

Parental Neglect and Child Abuse on Child Development in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State

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Abstract— *The study assessed parental neglect and child abuse in child development in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. Specifically the study was designed to examine parental responsibility towards their child, examine areas of child neglect and abuse, identify factors associated with parental neglect and child abuse and suggest social work intervention techniques in ameliorating parental neglect and child abuse in the study area. Purposive sampling technique was used to get information from 50 respondents. Collected data were analysed using percentage, mean score and regression analysis. Findings showed that the areas of parental responsibilities were: provision of food, clothing, healthcare and shelter, counseling in sex, career and friends, training to instill moral values. Areas of child neglects and abuse are street hawking, maltreatment, use of internet without guidance and lack of proper supervision. Factors associated with parental neglect and abuse are polygamy and joblessness on the part of parents. Social work intervention techniques are provision of rehabilitation centres for neglected and abused children. The study recommends that the media should promote programmes that deal on childcare and the dangers of child neglect.*

Keywords— *Parental Neglect, Child Abuse, Port Harcourt Metropolis.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Parental neglect is the inability of the parents of a child to provide the necessary materials and experience needed for the full potential development of the child. [1] defined child neglect as a condition in which a caretaker responsible for the child either deliberately or by extraordinary inattentiveness permits the child to experience avoidable present suffering and or fails to provide one or more of the ingredients generally deemed essential for developing a person's physical and intellectual capacities. This was buttressed by [3] who saw child neglect as the lack of adequate physical and medical care for the child, exposure to

cruel and abusive treatment, improper supervision and controlled exploitation for monetary purposes, unlawfully keeping him from school and exposing him to criminal or immoral influence [8]

The obvious outcome of child neglect is child abuse. Neglect is the most common form of child abuse. A child may be left hungry or dirty, without adequate clothing, shelter, supervision, medical or health care. By the pluralist, protectionist and romantic concept of the child, every child neglected is vulnerable to abuse. Abuse and neglect can hardly be separated since the child will be exposed to a high degree of negative socio-cultural factors in the environment. [1] associated child neglect with child abuse. According to him, children that are neglected are at high risk of not meeting the expected standard behavior and are more likely to participate in illegal or antisocial behavior. He was of the view that abuse could be physical, emotional or sexual. Physical abuse include all acts that cause physical injury to the child, sexual abuse involves all sexual acts that provide sexual gratification either emotionally or financially to the perpetrator, such as sexual acts with the child, using the child for prostitution, phonographic displays and other forms of sexual exploitations. Emotional abuse may be in form of verbal assault and other omissions or commissions that cause psychological imbalance to the child in the same way. The National Exchange Club Foundation of United State of America identified two types of child neglect, namely: Physical neglect and Educational neglect.

Child neglect and abuse has become a global social problem. In Nigeria, though there is no reliable statistics, the phenomena may not be less alarming. A visit to Lagos and major cities in Nigeria will drive the evidence home to the notice of every good observer. Under Eko and other bridges in Lagos, it is a common sight to see many children abandoned by their parents and these children wander under the bridges as their new found homes. In many slums in and around Port Harcourt metropolis such as, Diobu and Town

axis of the old Port Harcourt, many children have become street children wandering from street to street without any form of education or parental care. In fact, [9] succinctly described these categories of children and their conditions: as children forced to make out a living in the informal sector: on the street as beggars or as domestic servants. Some work in the informal sector under unsafe, unhealthy and inhuman conditions as labourer. Child workers abound in markets and garages, among others as porters and messengers. There are many children with disabilities hidden from the public view. There are children traded like slaves into foreign lands. Some children are disadvantaged simply because they belong to stigmatized groups, example the Osus in Abia and Imo State. In Port Harcourt metropolis which is the capital of Port Harcourt City Local Government Area, there are many cases of children who have been forced out of their parental homes without any form of parental care. Some are given to other families as domestic servants. In such foster homes, they may be used as hawkers of various wares ([2]; [7]). Some serve as baby nurses. Many children of school age are not in school. Many young boys and girls have become motor park touts. It is now a regular news item that some children are lost and have become the commodities of trade by child traffickers. Many young teenage girls have become a ready business for people who send them to Europe for prostitution and force labour ([6]; [5]).

Researches in medical science have shown that experiences to which the child is exposed in the early years of its life influence how the child's brain develops. Children need the expression of love and affection from their parents. They need the companionship and communication of their parents. Researchers have proved that child neglect predisposes children to dangers that transform them into adult criminals. Neglect can affect a child's physical, social and emotional development. It destroys the inner potentials of the child and increases the chances of poverty, diseases and anti-social behavior during adult age. Social workers in foster homes report regular cases of babies abandoned in refuse dumps, bushes and uncompleted buildings. A visit to night clubs and street corners in the metropolis at night will indicate the high incidence of prostitution, drug abuse and all sorts of illicit trade by teenagers. Police stations today receive regular complaints of teenage domestic violence in many homes.

