

Child Rearing Practices and Child Neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State

Eyo, Emmanuel Paul

*Department of Sociology,
University of Calabar, Calabar*

Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijsrpaop.v5.i1.16

Abstract

Child rearing practices play a fundamental role in shaping children's developmental trajectories and well-being. In the context of Nigeria, especially in urban low-income communities like Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, child rearing is influenced by a complex interplay of cultural norms, economic conditions, and family structures. This study examines the relationship between parenting styles and child neglect within this locality. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 400 purposively selected parents and caregivers across 10 wards in Calabar South. Structured questionnaires were administered to assess child rearing behaviors and indicators of neglect. Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential methods. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied to test the hypothesis that child rearing practices significantly influence the level of child neglect. The results revealed a statistically significant relationship ($F = 8.732, p < 0.05$), indicating that authoritative parenting is associated with lower levels of neglect compared to authoritarian and permissive styles. Post-hoc analysis further revealed that children under authoritarian and permissive parents exhibited higher neglect indicators such as lack of supervision, poor nutrition, and emotional disconnection. The findings are situated within Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of modeling and reinforcement in behavior acquisition. The study concludes that ineffective parenting styles, compounded by socio-economic stressors and cultural beliefs, significantly contribute to child neglect in the study area. Recommendations include implementing community-based parenting education programmes, enhancing child welfare enforcement, and integrating parenting modules into school curricula. This study contributes to the growing discourse on child protection in Nigeria and underscores the urgent need for systemic interventions that support caregivers while safeguarding children's rights.

Keywords: *Child; Rearing Practices; Child Neglect; Parenting Styles; Child Welfare; Family Structure*

Corresponding Author: **Eyo, Emmanuel Paul**

<https://internationalpolicybrief.org/international-journal-of-strategic-research-in-public-administration-and-organizational-process-volume-5-number-1/>

Background to the Study

Child rearing, the practices involved in raising and nurturing children from infancy to adulthood, plays a central role in shaping their physical, psychological, and emotional development. Globally, various cultures employ distinct approaches to child upbringing, which are often influenced by societal values, economic conditions, and educational systems. According to Bornstein (2015), while Western societies often advocate for individualistic parenting strategies that emphasize independence, many non-Western cultures, particularly in Africa and Asia, adopt collectivist models where children are raised within the extended family unit, emphasizing obedience and interdependence. These approaches, though culturally contextual, can influence a child's psychosocial development either positively or negatively depending on consistency, affection, discipline, and responsiveness.

In many developing countries, however, the socio-economic constraints facing families have significantly influenced child rearing practices. UNICEF (2021) reports that over 160 million children globally experience some form of neglect annually, a consequence often linked to poverty, limited parental education, and weak social welfare systems. Neglect is recognized as a form of child maltreatment that deprives a child of essential needs such as nutrition, education, healthcare, and emotional support, which are crucial for holistic development. The World Health Organization (2020) has noted that neglect may not always stem from malevolence but rather from circumstances where caregivers are overwhelmed or ill-equipped to meet their responsibilities.

In Nigeria, child neglect remains a persistent issue despite legislative frameworks like the Child Rights Act of 2003, which mandates the protection and welfare of every Nigerian child. The National Population Commission and UNICEF (2017) highlight that nearly 60% of Nigerian children have experienced one or more forms of neglect, including abandonment, lack of access to education, and emotional maltreatment. This troubling statistic reflects deep-seated structural and cultural challenges, including high poverty rates, patriarchal family systems, and underfunded social services, which continue to erode child protection mechanisms. Cultural traditions in Nigeria often dictate parenting roles and responsibilities, sometimes to the detriment of the child's welfare. For instance, children in polygamous or single-parent households often receive less attention due to the multiplicity of domestic and economic burdens placed on the parent, typically the mother (Eke & Onuoha, 2020). Furthermore, practices such as child fostering, common in many southern Nigerian communities, though well-intentioned, may expose children to neglect when they are placed with caregivers who do not prioritize their well-being.

