The Influence of Child Abuse on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The increasing number of secondary school students abused, neglected and dropped out of secondary school, hawking and selling goods around the streets and school premises in Ondo State is alarming. In addition, academic performance of secondary school students in Ondo State has been deteriorating to the concern of all stakeholders in the educational sector and society in general. This study therefore evaluated child abuse as determinant of secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State, Nigeria. Descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study. Nine hundred (900) junior secondary school class three (JSS 3) students from eighteen secondary schools in the three senatorial districts of Ondo State were selected through multi-stage sampling technique. Instrument used for the data collection is titled "Child Abuse Questionnaire". A proforma was used to collect students' scores in English and Mathematics" Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, frequency count and percentage were used to answer the research question, while Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Results indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between child abuse and secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State (R = 0.62, p < 0.05). Based on the findings, it was recommended that classroom teachers and school counsellors should assist parents and guardians to avoid acts that would result in child abuse and neglect irrespective of their income status.

Keywords: Child abuse, neglect, academic performance and secondary school students.

Introduction

Education is the best legacy parents can give to their children. The development of the nation starts from the family. When the family succeeds in teaching and imparting good

values to their children, the country becomes a better place to live in. It is generally believed that overall development of the country must commence with the development of human resources through quality and transformative education. However, child abuse has become an apparent endless and vicious cycle that hurts the image of the country and the educational development of a child. The increasing rate of child abuse is alarming in the society. Child abuse such as partial and total neglect of a child, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, and sexual abuse has been widely reported in every part of the country. Hence it is worthy to examine the extent to which child abuse has influenced students' academic performance in the society.

Child abuse is any action by another person-adult or child-that causes significant harm to a child. Child abuse can result from physical, emotional, or sexual harm ([Fayaz](#), 2019).The term child abuse is anything which individuals and institutions do or fail to do which directly or indirectly harm children or damage their prospects of safe and healthy development into adulthood (Wambue, 2000). Olaitan and Akpan (2003) noted that child abuse is the physical or mental injury done to a child which may include beating accompanied by the physical harm done to the child who has no control of his own. Child abuse can also be defined as any act of misuse of a child in any form, such as physical and mental torture (Adeniyi, 2010). It has been described as any act of maltreatment or subjection that endangers a child's physical, emotional and health development (Hopper, 2004). Royal Canadian Police (2006) affirmed that child abuse is any form of physical, psychological, social, emotional or sexual maltreatment of a child whereby the survival, safety, self-esteem, growth and development of the child are endangered. Therefore, child abuse is any negative act that hinders a child self-esteem, confidence and health. Accordingly, Denga (2002) observed that child abuse is exposing children to painful and unwarranted suffering knowingly or unknowingly. He continues that both male and female children are abused in some cases by their parents, guardians, teachers, peers and the society in various forms.

Child abuse can be seen as any act of omission or commission, physical or psychological mistreatment or neglect of a child by parents, guardians, caregiver or other adults that may endanger the child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. In this definition, wrongfully maltreating a child or selfishly making an unfair use of a child's services by adults responsible for the child constitutes child abuse. Thus, the adult may not be directly related to the child but a person in whose care the child is left can be an abuser. This may include the educators, healthcare workers, day care workers, or other responsible adults.

Child abuse is one of the most challenging social catastrophes attracting public attention the world over (Alokan & Olatunji, 2014). The researchers of this present study observed that Ondo State is not spared of this evil as many cases of child abuse have been reported in the state hence the need to carry out a study of this nature. Child abuse takes place in the home environment, at school, in church, hospitals, orphanages and in any place; public or

private. In the light of this development, Augustin and Abubaker (2016) lamented that there is no safe place for children anymore because child abuse is rampant everywhere.

Child abuse is not without its consequences in the society. Alokan and Olatunji (2014) carried a study on the influence of child abuse on classroom behaviour and academic performance among primary and secondary school learners in Ekiti State of Nigeria. The study found out that there was a significant relationship between children's active involvement in parents' business and their attitude to class work. In schools, abused children find it difficult to concentrate in class, complete school work on time, or understand school work, they are fearful, frustrated, achieving low grades, lazy or slow (Larkin, 2009).