Child upbringing has become the focus of moral panic among parents all over the world. The impact of globalization and modern communications technology including industrial work has thrown a negative current into the family institution. Many fathers and mothers no longer play their traditional mothering and fathering roles in the family. Therefore the study aimed to analyze and identify

causes on of child abuse and how it has affected the development of the child that resulted to child neglect and abuse in Port Harcourt. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. examine parental responsibility towards their children in the study area;
- ii. examine areas of child neglect and abuse;
- iii. identify the factors associated with parental neglect and child abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis; and
- iv. Suggest social work intervention techniques in ameliorating parenting neglect and child abuse.

II. METHODOLOGY

The area of study was Port Harcourt metropolis which is the capital city of Rivers State, Nigeria. Economically, Port Harcourt is the oil-rich zone of the hydrocarbon industry in Nigeria and the major producer of Petro-chemical and natural resources which are the major support of the Nigerian economy. Following the figures of the recent 2006 population census, Port Harcourt is made up of 541,115 persons with a male population of 276,464 persons and a female population of 264,651 persons. The whole population is circumscribed within a land area of 10,432 square kilometres, Road construction and other human activities are centred on the scarce land resources within Port Harcourt because the entire state is occupied by water and swamp the only true urban settlement. Multi stage sampling technique was employed. First, was the division of Port Harcourt metropolis into ten zones (strata). Secondly, purposive sampling of was used to select fifty children that are neglected and abused by their parents from the ten areas in Port Harcourt metropolis. Primary data were collected through the administration of structured questionnaires by hand to the respondents. Structured questionnaire was prepared to cover the objectives. The material was prepared in sections. Section A took care of the demography characteristics of the respondents while sections B, C and D were prepared to cover the stated objectives. Descriptive statistical parameters such as tables, percentages, ratios, charts and cross tabulations were applied to show perception scores and relationships among variables and chi-square measure was used to determine the degree of correlation between the key variables.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parental Responsibilities to Children

In the aspect of parental responsibilities to children in Port Harcourt metropolis, the result in table 1 revealed that provision of basic needs like food, shelter and clothes was (100%) followed by education (94.0%), watching children do school homework, read, television programme viewed

(92.0%), counseling in sex, career and friend (92.0%), training children to learn how to cook, wash, dress and cleanliness (90.0%). Meeting children health needs (90.0%), training to instill moral values (84.0%) and being role models to their children (80.0%). Masglow’s theory suggests that the

most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire motivation and so the basic needs of the children must be met by parent because they are obligated to do so and to avoid raising delinquent children and adult criminals.

Table.1: Percentage distribution of parental responsibilities to children

S/NO	Parental Responsibilities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Provision of food, clothing, ,shelter	50	100.0
2	Health	45	90.0
3	Education	47	94.0
4	Training to instill moral values	42	84.0
5	Be a role model to your child	40	80.0
6	Counseling in sex, career, friends	46	92.0
7	Training the child to learn how to cook, wash, cleanliness, dress	45	90.0
8	Watching the child to do school homework, read, television programmes viewed	46	92.0

Source: Field survey, 2016

Multiple Responses

From the result in table 2, f-tab (18.13542) while the f-cal (4.300949) showing that f-tab is greater than f-cal. F-tab (18.14) > f- cal (4.31). The p – value is. 0.000321 which is less than the probability value of 0.05 (P<0.05) indicating the probability value (0.05) is greater than the p-value (0.000321). This means that it is significant and since f-tab >

f – cal, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted showing that there is a positive relationship between parental responsibility and child neglect/abuse. This means when parents do not perform their parental obligations to their wards/children there wards /children will be neglected.

Table.2: ANOVA of Relationship between parents responsibility and Child neglect/abuse

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	4529.803	1	4529.803	18.13542	0.000321	4.300949
Within Groups	5495.084	22	249.7765			
Total	10024.89	23				

Source: Field data, 2016

P<0.05

Areas of Child neglect and abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Concerning the areas of child neglect and abuse in Port Harcourt metropolis, the result in table 3 revealed that turning children to be beggars with a grand mean of (\bar{x} =2.80), followed by maltreatment of children may cause them emotional, physical and mental damage (\bar{x} =2.74), when children are not guided on the use of internet (2.72), parents not always around and leaving children at the mercies of house help (2.68), children who are deprived of food, clothing and shelter may become delinquent and adult

criminals (2.62) and when adequate medical attention is not given to a sick child, the child may die or sustain permanent deformity (2.58), flogging children to inflict injuries and even deformation (2.56), children sent on street hawking can fall victim of abuse by unscrupulous men and women (2.56), children who are not properly supervised may join bad gangs and learn bad habits such as Indian hemp smoking, alcohol abuse and cultism (2.56), child’s feelings are not respected, the child may lose parental control and join wrong peers who may have negative influence on the child (2.51).