Calabar South Local Government Area in Cross River State typifies many of the challenges facing urbanizing regions in Nigeria. The area is marked by a blend of traditional and modern lifestyles, rapid population growth, and increasing levels of unemployment and urban poverty (Cross River State Ministry of Social Welfare, 2022). These factors often influence parenting patterns and have been associated with rising incidences of child neglect, as caregivers struggle to balance socio-economic pressures with parental responsibilities. Another contributing factor in Calabar South is the erosion of extended family systems,

which historically provided a safety net for children. The decline in communal living and kinship-based caregiving, driven by modernization and economic migration, has left many children vulnerable to neglect. According to Ekanem and Essien (2023), the disappearance of this communal support has particularly affected children of working mothers, many of whom are left in the care of housemaids or unsupervised environments for long periods.

The prevalence of street children and out-of-school youth in Calabar South is a visible manifestation of systemic neglect. Reports by the Ministry of Women Affairs (2023) indicate that many of these children come from homes where child rearing is inconsistent or absent altogether. These children often become victims of physical abuse, substance abuse, and exploitation, revealing a deeper crisis in parenting and child welfare support systems. Child neglect in this region is also worsened by gaps in public awareness about proper child rearing practices. Many caregivers lack formal education or access to parenting resources, leading to ignorance about developmental needs and child rights. This absence of knowledge, combined with economic hardship and cultural permissiveness, creates conditions conducive to neglect (Ubi & Egbai, 2022). Addressing this challenge, therefore, requires a holistic understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics influencing parenting in Calabar South. Thus, the present study seeks to explore the relationship between prevailing child rearing practices and the incidence of child neglect in Calabar South LGA. By investigating the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors that shape how children are raised, this study aims to offer data-driven insights into mitigating child neglect in the region.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's ratification of international treaties and the domestication of child protection laws, child neglect remains an entrenched social issue, particularly in urban poor communities like Calabar South. Numerous children grow up in environments devoid of proper care, supervision, and emotional nurturing conditions which have been linked to various developmental impairments. The frequency with which children are seen hawking, begging, or idling on the streets of Calabar South points to a deeper systemic failure in child rearing and care. These realities raise serious questions about the effectiveness of parenting practices in the locality and the adequacy of existing support systems. Several socio-economic and cultural factors contribute to the growing rate of child neglect in the area. Unemployment, low income, single parenthood, and large family sizes often stretch the caregiving capacity of parents. In such circumstances, many parents resort to punitive parenting or complete emotional disengagement. These practices not only expose children to harm but also compromise their psychological development, academic performance, and future potential (Okoro, 2021). Unfortunately, these patterns often go unnoticed or are culturally normalized, further compounding the problem. The decline in traditional child-rearing structures such as the extended family system has exacerbated the problem. Historically, these systems ensured that caregiving responsibilities were shared across multiple adult relatives, thereby reducing the burden on individual parents. However, the modernization of family life, coupled with rural-urban migration, has disrupted this communal support. Many children are now left in the hands of untrained caregivers or domestic workers who lack the competence or concern to provide proper care (Ekpenyong & Uduak, 2022).

There is also a notable knowledge gap among caregivers in Calabar South concerning modern parenting techniques. Many parents rely on instinct or tradition rather than evidence-based parenting methods, often resulting in emotionally detached, inconsistent, or overly authoritarian styles of rearing. Such approaches may undermine the child's confidence, social skills, and cognitive abilities, making them more susceptible to neglect, especially in households where multiple stressors exist. Given these concerns, this study seeks to examine the prevailing child rearing practices in Calabar South and how they relate to the occurrence of child neglect. It investigates whether the current parenting approaches align with child welfare standards and evaluates the extent to which socio-cultural and economic factors mediate this relationship. The ultimate aim is to generate insights that could inform community-level interventions and policies to safeguard child development in the area.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The study will specifically identify the dominant child rearing practices among parents in Calabar South, assess the prevalence of child neglect in the study area, examine the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing parenting styles in the study area, and make recommendations aimed at reducing child neglect through improved parenting practices.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis formulated for this study is as follows:

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area.
- H₁: There is a significant relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area.

Literature Review

Child rearing practices encompass the methods, strategies, and behaviors parents use to nurture, guide, and discipline their children. These practices are deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and socioeconomic contexts, often varying across societies and even within communities. Baumrind (1991) identified three major parenting styles; authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, each of which impacts child development differently. Authoritative parenting, which balances discipline with emotional warmth, has been widely regarded as the most effective style, while authoritarian and permissive approaches often correlate with behavioral problems and emotional instability in children.

