

Girl-Child Abuse: Psychological Effects

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Abstract

The paper discussed the concept of girl-child, concept of abuse, causes of abuses on girl-child, psychological effects; recommendations were made to help remedy the girl-child abuse in today's society since training a woman is training a nation. The dream of every girl child is and should be to become responsible woman to contribute to the building of the society for good. It was concluded that the home, government and the society at large should see girl-child as a gift to be care for and to create a conducive learning environment to enhance academic achievement can will lead to self-empowerment.

Keywords:

Girl-child, Abuse
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Background to the Study

A child is a precious gift irrespective of the gender, should be valued as a human being. Every child matters and should be given the basic necessities of life which are food, shelter and clothing. Apart from these basic needs, the child has the right to education. In Nigeria a person remains a child as long as he/she is not yet 18 years of age. Aminata cited in Anakwe and Rotshak (2018) stated that “a child is nurtured by the immediate environment encompassing the father, mother, brothers, sisters and neighbors. The experience acquired by this child at this phase influences the development of the child and the society positively or negatively. The childhood phase is the most sensitive and delicate period of child development and should not be taken for granted. The child's academic achievement and the type of person the child will be in the future can be predicated in the way and manner the child is brought up. In Africa the upbringing of a child was a communal joint effort where each and every member of the community plays his or her role, but this beautiful practice is gradually dying. Despite the economic and social importance of education of the girl-child, they are often abused and neglected in Nigeria and this has affected their development (Ejikeme, 2000). According to Umar (1997), parents are disappointed whenever the first born to the family is a girl and worse still when all children born to the family are girls. The father of such family feels that there will be none to propagate the family image or, takes leadership of the family after his death.

Odneye (2015), expressed that there are myopic thoughts that once a girl gets married she becomes someone's assets and responsibility and loses contact with her parents. Hence, the baby girl born into the family is usually received with mixed feelings while a baby boy is considered a source of joy and pride. Consequently, some parents held the view that it is better to have more boys than girls and it is better to spend more time and money on the education of boys than the girls. It has also been observed that indeed some girls who go to schools in Nigeria, but due to dropout or are in some cases given out for marriages and their bride price paid used for the school fees of the boys (UNCEF,1991).

The issue of girl-child abuse can never be over emphasized. Child-abuse is on the increase. Anakwe and Rotshak (2018), explained that child-abuse refers to over exploitation of a child and maltreatment in various ramifications. These included excess flogging, starvation, hawking, sexual abuse and denial of formal education. For instance, any work that stresses the limit of a child physically, mentally, psychological and emotionally is child-abuse, like a girl child in African family is expected to fetch water in the house, cook, wash all clothes and weed the entire family farm, after the farm work, the girl child is also asked to go to the market to hawking some items even without eating. Also forcing a little girl child to bed for sexual intercourse could result to injuries and emotional trauma in the future. This is a serious form of abuse of a girl child which has become rampant at home and even in schools. Nigerian Association of Clinical Psychologists explained that child sexual abuse is sexual activity targeted against children. This is achieved by the use of force, for example, beating, shouting, threatening, or without the use of force for example, touching the private parts (breast, buttocks,

vagina, penis, anus) of the child, making the child touch an adult's private parts (breast, buttocks, vagina, penis, anus), making a child look at naked adults or a naked picture or watching films in which sexual activities are taking place.

Stopping or reducing girl child abuse is a collective effort. Home, school and the society need to work together. More also the girl child should be helped to build self-love. Akagwu (2021), opined that self-love is not selfishness but entails the acceptance of oneself with one's strengths and weaknesses, the readiness to take proper care of oneself both physically and spiritually and the readiness to make effort for one's all-round growth. Connected to healthy self-love is the development of a good self-image or self-esteem.

Conceptual literature

The Concept of Girl-Child

A girl-child is a human being. A girl-child is a young female person, below 14 years of age who will eventually grow into a woman (Umar, 1997). According to Offorma (2009) defines the term girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. In the same way, Chidebelu (2010), sees girl-child as "female child, or a young maiden who in the formative years depends solely on an adult for nurturance -and training to adulthood. According to Chidebely (2010) apart from being "a young unmarried woman", the term girl-child can be used to refer to "a woman of any age". That is, the term is generally used to refer to a woman irrespective of her age; young, adult and the old. This means a girl-child is a human being with flesh and blood.