Table.3: Mean distribution of Child neglect and abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/N	Child neglect and abuse	Mean score (\bar{x})
1	Children sent on street hawking can fall victim of abuse by unscrupulous men and women	2.56
2	When children are not guided on the use of internet	2.72
3	Turning children to be beggars	2.80
4	Maltreatment of children may cause them emotional, physical and mental damage	2.74
5	Children not sent to school or for skill acquisition have higher chances of becoming delinquents	2.62
6	Children who are not properly supervised may join bad gangs and learn bad habits such as Indian hemp smoking, alcohol abuse and cultism	2.56
7	Children who are deprived of food, clothing and shelter may become delinquents and adult criminals	2.62
8	When adequate medical attention is not given to a sick child, the child may die or sustain permanent deformity	2.58
9	Lack of parental support and advice on career can lead to wrong choice of career and lifestyle	2.33
10	Child's feelings are not respected, the child may lose parental control and join wrong peers who may have negative influence on the child	2.51
11	Flogging children to inflict injuries and even deformation	2.56
12	Parents not always around and leaving children at the mercies of house helps	2.68

Source: Field survey, 2016 ≥ 2.50 =Accepted

Factors associated with parental neglect and child abuse

From the result in table 4, it was shown that joblessness on the part of parents can affect the degree of care they give to their child with a grand mean of (2.93), polygamous families neglect their children more than families with one man, one wife (2.82), the number of children in a family can determine the degree of care or neglect their parent can give them (2.82), failure of going out to provide the necessary welfare conditions for child upbringing is increasing the cost of parenting and contributing to child neglect and abuse (2.65), parents who do not get adequate parental discipline end up neglecting their own children (2.60), family where parents are not highly educated, there is greater chance of their

children being neglected or abused due to ignorance of what constitute neglect or abuse (2.56), income level of a family can affect the extent of care and support they give to their children (2.56) and most of the cases of child neglect we see today are caused by unplanned families/pregnancies (2.52). Joblessness as shown by the study on the part of parents can affect the care and attention given to the children and that will negatively affect the children who may join wrong peer and graduate to adult criminals that pose serious security threat to other law abiding citizens in the society. According to [4] when parents are jobless and could not meet the basic needs of their children, there is the tendency to neglect them.

Table.4: Mean distribution of factors associated with parental neglect and child abuse

S/N	Factors	Mean (\bar{x})
1	Income level of a family can affect the extent of care and support they give to their children	2.56
2	Number of children in a family can determine the degree of care or neglect their parents can give them	2.82
3	Joblessness on the part of parents can affect the degree of care they give to their children	2.93
4	Children brought up by single parents tend to have a higher incidence of neglect and abuse	2.44
5	Polygamous families neglect their children more than families with one man, one wife	2.82
6	Family where parents are not highly educated, there is greater chance of their	2.56

	children being neglected or abused due to ignorance of what constitute neglect or abuse	
7	Most of the cases of child neglect we see today are caused by unplanned families/pregnancies	2.52
8	Parents who do not get adequate parental discipline end up neglecting their own children	2.60
9	Government failure to provide the necessary welfare conditions for child upbringing is increasing the cost of parenting and contributing to child neglect and abuse	2.65

Source: Field survey, 2016 ≥ 2.50 =Factor

Social Work Intervention Techniques

The result in table 5 shows that majority (94.0%) of the respondent opined that social workers should open offices to counsel parents on child neglect and abuse, followed by social workers should work with government and NGO’s on how to stop child neglect and abuse (90.0%), social workers should carry out/ embark on enlightenment campaigns (84.0%), Rehabilitation centres should be created by social

workers to help children who are abused (80.0%) social workers should campaign on parental responsibilities in the upbringing of their children (78.0%). Parents neglect their children without knowing /being conscious, so it is believed that pains taking counseling of parents/guardian on issues and activities that constitute neglect will drastically reduce the level of neglect and abuse observed in the metropolis.

Table.5: Percentage distribution Social Work intervention techniques

S/NO	Social Work Techniques	Frequency	Percentages
1	Rehabilitation centres should be created by social workers to help children who are abused	40	80.0
2	Social workers should carry out an enlightenment campaign on how to avoid child neglect and abuse	42	84.0
3	Social workers should campaign on parents responsibilities in the upbringing of their children	39	78.0
4	Social workers should work with government and NGOs on how to stop child neglect and abuse	45	90.0
5	Social workers to open offices to counsel parents on child neglect and abuse	47	94.0

Source: Field survey, 2016

Multiple Responses

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

in view of the frailty and vulnerability of children, they depend on adults for their care, support, welfare and survival. However, in many families children are not provided with the necessities for their maximum potential development. Parental neglect has been prevalent in Port Harcourt Metropolis and the State at large. Parental unemployment are associated condition which warrant parental neglect. More importantly, inadequate welfare infrastructures for parental support on the part of the state were also among the factors identified.

