts, models and causes of child battering.

Characteristics and Models

It is worth noting that in the course of observation of battering cases, generally abusers reasons for battery are spurious and almost plausibly deceptive and therefore lest any study would lay claim to having exhausted all causes of child abuses. This notwithstanding, more meaningful interventions in terms of studies have been carried out. Anakwe (2003) reported that most abusers are males though recent evidence suggests that frequency of abuse by females may be significantly underestimates while it was found that abusive parents are typically young, come from socio economic levels and are more likely than non abusing parents to have a history of mood disorder, alcohol and drug abuse or personality disorder (Famularo et al. 1992. Kelleher et al, 1994, Windle et al 1995).

Women in Nigeria (1992) categorized parents who are guilty of child battering into groups of parents with wider tress, financial worries, unemployed or marital crisis. Daryl and McCabe (1998) summarily produced a "Child Maltreatment; Risk and Protection (CMRP)" model in such a manner that the contribution of each form of child abuse and neglect to observed adjustment problems is accounted for within the CMRP model.

Figure 1 CMRP



The model as it is applicable in this content exemplifies six domains as outcomes of abuse. The celebrity brides (2004) identifies the home as a primary sources of training the “batterers” and that in all cultures; the perpetrators are most commonly the men. Many other studies have similar findings and views, however what is important for school age children is their rescue from battery by applying culture fair concepts of the studies and views.

The Need for a Predictive Measuring Instrument

Already, one of the approaches at discouraging child abuse (child battery inclusive) which is a giant stride is reflected in the intents of not only the National Government but also OAU. The African member state of the organization of African Unity approved of the charter entitled” African Charter on the Rights and welfare of the child” and article xvi addresses the protection of African child against abuse and torture (UNICEF). But as concerned educators would observe, Osoba (2004) wrote that it is regrettable that after almost 14 years after, Nigeria children are no better off. The National Assembly has asked the state house of assembly to pass the child Rights Act thereby undermining the objectives and wish of the OAU and once more putting the moral, physical and psychological development of all children in doubt.

Although the problem could be tackled by legislation, predictive approach would be a complementary approach towards discouraging child battering in the society. On of such is to develop educational instruments for predicting battery tendencies so that follow up activities can be undertaken to salvage the potential batterers and children prone to battering.

Predictors of Child Battering

To begin to develop a measuring instrument for child battering the causes and characteristics of the trait should be considered. While various dimensions and models are being sought, adopted items should be relevant to the society where it will be used. One useful aspect of the model is the domains of physical abuse of the child which serves as a good guide.

Path: To generate predictors of child battering which will serve as clues to potential abuse, the path emanating from, “where” of the abuse could be starting point.

| Table 1 | Path Of Child Battering |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| HOME | Siblings/Adopted Children |
| | Real Parents/Guardians |
| SCHOOL | Male/Female teachers |
| | School rules |
| ENVIRONMENT | Status |
| | Government |
| | Beliefs |

From the above table, instruments to be generated, should focus an aspect of “Where” of the abuse at a time and thereafter “Path” of the abuse considering the unit of the predictor(s) examples could be developing an instrument to predict child battering tendencies of school (Boarding) rules or domestic violence. The purpose of applying the path consideration is predicted on the fact that despite children experience multi-type abuse, they may not be taking place at home, school and environment concurrently. Discrimination against the place of abuse will help in prediction.

Predictors: From the theoretical considerations of child battering, some cues for detecting potential abusers were identifies, classified and observed. A four point scale was designed and 80 persons (40 Female, 40 Male) of mixed characteristics who admitted having battery experience(s) rated each of the cues as very relevant, relevant, not quite relevant and irrelevant. Attaching a maximum score of 4 and minimum of 1, the rating was done and collated using percent scores.

Familial: Marital crisis/dysfunctional (75%), financial pressures/economy (90%), parenting style (81%), family planning (74%)

Psychological/Psychopathological: Temperament (94%), Aggression (85%), Violent (79%), Frustration (86%), Stress (73%), Drug Abuse (96%), Alcoholism (88%), Mental health (98%), Value for life (animal) (83%), Physique (73%), Envy (36%), Domineering (68%), Communication skills (79%), Self esteem (51%), Academic performance (28%), Exploitation (51%), Lying (45%), Humor (70%), Armed (91%).

Socio - Cultural: Cultural (83%), Religious beliefs (52%), Socio-Economic stators (68%),

From the observations, cues bearing a score of less than 50% fall within factors not relevant to the prediction of child battering and may not be relevant for the development

of battery instruments. For the sake of proceeding to the stage of instrument blue print production, the domains of physical abuse should be used and one of such is the child physical abuse outcome domains by Daryl and McCabe (1998). Which covers behaviour, emotion, Cognitions, social functioning and somatic complaints.

Recommendation and Conclusion

From the foregoing the following recommendations will aid the campaign against child battering. The individual society Non Governmental Organization and Government should in the Nigerian case dissipate less energy on outlawing child abuse but rather seek vigorously the development of standardized educational instruments for prognosis and diagnosis of potential victims. As a rider to the above, since the paper posited that variety of instruments are required to predict child battering in school, at home and in the environment, it will not be out of place to recommend that government and non governmental organization should fund and encourage instrument construction which are culture fair. Provision of basic educational facilities will put every child at a vantage position of being reached in cases of child battering prediction and treatment. Teachers at all levels particularly those operating at primary and secondary school levels (Government and private owned) should be trained in the use of standardized educational materials and counselling for sake of their task.

In conclusion, child battery occurs openly and secretly, predictive approach at detecting potential victims and batterers can burrow through the bottle necks created by abusers and their sympathizers. It is a capital intensive approach but comparatively, it shall be cost effective and long lasting solution to a major problem of the Nigerian child.

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