In the same vein Gowon cited in Odonye (2015), defines girl-child as, "a female child, a young unmarried woman' and "a female servant". Three critical parts can be seen from this definition. The first is the notion that a girl-child is female child. This is a factual status to the position of a mere servant. This is biologically appropriate a valid fact. The second perception of the definitions is the notion that a girl-child is a "female servant". This is a factual status to the position of a mere servant. It is obvious that this second definition has laid down a substantive and thematic description of the status of a girl-child. A girl-child is far more than a servant, a girl-child can be a sister, a wife, and a mother and can be president, governor, banker, professors, military general if given the opportunity and empowered.

The Concept of Child Abuse

Abubakar (2014), suggests that child-abuse is a global phenomenon that takes the form of child soldier', children of war, sexual abuse and street children. Child-abuse may vary from continent to continent, country to country, state to state, and family to family due to differential cultural values placed in women and children. In Nigeria today, we may not have child soldiers or children of war but we have street children, children sexually abused, child prostitution, hawking child labour, child trafficking, the Almajiri syndrome, female genital circumcision and child rejection (Denga, cited in Abubakar, 2012).

National Child Abuse (2009), stated that child-abuse is that “beating children, chronically belittling them, using them for sexual gratification and depriving them of the basic necessities of life and repellent acts and cannot be permitted in a civilized society”. While the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (200) child-abuse involves mistreatment of the child which may involve physical, sexual or psychological harm. The child is burdened, pressured, over tasked, over punished, subjugated and even enslaved.

Child-abuse has been perceived and defined by African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) (1988:36) as the “the International, unintentional or well Intentional acts which endanger the physical, health, emotional, moral and the educational welfare of the child”. From the above definitions, it could be simply put that girl-child abuse is the inhuman treatment given to any girl-child. It ranges from physical abuse such as beating, verbal abuse like insult of any kind, street hawking, prostitution, hard labor of any kind, domestic services, scavenging, kidnapping, rape, abandonment, deprivation of school, changing their sex through surgery. This treatment affects all aspect of their lives, through adolescence, adulthood and old age. Templar (2008), stated that children deserve respect, simply because they are human.

Odonye (2015), explained that the place of girl-child in the overall development of any society is fundamental such that any deliberate neglect of their education could endanger the entire society. This view is shared by development planners, academicians, politicians and leaders of government and non-governmental organization the world over. These various groups have actually come to agreement that education of girl-child particularly is basic component in nations building (Fishe, 2001). They acknowledge that for any society desirous in raising standards of living, consideration of girl-child's education is a fundamental necessity. Therefore, it is desirable that everyone in an economy should be educated including the girl-child. This is because she would pass on her knowledge to her peers and other family members particularly her children, thereby multiplying the effects of her education to the society at large. As it is often said, “if you educate a man, you educate an individual; but if you educate a woman, you educate the whole family and the whole nation” (Fredrick, 1998). Therefore, free access to quality education is the right of every child without expectation and discrimination on gender basis. An educated girl-child would have the ability to make a good home, maintain a higher standard of cleanliness and attractive surroundings, socialize with her children and maintains stable and other ways of life necessary for human survival (Madugwus, 1999).

In a family the girl is also learning how to be a parent. Most people will have some desire to do some things differently from the way their parents did them; equally many people are surprised to find themselves doing it in the same way. What our parents did is absorbed over a number of years, until it becomes an instinctive way of behaving and chaotic.

Uya (2012), expressed that there had been various regulations in Nigeria on child labour and school attendance. Nigeria government has both in the past and present promulgated several laws on child labour and on related issues such as child abuse, child trafficking etc. The Nigeria labor Act prohibits children less than 12 years from lifting or carrying any load likely to inhibit physical development. The law prohibits children less than 16 years from working underground, manually or with machines either in the day time or at night for more than 4 consecutive hours or more. The law prohibits children less than 18 years from any employment that is dangerous or immoral. Section 11 of the Act therefore, stipulates life prison terms for any persons in Nigeria. Yet the enforcement of the act of child-labour act is not seriously being carried out.

Nigeria, as an active member of the United Nations, demonstrated genuine commitment to the implementation of this Convention when a draft of the Child Rights Bill aimed at domesticating the principles of the Convention on the rights of the child and the African Union (AU) Charter on the Rights and welfare of the child was eventually passed into law by the Nigerian National Assembly in July, 2003. This Bill was assented to by the then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in September, 2003 and promulgated as the Child Right Act 2003, (Amalu, 2010). The Act spells clearly the roles of the government, parents/guardians and NGOs in the proper upbringing of children from birth to 18 years in terms of the protection of their rights. The Act shifted emphasis from the traditional approach of child upbringing to the modern approach where more responsibility on the welfare and care of the child rests upon a tripod, namely, the government, parents and the NGOs to effectively provide to the growth of the child.