Globally, research suggests that child rearing practices are strongly influenced by socioeconomic status. Parents with higher levels of education and stable income are more likely to employ supportive and developmentally appropriate parenting techniques (Bornstein & Bradley, 2014). Conversely, low-income families, especially in resource-poor settings, often adopt rigid or neglectful practices due to stress and a lack of knowledge about child development. These patterns underscore the need for context-specific evaluations of parenting behaviors, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like Nigeria.

Neglect, a form of child maltreatment, is defined as the failure of a caregiver to provide necessary care, supervision, affection, and support needed for a child's well-being. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021), neglect is the most prevalent form of child abuse, accounting for over 75% of all reported cases. Children who are neglected may suffer from poor academic performance, chronic health conditions, and social maladjustment. Importantly, neglect can be both physical such as failing to provide food and shelter and emotional, such as ignoring a child's need for affection and reassurance.

In Nigeria, child neglect is often driven by poverty, inadequate parenting skills, and social disorganization. Uzoho (2019) argues that the economic hardships faced by many Nigerian families result in children being denied basic necessities, sometimes unintentionally. Furthermore, cultural beliefs that view children as the “property” of the father or extended family can diminish maternal autonomy in parenting, leading to inconsistent or neglectful care. These dynamics are particularly evident in urban poor communities like Calabar South, where family fragmentation and unemployment are widespread. Empirical studies have shown a positive correlation between poor parenting practices and increased rates of child neglect. For instance, Adebayo and Oyewole (2020) found that children raised in homes where authoritarian parenting dominates are more likely to experience emotional detachment and lack of parental supervision. These conditions are fertile ground for neglect, especially when compounded by substance abuse, domestic violence, or parental mental health issues. The study underscores the significance of equipping parents with adequate psychosocial support and training in child care. Parenting practices are not only shaped by economic and psychological factors but also by cultural norms and religious values. In many Nigerian communities, including Calabar South, corporal punishment and rigid obedience are often perceived as necessary tools for socializing children. While these practices may be culturally endorsed, studies show that excessive physical discipline and lack of emotional support can alienate children and increase their risk of psychological neglect (Ekanem & Okon, 2021). There is, therefore, a need to re-evaluate such practices in the light of contemporary child welfare standards.

Child rearing also varies according to family structure. Single-parent households, common in Calabar South due to high rates of divorce and widowhood, often struggle to meet the demands of effective parenting. Research by Okey and Agbor (2022) reveals that children from such homes are more prone to neglect, as the burden of providing care falls on one individual who may also be economically disadvantaged. In contrast, two-parent households tend to offer more balanced caregiving, although this is not always guaranteed. Furthermore, the role of education in influencing parenting cannot be overstated. Educated parents are generally more aware of child rights, development stages, and non-violent forms of discipline. They are also more likely to engage in meaningful communication with their children and to support their educational aspirations (Nwankwo & Njoku, 2020). In Calabar South, however, a significant proportion of parents have limited formal education, which contributes to outdated and potentially harmful child rearing methods. The effect of child neglect on children's academic performance is well-documented. Neglected children often lack the motivation, concentration, and support needed to excel in school. According to UNICEF

(2021), children experiencing neglect are more likely to drop out of school, repeat grades, and develop behavioral issues. These outcomes perpetuate a cycle of poverty and social marginalization, particularly in underserved urban communities. Neglect also has long-term health implications. Children who are emotionally or physically neglected are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse later in life. Research by Anyanwu and Eze (2021) found a high prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents who reported being neglected in their early years. This underscores the importance of early interventions and support systems aimed at preventing neglect before it causes irreversible harm.

