

**EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE JUVENILE
COURT IN THE PROTECTION OF ABUSED AND
NEGLECTED STUDENTS AT THE ZONAL SOCIAL
WELFARE AGENCY IN IBADAN, NIGERIA.**

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to evaluate the activities of the juvenile court in the protection of abused and neglected children at the Zonal Social Welfare Agency in Ibadan, Nigeria. The major objective of the study was to find out if the goals for the establishment of the court are being met. The target population for the study was mostly children who had suffered from one form of abuse or the other. Fifty people were used as sample for the study. The method of data collection was through questionnaire administered personally by the researcher. Oral interviews were also conducted for both staff and the respondents. The responses collected, are scored and analyzed using chi-square statistics. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made on how well and how best the government can discourage child abuse and neglect through workshops, seminars, radio and television programmes.

Introduction

It is recognized that children have certain rights which are guaranteed to promote their health and development in order to ensure an improved quality of life. When these rights are not respected and are infringed upon, such children are subjected to neglect and abuse. Child abuse and neglect are terms which have been occurring with alarming frequency in the literature of Social Work, Sociology, Psychology and World Health Organization documents. Leavitt, (1974) noted that each year in the United States, between 60,000 - 6.5 million children aged 6 and above, are abused and neglected and require social care. This situation is the same or worse in developing countries.

The International Labour Organization declared that 250

million children world wide are victims of child labour. There is dire need to look into how juvenile institutions in Ibadan can minimize the menace of child abuse and neglect within its area of jurisdiction since it cannot be eradicated completely from the society. Thus, the need to exploit ways of combating this trend in a developing country such as Nigeria becomes necessary. Nigeria is one of the African Nations that endorsed the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. It is against this background that the need for all and sundry to work on activities that will combat child neglect and abuse in Nigeria society becomes mandatory.

Juvenile courts are established to care for abandoned and neglected children and abused cases which are reported to them. The court consists of a judge or magistrate and men/women of experience and proven integrity who are appointed to take appropriate decisions on each case. The juvenile court is well assisted by social workers to enforce the law, especially in matters that involve uncooperative clients. However, parents sometimes report cases of neglect or custody to the social welfare agency. When this is done, the agency usually sends a probation officer to investigate the matter and come up with substantial evidence which is presented to the juvenile court for necessary action.

Juvenile court officers regularly assist social workers to carry out raids on abused children especially those that hawk in the street, under aged bus conductors, pure water sellers and bread boys and girls. Such raids have been of immense benefits, not only to the society, but to parents who spend a lot of money and time in search of their lost children. Among such children are those who could no longer trace their homes and have been declared lost and wanted. Most often, many of them absconded from home and are afraid to return home for one reason and another. The police take such found children to the juvenile welfare clinic and later transfer them to Remand Home and later re-unite them with their respective parents.

In this study, the focus would be on children whose ages range between 0-18 years because children in the age range are mostly affected.

Statement of the Problem

There are several cases of child abuse and neglect ranging from abandonment, and exploitations, hawking of goods in the street which expose the girls among them to sexual abuse. In Ibadan, other forms of abuse are:- depriving a child of material care, affection, good education, emotional, physical and moral upbringing, to mention just a few.

According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1997), 16 million children aged below 13 years are working in Africa. In Nigeria, phenomenon of child labour manifest in various forms such as house helps to the privileged class, hawking of goods and also employing children to beg with professional adult beggars. It is also manifested in building, transportation and in agricultural sectors.

Findings from empirical studies show that children employed as shop assistants, usually boys often sleep in the shops located mainly in market places which open between 7 am to 9 pm daily. Throughout the day, the shop assistants may be involved in carrying heavy merchandise. This is very common in major Nigerian cities. Some other children especially girls become domestic helpers where they do very strenuous jobs (Ebigho, 1990; Okehialam, 1984). Some children are bread winners in their families. One of the risky activities children do to meet their family needs is street trading. Street trading is very hazardous for children because of the risk of automobile accidents and sexual harassment for the girls. Oloko, (1989), however stated that this phenomenon is encouraged in the Northern part of Nigeria because it serves as a training ground for marriage for young girls. Other form of abuse which exposes the children to diseases includes teen or early marriage common in the northern part of Nigeria. This practice causes high incidence of HIV/AIDS and other STD's in Northern Nigeria (Ejikeme, (2000).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To find out the demographic characteristics of reported cases of child abuse and neglected at the Zonal Welfare Office, Iyaganku, Ibadan.
- ii. To investigate if the absence of parental care influences the level of anxiety of neglected children.
- iii. To determine if parental care increases the personal problems of the neglected children.
- iv. To investigate if child abuse and neglect will influence victims' self esteem.