In a simplified version by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, the Child's Rights Act is defined "as a law which incorporates all the rights and responsibilities of children, and consolidates all laws which provide for the protection and care of the Nigeria on 31 July 2003. The Act "demands that in all actions concerning the child, his or her best interest, welfare and well-being must be the paramount consideration" and that "the Act guarantees the rights of the child to survival, develop fully, be protected against all forms of harm, and to participate responsibly in all matters affecting him or her." (Child Right Act: 3).

Causes of Girl- Child and Abuse

There are a lot of Factors that Causes girl-child abuse in different countries of the world. However, in this paper only a few of the causes of girl-child abuse will be examined. These include; poverty, broken homes, cultural or traditional factors, high expectation, transfers of anger.

Poverty: Unemployment rate is very high, farm produce in Nigeria is purchased at very low rates, the loses that farmers experience in Nigeria are not being paid for so as to enable them farm for the next season adding to the crisis that have driven farms from farming. Some family members have been thrown out of job, which have made some families to

send their girl-child to hawking pure water and groundnuts, cooked eggs and other items in the streets and bus stops or parks. Some of the girl children are given to rich families who treat them as maids or house helps and even baby sitters at a very tender age, in these case "baby is babysitting a baby". Ejikeeme cited in Uya (2012) identify that poverty is the main cause of child labour in Nigeria. The girl child work to ensure the survival of the responsibility of parents to take care of their children. Children do not need to engage themselves in wage labour to take care of themselves and other members of the family. At the moment in some family this role is shifted to the girl-child.

High Expectations: Some family expect too much from the girl-child. They expect the girl-child to begin to think and behave like an adult and when the girl-child is not able, she is maltreated and mishandle like a thing to be used and discarded. Anzaa and Nwosu (2017), in their study revealed that domestic chores have negative influence on girls schooling in both rural and urban secondary schools. Gender/sex discrimination starts at family level, immediately the arrival of an addition to a family is announced. The response shown by family members on the birth of a boy is quite different from that of a girl-child. In some homes the girl-child right from birth is subjected to low self-esteem and later an inferiority complex which invariable constitute hindrance in making vital lifelong decisions such as career choice and the task of contributing to national development (Ugwuegbulam, 2005).

Broken homes: This can come in form of separation, desertion, divorce and remarriage of parents which means the cord of unity, which binds the home together, is broken. Anakwe (2017) found out that "a child separated form or deserted by the parents is like a major surgical operation cutting the limb from the main body'. These experiences leave the girl-child without proper care, physically and psychologically lead to the child normal growth being drastically interfered with. There is no person that can be a perfect substitute for a parent or parents, even if the father marries another woman and the woman another man. It is never and will never be the same.

Cultural Beliefs and Values

Some cultural practices in Nigeria are not favorable to the girl-child when compare to the boy child. Cultural practices such as female circumcision, when the family have no enough money the girl-child should step out for the brother even if she is older and more intelligent rather she to work hard to support the brother in school. Njoku (2015), express that in the Northern part of Nigeria particularly in the North East and North West many people have been deprived the adolescence period though biologically they passed through it. The girls can marry as early as 11 years and the boys can marry as early as 18 years. This type of practice exposes the children to poor intellectual development, timidity, and health problems associated with early and premature marriage. Anzaa (2013), found out that parents in Tiv land prefer to send boy-child to school first, especially where there is no enough money to send both to school. Wubon (2013), expressed that if the girl-child is not educated, she remains dependent on her family before marriage, on her husband after marriage and on her children should she eventually loss her husband. That is, a life of total dependence.

The challenge of sex stereotypes in terms of gender-based barriers, social norms and traditional and religious practices remained strong obstacles for the advancement of the cause of women in Nigeria, Ovute et al, Undiyaunde, Bradshaw et al, (cited in Alade, 2015). Thus, this constraint would seem to be the primary reason why there is inequality of access to education; unequal access to economic opportunities for women and finance disparity in cultural and traditional rights and privileges and hence low political and economic opportunities.

Psychological effects of Gill-Child Abuse

Physical effects: Physical effects are one of the major effects of domestic violence on girl-child. Bruises, broken homes, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization (Jones, 1997). Some chronic health conditions that have linked to victims of domestic violence are arteritis, irritable bowel syndrome (Berrios, 1991). Physical effects can lead to a lot of psychological effects which are discussed below:

Lack or low self-esteem: The girl-child who hawk around suffer from the feeling of inferiority complex especially if they attend school with peers from good economic back ground. This can cause emotional disturbances which can lead to seeing companionship of other age mate as threat. This has the ability of social and emotional maladjustment in school which in the long run affects her academic performance.