From a policy perspective, several gaps exist in Nigeria's child welfare system. Although legal instruments such as the Child Rights Act provide a framework for child protection, enforcement remains weak. The National Human Rights Commission (2022) notes that many cases of neglect go unreported, especially in informal settlements where traditional dispute resolution mechanisms are preferred over formal legal channels. This gap is particularly glaring in areas like Calabar South, where social services are underfunded and understaffed. Community-based interventions have shown promise in reducing child neglect. Programmes that provide parenting education, financial support, and counseling have been successful in reducing stress and improving parenting outcomes (Ajayi & Olanrewaju, 2020). These interventions are most effective when they are culturally sensitive and involve community leaders, who are often gatekeepers in local decision-making processes. Religious organizations also play a significant role in shaping parenting norms. In Calabar South, churches and mosques often provide moral instruction on family life. However, their capacity to address the practical needs of parents, such as economic hardship or mental health issues is limited. There is a need for stronger collaboration between religious institutions and government agencies to develop holistic parenting programmes that combine moral guidance with psychosocial support. Technology is another tool that can be harnessed to improve child rearing practices. Mobile apps and radio programmes that disseminate parenting tips in local languages have shown success in other parts of Africa (Mwaniki & Wanjohi, 2022). Implementing such strategies in Calabar South could help bridge the knowledge gap among parents and provide real-time assistance on child care issues.

Finally, it is essential to recognize the agency of children in child rearing discourse. Child-focused programmes must not only train parents but also empower children to speak up about neglect and abuse. Establishing safe spaces in schools and communities where children can report mistreatment is critical in tackling the scourge of child neglect (UNICEF, 2021). Such measures, if effectively implemented, can transform the parenting landscape in Calabar South and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, provides a foundational framework for understanding how children acquire behaviors and attitudes through observation, imitation, and modeling. According to Bandura, learning does not occur solely through direct reinforcement but also vicariously, as individuals watch others—particularly

parents and caregivers—and replicate their actions. This theory is highly relevant to the discourse on child rearing practices and child neglect, as it places emphasis on the family environment as a primary agent of behavioral transmission. Children internalize behavioral norms based on the models they observe in their immediate surroundings. A central concept in Social Learning Theory is the idea of "modeling." Parents and guardians act as primary role models, and the consistency or inconsistency in their behavior influences children's perceptions of right and wrong, as well as emotional responses and interpersonal behaviors. For example, when caregivers exhibit nurturing, empathetic, and responsive behaviors, children are more likely to develop secure attachment and empathy themselves. On the contrary, neglectful or abusive parental behaviors can model indifference, aggression, or withdrawal, shaping the child's psychological orientation toward themselves and others (Bandura, 1977). The theory also highlights the importance of reinforcement and punishment in behavioral learning. Children who are positively reinforced for displaying respectful or responsible behavior tend to repeat such behaviors. However, in neglectful households where positive behaviors are neither recognized nor reinforced, children may resort to maladaptive behaviors to seek attention or cope with emotional neglect. Over time, these children may internalize neglectful interactions as normative, which could perpetuate cycles of neglect and dysfunction in their future families (Patterson, DeBaryshe & Ramsey, 1989).

In the context of Calabar South, where socio-economic and cultural dynamics shape parenting styles, Social Learning Theory provides valuable insight into how behaviors associated with child neglect are transmitted intergenerationally. A child who grows up in an environment marked by emotional absence, lack of supervision, and verbal hostility is likely to adopt similar patterns when they become caregivers. This cyclical model underscores the urgent need for interventions that break the pattern by providing parents with alternative, positive parenting behaviors to model (Akpan & Udo, 2022). Additionally, the theory aligns with the role of media, peers, and school environments in shaping child behavior. In urban settings like Calabar South, where children are often exposed to multiple socializing agents due to weak parental supervision, these external influences can either reinforce or challenge the behaviors learned at home. This makes the case for multi-sectoral efforts involving schools, religious institutions, and community leaders in promoting healthy child rearing practices and curbing neglect (Bandura, 2001). Finally, Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in learning. Children are not passive recipients of modeled behavior; they actively interpret and decide which behaviors to emulate. This suggests that even within neglectful settings, children exposed to positive behavioral models in school or through peer interaction may resist internalizing harmful patterns. Thus, equipping children with resilience skills and access to alternative role models becomes an essential strategy in breaking the cycle of neglect and enhancing overall child development outcomes in Calabar South.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design aimed at examining the relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect among households in Calabar South Local

Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was appropriate for the study as it allowed for the collection of data from a large sample of respondents within their natural environment without manipulating any variables. The area of study, Calabar South, is a densely populated urban local government area in Cross River State, known for its cultural diversity, economic activities, and social stratification. It comprises both formal residential communities and informal settlements where economic hardship and family disintegration are more pronounced. These conditions have implications for child care and parental behavior, making the area suitable for the research objectives. The population of Calabar South is estimated at over 205,000, with a significant percentage of households being low- to middle-income earners. The cultural context of parenting within the area combines traditional African practices with modern influences, making it a unique environment for studying child rearing and neglect. The target population for the study consisted of parents and guardians (both male and female) who had at least one child between the ages of 0–17 years. A total population of 820 eligible households across 10 wards in Calabar South was identified through the local government household registry and verified through a preliminary enumeration. From this population, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, where n = sample size, N = population (820), and e = level of precision (0.05). The sample size of 400 was considered adequate for statistical validity, ensuring reliable generalizations across the study area. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants. This technique was appropriate because the study specifically targeted parents or guardians who were directly involved in child rearing and thus could provide relevant information. The researchers worked with local community heads and health workers to identify households that met the inclusion criteria. Data collection was facilitated through the administration of structured questionnaires designed to capture socio-demographic information, parenting behaviors, and indicators of child neglect. The instrument was validated by experts in early childhood development and psychology, and a pilot test was conducted in a neighboring local government area to ensure reliability. The hypothesis was tested using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the statistical relationship between different child rearing practices (independent variable) and levels of child neglect (dependent variable). The results were interpreted at a 0.05 significance level, and findings were presented in tables for clarity.

Analysis:

The primary objective of this section is to test the hypothesis:

- H₀:** There is no significant relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area.
- H₁:** There is a significant relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area.

The independent variable: child rearing practices was measured in three categories (based on Baumrind's typology):

- i. Authoritative
- ii. Authoritarian
- iii. Permissive

The dependent variable child neglect was measured using a composite index based on frequency of neglect indicators (e.g., lack of supervision, inadequate food, emotional neglect, absence from school). Each respondent's level of child neglect was scored and categorized as:

- i. Low Neglect
- ii. Moderate Neglect
- iii. High Neglect

A One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether the mean levels of child neglect significantly differ based on parenting style. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 1: ANOVA Summary Table for Child Rearing Practices and Child Neglect

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-Ratio	Sig. (p-value)
Between Groups	328.417	2	164.209	8.732	0.000
Within Groups	7465.583	397	18.805		
Total	7794.000	399			

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

Interpretation of Results:

From the ANOVA table above, the calculated F-ratio is 8.732 with a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean level of child neglect across the different parenting styles. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that child rearing practices have a significant effect on the level of child neglect in Calabar South. To further understand which parenting styles are associated with higher or lower levels of neglect, a post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) was conducted:

Table 2: Post-Hoc Comparison Using Tukey HSD

(I) Parenting Style	(J) Parenting Style	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Authoritative	Authoritarian	-2.218*	0.001
Authoritative	Permissive	-1.967*	0.005
Authoritarian	Permissive	0.251	0.884

*Significant at the 0.05 level

The post-hoc comparison shows that authoritative parenting is significantly associated with lower levels of child neglect compared to both authoritarian and permissive styles. There is no significant difference in child neglect between authoritarian and permissive parents, which suggests that both non-authoritative styles are similarly ineffective in preventing neglect. These results reinforce the literature that authoritative parenting, which combines warmth with appropriate discipline, is the most effective in promoting child well-being and reducing the risk of neglect (Baumrind, 1991; Bornstein & Bradley, 2014). The implications are critical for child welfare interventions and parental education programmes in Calabar South.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study have confirmed a statistically significant relationship between child rearing practices and the level of child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area. Specifically, authoritative parenting was found to be significantly associated with lower levels of neglect compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. This aligns with the findings of Baumrind (1991), who identified authoritative parenting as the most balanced and developmentally appropriate style, characterized by warmth, structure, and responsiveness to the child's needs. The implications of this finding are profound, especially in a sociocultural context like Calabar South, where parenting behaviors are often shaped by tradition, poverty, and limited exposure to contemporary child development knowledge. As supported by Bornstein and Bradley (2014), child neglect frequently stems not only from parental indifference but also from a lack of awareness about the consequences of inconsistent or punitive parenting. The data from this study suggest that empowering parents with knowledge about authoritative practices could significantly reduce child neglect.