Child participation in class is positively related to academic achievement (Ladd, Buhs & Seid, 2000). Children in the primary grades can fail to participate in class activities due to abuse, lack of interest, inattentiveness or different kinds of learning problems. The student who finds it difficult to study, memorise, respond to teachers' questions or display other participatory behaviour is more likely to get low marks in different school subjects. Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) asserted that child maltreatment can influence children's performance of competencies (e.g. engagement in academic tasks and paying attention in the classroom). Finkelhor (2008) added that the school non-attendance for abused children was more than three times higher than that of their non-abused counterparts. These deficits appeared to exceed those of children suffering other forms of social disadvantage.

Dunne (2007) on a study about schools and the production of gendered identities in Ghana and Botswana reported that over 50% of abused children experienced some type of difficulty in school, including poor attendance and disciplinary problems. Nekesa (2009) carried out a study on the influence of child labour on children's attendance and discipline in primary schools in Kampala District. The study was carried out after evidence of increased child labour in different parts of Uganda. The study found out that there was a strong positive correlation between child labour and school attendance. There were many cases of children who failed to go to school because of child labour. There were also more cases of indiscipline among children who experienced child labour. Ruto (2009) on a sexual abuse study in Kenya also noted that some abused children felt as if they were different from other pupils hence opted to stay out of school. Children affected by neglect tend to be more isolated at school compared to other groups of children and have difficulty making friends (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002).

Dlamini and Makondo (2017) investigated the effects of child abuse on the academic performance of primary school learners in the Manzini Region of Swaziland. Their findings showed that a majority of the abused learners underperformed as a result of abuse and became suspicious of every person around them and this had a negative bearing to their academic performance. Ibok (2020) also examined the influence of child abuse on

students' academic performance in Biology in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State. The result of the analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation showed that, child emotional abuse, child neglect, physical abuse, family marital status significantly related to students' academic performance in Biology.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing number of secondary school students that are out of school hawking and selling goods around the streets and school premises in Ondo State is alarming. Some of the children look so malnourished and sick, others in pain of being hurt by beatings and assaulted by gangsters. Some of these children are sent out by their parents or caregivers. The interest of most parents is what the child can bring to the home through selling of goods (hawking goods) or giving oneself for money. Many leave school as early as age 12 while still in primary school to engage in prostitution and others are used as house helps and in other menial jobs to bring in money to the family (Denga & Denga, 2007). As a result, the moral and social development of the children are distorted and their general performance in school is affected. The child is therefore a tool for profit making. This current situation is probably responsible for the many half-baked graduates, gangsters, touts and the high crime rate observed in the society. In addition, academic performance of secondary school students in Ondo State has been deteriorating to the concern of all stakeholders in the educational sector and society in general. It is against this background that the study investigated the impact of child abuse on academic performance of secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Research Question

The following research question was raised for the study:

1.   What is the level of secondary school students' academic performance?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis guided the study:

1.   There is no significant difference in the academic performance of abused and non-abused children in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Descriptive research design of the survey type was used for the study. The descriptive research design of the survey type was employed to examine the influence of child abuse on secondary school students' academic performance. The design was considered appropriate because it focuses on the observation and description of the existing situation. The population consisted of all twenty-two thousand, four hundred and twelve (22,412)

students in junior secondary school class three (JSS3) in Ondo State. It included both male and female secondary school students. There are eighteen local government areas in Ondo State. The three senatorial districts in Ondo State comprised 304 public secondary schools. The local government areas comprised urban and rural areas and have many public schools that are co-educational and easily accessible.

The sample for the study comprised nine hundred (900) junior secondary school class 3 students which involved male and female students from three senatorial districts, six local government areas and eighteen (18) secondary schools. The sample was selected from the population using multi-stage and stratified sampling techniques. The state was grouped into three senatorial districts that is Ondo Central, Ondo South and Ondo North. In stage one, two local government areas were selected from each of the senatorial districts making a total of six local government areas for the study, using simple random technique. In stage two, three secondary schools were selected from each of the local government areas to make a total of eighteen (18) secondary schools for the study using simple random techniques. In stage three, fifty (50) students were selected from each secondary school using simple random techniques. A total of 900 students were selected for the study.

The instrument that was used in collecting data for this study was a self-developed questionnaire titled "The Child Abuse Questionnaire". The instrument consisted of two sections (A and B). Section A consisted of items on demographic data while section B contained 15 item on child abuse. The section B of the questionnaire rated on a 4-point Likert scale with response options: 4-Strongly Agreed, 3-Agreed, 2-Disagreed and 1-Strongly Disagreed. The instrument was given to experts in counselling psychology and tests and measurement for proper scrutiny. A pilot study was carried out to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined through test re-test method. The questionnaire was administered twice within a space of two weeks' interval on 20 non-participating students at the Ekiti Central Senatorial District. The scores of the 20 students in the two administration of the same instrument were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation techniques. The 'r' value obtained for the instrument was 0.81. The research question raised was answered with percentage and the research hypotheses generated was tested with multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of secondary school students' academic performance?