Review of Related Literature

Incidents of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nigeria

Generally, child abuse and neglect can be seen as maltreatment on a child by the parents and may result in denial of the child's right to develop physically, mentally and socially. Child abuse and neglect differ from culture to culture.

Many children experience this problem. It cuts across many social and cultural backgrounds. It means different things to different people. What constitutes child abuse or neglect to a particular group may not be the same in another group. Child abuse and neglect may be deliberate act by a parent which may harm the child's social, physical and psychological needs. There are several categories of abuse which include emotional and sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, fractures and injuries, poisonous acts etc (Meadow 1997). The lack of interaction between parents and child constitutes emotional neglect. Sexual abuse is any act of sexual nature performed upon or with a child presumably by a parent or caretaker without child's consent and understanding.

The problem of child abuse and neglect is as old as mankind. In the Holy Bible, it is reported that Jesus Christ rebuked his disciple who tried to prevent little children from coming to Him "suffer the little children and forbid them not to come to me for such is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt: 19:4). The mass killing of infants by Pharaoh and Herod as recorded in the Holy Bible during the period of the birth of Moses and Jesus respectively also showed that child abuse has been with mankind from the time of our fore-fathers. In the Northern part of Nigeria, Ejikeme (2000) listed various forms by which children are abused, all in the guise of culture. Some of the girls are forced into early marriage. Abandonment, childhood sexual violence, street begging etc. are all considered as way of life, since the state does not do anything to discourage them. These acts would continue, not minding the effect on these children and the society (Ejikeme, 2000). The giving away of very young female teenagers in marriage to old men of the same age with their fathers among the Northerners of Nigeria is a glaring form of child abuse. Other forms of child abuse include hawking in the street by young girls and boys. This is prevalent among the low income earners of the society. The killing of twins and maiming of children perceived to be "Ogbanjes" or "Abiku" are all forms of child abuse. The given

out of children by parents as house boys and maids to privileged class is another form of child abuse. Female circumcision as practiced among some cultures in Nigeria constitutes gross dehumanization and abuse of the child.

In the traditional African societies, wayward and delinquent children were promptly identified and reported to appropriate authorities and dealt with accordingly by community leaders, elders or parents/relations of such children. Communal living meant that a child is the responsibility of the whole village. Hence children's unruly behaviour could not extend beyond certain level.

In Nigeria today, Remand Homes, Approved Schools and Borstal Institute have been established in accordance with the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Law to take care of children in vulnerable circumstances who fall between the ages of 6-17 years while children below age 6 are taken care of at the Motherless Babies Homes or Orphanages. Decisions by which these children are admitted into these Institutes are usually taken at the Juvenile Courts. Categories of children in vulnerable circumstances are:

1. Children in need of care, protection and supervision
2. Children who are beyond parental control
3. Care and custody of infants whose parents are not married.

Proceedings at the Juvenile Courts are initiated by authorized persons; e.g. the Police, Social Workers, Probation Officers of Local Government Authority.

Various treatment approaches are used in the Juvenile Courts. Some of them include: probation, parole, juvenile procedures or diversion, individual and family counseling, group therapy, addiction treatment, alternative education programmes, foster care, residential treatment, vocational education, training and placement services, runaway shelters, and therapeutic services for abusive parents.

The philosophy of the juvenile courts is that the courts should be structured to act in the best interest of the child. Hence juvenile courts have a treatment and rehabilitation orientation that sometimes dominates its adjudicative function. In adult criminal proceedings, the focus is on specific crime but the focus of juvenile courts is often on the psychological, physical and emotional needs of the defendant as opposed to the child's specific guilt.

The juvenile court is a sub-division of the superior court and has original jurisdiction in all matters involving minors (youth

under age eighteen). It was established for the purpose of hearing and determining cases relating to children or young persons. In line with this, the juvenile court stands the task of an assessor for provision for treatment of those in trouble who come to its notice. The juvenile court is under the same scrutiny as every other court in the land and it must be conducted in a way which must satisfy that scrutiny on all courts and on all occasions.