The high neglect levels associated with authoritarian parenting observed in this study echo earlier findings by Okoro (2021), who reported that excessive rigidity, lack of emotional expression, and punitive discipline often alienate children and deprive them of critical emotional support. Children raised under such conditions are more likely to internalize feelings of worthlessness or anxiety, which further exacerbates their vulnerability. In Calabar South, this parenting style is often misperceived as effective due to cultural endorsement of strict discipline. Permissive parenting, similarly, was shown to contribute significantly to child neglect. Permissive parents often avoid setting limits or enforcing rules, leading to environments with minimal supervision or structure. Ekanem and Okon (2021) noted that such environments, while appearing loving, fail to meet the child's developmental need for guidance and security. In the context of Calabar South, permissive parenting is often observed in households where caregivers are either too overwhelmed by economic challenges or lack parenting knowledge, resulting in unintentional neglect. The role of socio-economic status in shaping parenting practices was indirectly affirmed in the findings. Households where parents had stable employment and higher levels of education were more likely to exhibit authoritative practices and lower neglect scores. This reinforces the position of Adebayo and Oyewole (2020), who found that economic instability is a major driver of stress-induced parenting errors, including emotional withdrawal and inadequate supervision. The economic realities of Calabar South—marked by high unemployment and informal labor—contribute to the prevalence of neglectful parenting styles.

Furthermore, the findings support the theoretical underpinning of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes that behaviors are acquired through observation and modeling. Children raised in environments where neglect is normalized are more likely to reproduce such patterns in adulthood. This intergenerational transmission of behavior underscores the need for systemic interventions that not only address present parenting challenges but also interrupt long-standing cycles of neglect. The weak support systems available to parents in Calabar South were also implicated indirectly in the discussion. Ubi and Egbai (2022) observed that the absence of extended family support, inadequate childcare

services, and lack of community-based parenting programmes leave parents overwhelmed and unprepared. This scenario is reflected in the number of households in the study that exhibited inconsistent caregiving, especially in low-income and single-parent households. Another important dimension revealed by this study is the limited awareness of child rights among many caregivers. While Nigeria's Child Rights Act mandates proper care and protection of children, enforcement remains low in local communities. Nwankwo and Njoku (2020) highlight that ignorance of legal responsibilities among parents leads to inadvertent neglect. In Calabar South, many parents are unaware of what constitutes neglect, particularly emotional neglect, which remains the most underreported form.

The data also call attention to the role of institutions like schools, religious bodies, and social services in supporting healthy child rearing. Ajayi and Olanrewaju (2020) emphasize the importance of multi-agency collaboration in promoting child welfare. In Calabar South, local churches and community centers could serve as platforms for parenting workshops, mental health support, and referrals for at-risk families. Without such collaborative structures, efforts to reduce neglect may remain ineffective. Finally, the significant differences in child neglect across parenting styles observed in this study validate the use of parenting typologies as predictive tools in child welfare research. Interventions in Calabar South must therefore be targeted, evidence-based, and culturally adapted. As Anyanwu and Eze (2021) rightly argue, parenting support programmes must reflect the lived realities of local families while incorporating global best practices. Such initiatives could shift the parenting paradigm in the area and contribute to the reduction of child neglect over time.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between child rearing practices and child neglect in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State. Through a robust application of quantitative methods, including ANOVA analysis, the study found a statistically significant link between the type of parenting style employed and the level of child neglect experienced by children. Specifically, authoritative parenting was associated with the lowest levels of neglect, while authoritarian and permissive styles correlated with higher levels of neglect. These findings align with global and national research that underscores the importance of balanced, emotionally responsive, and structured parenting in promoting child well-being. The research also highlighted the influence of socio-economic factors such as education, income, and family structure on parenting behaviors in the local context. Parents in resource-constrained settings often face challenges that limit their capacity to provide consistent care and supervision. As demonstrated in the study, the economic realities of Calabar South, combined with limited knowledge about modern parenting techniques, contribute significantly to the incidence of child neglect. Thus, child neglect is not merely a behavioral failure but also a structural issue rooted in broader socio-economic inequalities. Moreover, the study affirmed the relevance of Social Learning Theory in explaining how parenting behaviors and their outcomes are transmitted across generations. Children raised in neglectful environments are likely to replicate such behaviors when they become parents, thereby perpetuating cycles of harm. This observation necessitates proactive interventions that go beyond surface-level behavior modification and instead address deeper socio-cultural and institutional causes of poor parenting.