Hostility: Hostility is a pervasive feeling of enmity, animosity or ill-will toward another born of unexpected anger. The abuse gild-child is full with stress that leads to inability to cope with her anger as well as the anger of other oftentimes become the source of hostility. Agudo (2003), expressed that everyone is made up of behaviour patterns from childhood. The hostile individual is unhappy about self and needs a scapegoat for this unhappiness. When you take hostile words personally, you are accepting the role of the scapegoat. Then you become hostile yourself. Oftentimes, hostility begets hostility. Odebunmi (2018), explained that stress is the threat to the fulfillment of basic needs, to the function of the nervous system and to growth and development. Psychologically, stress means stimuli that are likely to produce disturbance in most individuals. When there is inadequate release of tension caused by excessive stress, functional body disorders, called psychosomatic disorders, develop. Okpe (2021), explained that with mothers working away from home or being busy with outside concerns, most well-to-do families today engage people to help around the home. These workers are usually girls with little or no education or opportunities for professional employment. Their work involves endless chores in the house, in the farm, in the shop and even running numerous errands. House girls do a lot of necessary work, and they need to be respected.

Eze (2021), expressed that without jobs, without effective means of sustenance, millions of Nigerian youths have lost hope in the country. That was part of what triggered the "EndSars protest, frustration and despondency. Seeing gloomy darkness at the end of the tunnel, many youths looked for ways to end these problems; they began to toy with the idea of freedom through agitation for self-determination.

Feeling of Rejection: Abuse on girl-child can create feeling of rejection, unwanted and good for nothing. It is a terrible feeling to feel not belong to yourself and to the society. This can lead to suicide. Most girl-child abusers have no human feelings. Goleman (1996), express that psychopaths are notorious for being both charming and completely without remorse for even the most cruel and heartless acts. Psychopathy is the incapacity to feel empathy or compassion of any sort, or the least twinge of conscience, is one of the more perplexing of emotional defects. Psychopaths are also glib liars, willing to say anything to get what they want and they manipulate their victims' emotions with same cynicism.

Ritual Practices: Some of the ritual practices going on in Nigeria use female genital parts. Most of their victims are abuse girls who have run away from home and sometimes deliberately given for such practices because of money by their parents or guidance. One of the social effects perspective according to Musa cited in Abubakar (2014), discovered that children have fallen victims to men and women in search of human being parts for rituals practice in order to make quick money or to get high position. Girl child battering, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, pornography and all forms of bondage and slavery of children could lead to increase in social vices which does not go well for any society that wants to progress.

Conclusion

It is very disheartening to know and see how girl-children are abuse in different forms and shapes constantly by parents, family members, relatives and teachers. The importance of women in the development of the family, states, national and the society at large cannot be over looked. A society that has no respect and dignity for every human life is heading to doom because every human persons is endowed with abilities and capabilities that is different from any other person on earth. Having respect for a woman and empowering them for economic and political leadership positions could help to contain the growing dissatisfaction with our economic and democratic institutions that are happening in recent times and in the future. Constant education and enlightenment need to be created by parents, teachers, all those who wish the child well the lure or traps used by child abusers such as befriends parents to gain access to children, offers to take care of children whose parents are busy, enjoys working and loitering in places where many children are involved, offers to teach sports to children, use the social media to gain access to young ones, uses bribes, gifts and verbal threats to continue to gain access or to keep children silent and not tell others. To put an end to this perpetuating evil all stakeholders must be responsible and take their responsibility as protector and guardians of every child as very important and cherish him or her more than gold.

Recommendations

1. Parents or guidance should be educated on the dangers of girl-child abuse, it consequences on their psychological, psychological, socially etc. through the media, churches and mosque.
2. Government and non-governmental organization should handle child welfare issues with all seriousness. The offender is to be punished according as the law has it.

3. Girl-child education should be encouraged at all levels of education. Educating the girl-child would go a long way in checkmating indiscriminate child-abuse and gender disparity.
4. Providing professional help for abused girl-child. Abuse of any kind can lead to delinquency. Through constant and continuous therapy, the counsellor or psychologist should endeavour to actually understand the basic personality dynamics and how the individual's current attitudes and actions have developed. Once the counsellor or psychologist becomes familiar with how the attitudes and actions have developed, he or she is in position to find possible solutions to the delinquency to restore hope to the girl-child.
5. Government should be interested in the welfare of girls given out as house help and to put check on the families or persons they work for.

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