The magistrate who is appointed by judicial service commission is the chairman in the juvenile court and presides over all sittings. A court session is made up of the magistrate sitting with such persons from the panel not being more than two in number out of which at least one would be a woman. These panel members, however, have to be of high integrity, reputable, eminent and intelligent members of the society. A probation officer at least is attached to the juvenile court for effective operation. A child can be brought by the guardian or apprehended by a police officer. Once the apprehended subject is a juvenile offender, his case must not be treated by the police, hence he should be handed over to a probation officer.

Furthermore, no person other than the members and officers of the court and the parties to the case (the subject and the parents and guardians, their solicitors and counsel, and other persons directly concerned in the case) shall except by leave of such court be allowed to attend.

Confidentiality is a strong and prominent ethical principle of the profession. No other person is therefore expected to publish name, address, school, photography, information or anything likely to lead to the identification of the child or young person before a juvenile court except with the permission of the court.

The juvenile court in getting the subject corrected may counsel, encourage or even lash him to ensure that the ungovernable behaviour such as the one undergoing treatment is not repeated. However, if the offence of the subject is due to laxity on the part of the parents or guardians, they are usually counseled and warned against future occurrence. Having done this, if the subject is adamant to correction or if all corrective measures recommended by the juvenile court fail, then the court has the power to send the subject to an approved school. The officers of the approved school become the parents and or guardians to the subject.

Hypotheses

Ho1: Absence of parental care will not significantly influence the level of anxiety of neglected children.

Ho2: Lack of parental care will not significantly increase the personal problems of neglected children.

Ho3: Child abuse and neglect will not influence the victim's self esteem.

Methodology

The research design used for the study was - ex-post facto. The population consisted of all cases of child abuse and neglect referred to the Juvenile court from the Zonal Welfare Office during 2002/2003. Here, purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 respondents, from children involved in the cases at both the Remand Home and Juvenile court in Ibadan. Data was collected through structured questionnaire and oral interview. Simple percentages and X^2 statistics were used to analyze the data.

Findings

The characteristics of the respondents are presented thus:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
6-10	10	20%
11-14	25	50%
15-18	15	30%
Total	50	100%
Sex		
Male	20	40%
Female	30	60%
Total	50	100%
Religion		
Islam	26	52%
Christianity	24	48%
Others	-	-
Total	50	100%
Education		
Primary	20	40%
Secondary	30	60%
Total	50	100%

From the above analysis, the age levels of children that are mostly abused and neglected fall within 8 and 20. They are mostly those within their early or late adolescent development. According to a psychologist, this is a period of storm and stress in the life of adolescent, Bakare (1993).

At such age, proper care needs to be given so that they would not waste away in the community as a result of poor parental upbringing and neglect. From the above analysis, one would note that children that are mostly neglected are at the peak of their development. This is the time for them to develop and contribute their quota to the development of their society. Instead of being given adequate attention, the reverse turns out to be the case.

Result also showed that 60% of female children involved in the study are mostly abused and neglected. There are different and various ways at which girls, especially are being abused. For example:

- i. Girls are given out in marriage to old men of their fathers' age.
- ii. Many of them are lured into prostitution for financial and material gratification against their conscience which is now being referred to as child trafficking in Child's Right Act/Law.
- iii. They are equally given out as house helps as nannies and house maids to the well to do and the privileged class in the society without seeking their consent.

Apart from the above, the female folks are sexually harassed by male teachers in secondary schools and lecturers in tertiary institutions, Paludi (1988).

Most of the respondents reflect the number of children that are victims of abuse and neglect as reported at the Zonal Welfare Office. This means that majority of children hawking in the streets and major roads are either in primary or secondary schools. 40% of the respondents are in different primary schools while 60% of them are in different secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis.

The magnitude of abuse on our children who are the future leaders appears uncomfortable. If this current trend is not addressed then there would be no hope for future leaders of our country. This is because education is the bedrock of development in any given society.

Although, the percentage drops at higher level of education, the facts remains that government needs to address the problem of child abuse and neglect within and outside the state.

Results:

Hypothesis One: Absence of parental care would not significantly influence the level of anxiety of the neglected children.

Table 2: X² Contingency Table on Parental Care and Level of Anxiety of Neglected Children

Ho	Calculated Value	Df	Table Value	P
4	74.11	9	26.92	0.05

Decision Rule: Reject Ho if X² calculated value is greater than the table value but if otherwise accept Ho. Since the calculated value X² (74.11) is greater than the table value of 26.92 at 0.005 level of significance, the null hypothesis stated above is therefore rejected. This implies that lack of parental care would significantly influence the level of anxiety of abused and neglected children.