In order to answer the question, academic performance of students in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) was obtained. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Influence of child abuse on students' academic performance in Ondo State, Nigeria

Subject	Academic Performance	Total	
		Frequency	**%**
Mathematics	Fail	93	10.3
	Pass	284	31.6
	Credit	393	43.7
	Distinction	130	14.4
	Total	**900**	**100.0**
English Language	Fail	150	16.7
	Pass	404	44.9
	Credit	346	38.4
	Distinction	-	-
	Total	**900**	**100.0**

Table 1 presents the level of secondary school students' academic performance in Mathematics and English among the participants in Ondo State, Nigeria. The result shows that 523 representing 58.11.9% of students had distinction or credit in Mathematics while 377(41.89%) of their counterparts had pass or fail in Mathematics. Similarly, 346(38.44%) of students had distinction or credit in English Language and 554(61.56%) of respondents had had pass or fail in in English Language. This revealed non impressive academic performance among secondary school students in Mathematics and English Language in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of child abuse on secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State.

In testing the hypothesis, scores relating to child abuse and students' academic performance were computed and subsequently subjected to statistical analysis involving Multiple Regression at 0.05 level. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Multiple Regression showing the influence of child abuse on students' academic performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**T**	**Sig.**
(Constant)	1.472	.042		35.072	.000
Child abuse	.389	.016	.624	23.905	.000

Multiple R=0.624, Multiple R^2=0.389, Adjusted R^2=0.388, $F_{1,897}$=571.456

[*]**P<0.05**

Table 2 shows that child abuse significantly determined secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State ($F_{(1,897)}$=571.456[*], $p<0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected.

The table revealed that there was significant positive multiple correlation between the predictor variable (child abuse) and secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State (R=0.624, $p<0.05$). This implies that the predictor variable constitutes factor that can exert influence on secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State.

The value of the coefficient of determination (R^2=0.389) indicates that the predictor variable accounted for 38.9% (R^2 x 100) of the total variance in secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State while the remaining 61.1% unexplained variation is largely due to other variables not included in the study that can account for secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State.

The calculated F-ratio (571.456) was significant at 0.05 level of margin error. This implies that the predictor variable provides a significant explanation for the variation in secondary school students' academic performance in Ondo State.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that child abuse significantly determined secondary school students' academic performance. This implies that child abuse influenced students' academic performance in Ondo State. This finding agreed with Ibok (2020) who found that, child emotional abuse, child neglect, physical abuse, significantly relate to students' academic performance. The study also agreed with Dlamini and Makondo (2017) who discovered in their study that majority of the abused learners underperformed as a result of abuse and became suspicious of every person around them and this had a negative bearing to their academic performance. The outcome of this study is not surprising because abused children often withdraw to themselves, leading to depression and lack of concentration in schools which may eventually lead to low academic performance.

One major aspect of child abuse is child neglect. Neglect such as failing to show love to a child, not giving a child food before going to school or lunch while in school, not paying attention to a child's education, and not paying attention to a child when he/she is sick would no doubt negatively affect the academic performance of that child. When the parents are lacking in their responsibilities to provide basic necessities and facilities for the child's education, the child could lose concentration in the class and it could result to low academic performance. The way the child is handled could affect the child positively or negatively with regards to his/her academic performance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that child abuse which includes neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse significantly influenced academic performance of secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study highlighted above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Federal, state, local government, non-governmental organizations such as the National Council for Women Societies (NCWS), African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN), World Organization for Early Childhood Education (WOECE), Rotary/Inner Wheel clubs, Lion/Lioness clubs, are concerned over the plight of the students. They should use their good offices to organize seminars, conferences, workshops to educate parent/guardians on the need to have a sizable family, the need for family planning, and the ills of child neglect particularly on the health and academic performance of the children involved in it.

2. Classroom teachers and school counsellors should advice pupils, parents and guardians to avoid acts that would result in child abuse and neglect irrespective of their income status.

3. Parents without formal education as well as those with primary and secondary education should be given some form of orientation about what constitute child abuse and neglect. This may help them protect their children against any form of child abuse and neglect.

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