Following the findings in this study, the study recommended or suggested that child upbringing is a responsibility of mother, father, guardians, law enforcement agencies and government. The failure of the actors involved to meet their obligations to the child seems to have a negative impact on

the child and society. Therefore, all the actors should get seriously involved in order to achieve maximum result. Secondly, one of the factors responsible for child neglect has been attributed to broken homes and high cases of Divorce. If laws on divorce are made to dissuade rather than encourage divorce, the case of broken homes will be minimized. Finally, the media should produce programmes that deal on childcare and the dangers of child neglect, jingles and songs in various local dialects can be used to educate parents on the effects of this social stigma.

Limitations

Due to time, material and human resources available to the researchers, this study was limited to ten (10) wards in the metropolis and to the specific objectives of this study, although the researcher was faced with challenges of getting the children to interview during the study. It is suggested that

further studies be carried out to involve the parents of neglected and abused children in order to know the reasons behind their actions.

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**APPENDIX I
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear Respondents,

The questions below are designed to seek your view on a Study on Parental Neglect and Child Abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Your responses will assist us to determine the prevalence and solutions to the problem. Your true and unbiased response to the questionnaire will be highly appreciated.

Section A: Personal Data

1.	Age:	16-21	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	22-26	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
		27-32	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	33-38	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
		39-44	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	45+	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Sex:	Male	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female-		<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Marital Status:	Single	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	Married	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Divorces/ Separated	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	Widow/ Widower	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Type of marriage	Monogamy	-	<input type="checkbox"/>	Polygamy	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Polyandry	-	<input type="checkbox"/>			

5. Type of parent Single parent/spinster
Foster parent/Guardian
Single parent/Widow
Single parent/Widower
Normal parent/Monogam
Normal parent/Polygamy
6. Number children: 1-3
4-6
7 and above
7. Occupation:
Civil/public servant
Organized/private sector worker
Self- employed
Unemployed
8. Educational qualification
Primary
Secondary
Tertiary
Above 1st Degree
9. Religion: Christianity
Islam
Others {specify}

Section B

10. The income level of a family can affect the extent of care and support they give to their children.
- (a) Strongly Agree
(b) Agree
(c) Disagree

(d) Strongly Disagree

11. The number of children in a family can determine the degree of care or neglect their parents can give them

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

12. Joblessness on the part of parents can affect the degree of care they give to their children.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

13. Children brought up by single parents tend to have a higher incidence of neglect and abuse.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

14. Polygamous families neglect their children more than families with one man, one wife.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

15. Families with one of their parents dead or divorced tend to the have higher percentage of child neglect and abuse than normal families.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

16. In a family where parents are not highly educated, there is greater chance of their children being neglected or abused due to ignorance of what constitutes neglect or abuse.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

17. Most of the cases of child neglect we see today are caused by unplanned families/pregnancies.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

18. Parents who did not get adequate parental discipline end up not neglecting their own children.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

19. Government failure to provide the necessary welfare conditions for child upbringing is increasing the cost of parenting and contributing to child neglect and abuse.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

Section C

20. Children sent on street hawking can fall victim of abuse by unscrupulous men and women.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

21. Unguided use of internet can expose children to pornography and sexual abuse.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

22. Children beggars can turn to adult beggars.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

23. Beating and maltreatment of children may cause them emotional, physical and mental damage.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

24. Children not sent to school or for skill acquisition have higher chances of becoming delinquents.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

25. Children who are not properly supervised may join bad gangs and learn bad habits such as Indian hemp smoking, alcohol abuse and cultism.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

26. Children who are deprived of food, clothing and shelter may become delinquents and adult criminals.

- (a) Strongly Agree
- (b) Agree
- (c) Disagree
- (d) Strongly Disagree

27. When adequate medical attention is not given to a sick child, the child may die or sustain permanent deformity.
- (a) Strongly Agree
 - (b) Agree
 - (c) Disagree
 - (d) Strongly Disagree
28. Lack of parental support and advice can lead to wrong choice of career and lifestyle.
- (a) Strongly Agree
 - (b) Agree
 - (c) Disagree
 - (d) Strongly Disagree
29. If a child's feelings are not respected, the child may loses parental control and join wrong peers who may have a negative influence on the child.
- (a) Strongly Agree
 - (b) Agree
 - (c) Disagree
 - (d) Strongly Disagree
30. Child neglect is directly responsible for the high incidence of child abuse in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
- (a) Strongly Agree
 - (b) Agree
 - (c) Disagree
 - (d) Strongly Disagree