Hypothesis 2: Absence of parental care would not significantly influence the personal problems of the neglected children.

Table 3: X² Contingency table on parental care of neglected children and personal problems.

Ho	Calculated Value	Df	Table Value	9
2	52.73	12	21.03	.0.05

Decision Rule: Reject Ho if X² calculated value is greater than the table value. If otherwise, accept Ho since calculated X² value of 52.73 is greater than the table value of 21.03 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis stated above is therefore rejected.

This implies that absence of parental care would significantly influence the personal problems of the abused and neglected children.

Hypothesis 3: Child abuse and neglect would significantly influence the level of the victim's self-concept in the society.

Table 4: X² contingency table on respondents' self concept in the Society

Ho	Calculated Value	Df	Table Value	P
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3	79.88	12	21.03	<0.05
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Decision Rule: Reject H_0 if X^2 calculated value is greater than the table value but if otherwise, accept H_0 . The null hypothesis stated above is rejected since the calculated X^2 value is 79.88 is greater than the table of 21.03 at 0.05 level of significantly. This implies that child abuse and neglect would significantly influence the level of the victims self concept in the society.

Discussion

The hypothesis stated above showed that lack of parental care would significantly influence the level of anxiety of the neglected children. The result showed that the abused children experienced a higher level of anxiety than those not abused. This finding is not strange in the light of what previous literature on abused and neglected children. Leavitt, (1974) observed that many battered children believed their punishment is deserved, hence they keep mute when interviewed by those who might help and they therefore develop negative self-images. The second hypothesis stated above also indicates that lack of parental care would not significantly influence the personal problems of the neglected children.

The finding revealed that lack of parental care would have a significant influence on the personal problems of the neglected children. It is true that the stressful conditions in the family background of the abused and neglected children as well as other factors could cause much stress. Under these circumstances, they take advantage of their personality attributes to make friends with people who seem to care. In the process, they gain love and friendship from outsiders, some of them might be criminals. Bakare (1993) in line with this finding, also observed that adolescents combine physical and biological development with psychological and sexual which makes the period particularly stressful for them. This situation could be more stressful when the children experience lack of parental care at this period thus compounding their personal problems and ability to cope effectively.

The third hypothesis stated that child abuse and neglect would significantly influence the level of the victims' self concept in the society. The result showed that the respondents' level of self concept is too low. This finding supports Ejikeme (2000) who found out that girl-child prostitution and trafficking enhance the development of psychological problems such as frustration, low self-concept, feelings of insecurity and inferiority. It is obviously

not a strange phenomenon that the neglected children at Remand Home expressed a negative self-concept. The low self-concept expressed by the children could also be examined in relation to the findings of Bakare (1993). In his study which investigated some of the family based psychological factors responsible for the development of behaviour in relation to Nigerian children found that children who have low self concept within their families tend to be delinquent.

He also asserted that children, whose self-concept within their family is low, make poor social adjustment and avoid social contacts and situations. The finding of the study, which demonstrated that maternals' deprivation experienced by the children, has adverse effect on their personal growth. He called this a challenge to the society. The relationship of the mother today with the child requires a re-appraisal. The findings of this study reveal that child-mother continued relationship helps the child's mental health. Apart from those caused by death and sickness, which separate the child; all other causes should be prevented. Establishment of family marriage guidance clinics would help to counsel families doomed for divorce or staggering on the verge of imminent collapse.

Recommendation

The reporting of neglect and abused needs to be greatly improved. All the states in the country need to have strong reporting legislation thus, making it possible for the affected children and their families to get help.

Juvenile Courts in the country should take into consideration the fact that both the parents and the children have rights that must be respected and protected. There should be collaboration between the social workers and the juvenile court to avoid confusion in the interpretation of their duties.

Improved medical care must be provided for children who have been subjected to neglect and abuse. The three levels of government in the country must make it mandatory for parents to seek medical attention for children who have been abused.

Trained personnel are needed to provide the much needed services. In Nigeria, there are very few trained social workers; most of them are Diploma holders from polytechnics and universities. Only three Universities in the country offer social work courses at the bachelors level while only one University offers a Master of Social Work Degree course in the country. On-the-job training must be provided for the workers to furnish them with current skills, knowledge and principles in the field of social work to meet

global challenges and best practices.

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