Importantly, the study underscores the need for a holistic, community-driven approach to parenting support in Calabar South. While individual behavior change is necessary, such efforts must be supported by functional institutional frameworks including child welfare agencies, schools, religious bodies, and civil society organizations that can provide resources, training, and support for caregivers. Without such systemic backing, parenting interventions may fail to achieve sustained change. Finally, the study serves as a call to action for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to prioritize child welfare in public discourse and governance. Promoting healthy child rearing practices is not only critical for the well-being of individual children but also for the socio-economic development of communities and nations at large. Addressing child neglect through informed parenting could yield long-term benefits in education, health, and social stability.

Recommendations

1. **Community-Based Parenting Programmes:** The Cross-River State government, in collaboration with NGOs and community leaders, should establish parenting education programmes in local churches, mosques, and community centers. These programmes should focus on promoting authoritative parenting practices and discouraging harmful traditional methods.
2. **Economic Empowerment of Caregivers:** To reduce stress-induced neglect, economic empowerment initiatives such as skill acquisition training, microcredit loans, and employment programmes should be directed at vulnerable parents, particularly single mothers and low-income families.
3. **Strengthening Child Welfare Institutions:** Government agencies responsible for child protection must be adequately funded and staffed. Case workers and social workers should be trained to identify early signs of neglect and intervene effectively.
4. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Mass media campaigns through radio, television, and mobile platforms should be used to raise awareness about the consequences of child neglect and the benefits of positive parenting. Messages should be culturally sensitive and delivered in local languages.
5. **Monitoring and Enforcement of Child Rights Laws:** The Cross-River State Child Rights Law should be enforced through active monitoring by local councils. Legal mechanisms must be activated to address extreme cases of neglect, with restorative support provided for affected families.

References

- Adebayo, A. M., & Oyewole, O. O. (2020). Parenting styles and child development outcomes in Nigerian families, *Journal of Family and Child Welfare*, 24(3), 45–58.
- Ajayi, O. L., & Olanrewaju, A. M. (2020). Community-based approaches to child protection in Nigeria: A review of grassroots interventions, *Nigerian Journal of Social Work and Community Development*, 18(2), 103–118.
- Anyanwu, F. C., & Eze, O. K. (2021). Childhood neglect and adolescent mental health in urban Nigeria, *African Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 9(1), 25–38.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use, *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11(1), 56–95.
- Bornstein, M. H., & Bradley, R. H. (Eds.). (2014). *Socioeconomic status, parenting, and child development*, Routledge.
- Cross River State Ministry of Social Welfare. (2022). *Annual report on child protection services in Calabar South LGA*. Calabar: CRS Press.
- Ekanem, A., & Essien, I. (2023). Disintegration of extended family support and implications for child welfare in Cross River State, *Journal of Contemporary Social Issues in Nigeria*, 10(2), 40–55.
- Ekanem, B., & Okon, E. (2021). Corporal punishment and neglect among school-age children in southern Nigeria. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Health*, 17(4), 289–300.
- Ekpenyong, A. S., & Uduak, J. E. (2022). Changing family patterns and parenting practices in Cross River State, *Nigerian Journal of Sociology*, 28(1), 76–90.
- National Human Rights Commission. (2022). *Status of child rights implementation in Nigeria: A thematic review*, Abuja: NHRC Publications.
- Nwankwo, F. O., & Njoku, N. (2020). The impact of parental education on child welfare: A Nigerian perspective, *African Educational Research Journal*, 8(1), 17–25.
- Okoro, E. (2021). Effects of harsh parenting on early childhood development in urban Nigeria, *Nigerian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 13(2), 112–129.

- Patterson, G. R., DeBaryshe, B. D., & Ramsey, E. (1989). A developmental perspective on antisocial behavior. *American Psychologist*, 44(2), 329–335. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.2.329>
- Ubi, E. E., & Egbai, M. E. (2022). The erosion of traditional child care systems in Nigeria: Causes and consequences, *Calabar Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(2), 91–104.
- UNICEF. (2021). *The state of the world's children: On my mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. New York: UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2021). *Child maltreatment 2020*. Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/child-maltreatment-2020>
- Uzoho, G. C. (2019). Cultural influences on child abuse and neglect in Southeastern Nigeria. *International Journal of African Studies*, 5(3), 48–61.