

IDENTIFICATION OF FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE IN OGBIA TOWN, BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Background/Objectives: Child abuse is a common social ill with grievous consequences for the child in all parts of the world. It has not shown any sign of abating despite the sensitization and attempts to combat over the years. This study identifies the forms of child abuse in Ogbia Town. The study is guided by a null hypothesis which says: There is no significant independence in respondents on forms of child abuse mete out to children in Ogbia Town. **Materials/Methods:** We adopted a descriptive research design. Four hundred questionnaires on nominal scale (YES/NO response format) were served respondents in Ogbia Town, with a population of 179,926. The sample was drawn through convenience sampling technique. The results are presented in tables and analyzed in simple percentages. Chi square was used to test the null hypothesis. **Results:** The result shows that all forms of child abuse occur in Ogbia Town, though the level of occurrence is higher in some forms than others. Of great significance is the 81% positive response signifying high level presence of educational neglect of children. The null hypothesis was rejected, which means there is significant independence in respondents in forms of child abuse mete out to children in Ogbia Town. We believe the continuous prevalence of child abuse in Ogbia Town is a product of wrong attitude of parents towards children reinforced by the low level of modern education in the population. **Conclusion:** All forms of child abuse are prevalent in Ogbia Town.

Keywords: Identification, Child Abuse, Ogbia Town, Bayelsa State.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization report of 2014, “Child abuse includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity”. The incidence of child abuse is as old as the world. Even in ancient civilizations, infant abandonment, sexual abuse and malnourishment and other forms of child abuse were prevalent (Wolf *et al* 2001).

Over the years, child abuse has become very common. It was reported that on the average four to seven children die of child abuse daily (U.S Department 2013). In the USA in 1980 alone over 652,000 cases of child abuse of various forms were officially reported (Schmitt 1986). Even in Nigeria according to Abumere (2013) there is high prevalence rate of child abuse. There is no day that passes without cases of child abuse being reported or witnessed. It is a scourge in many households in Nigeria across cultures and religions (Brand & Fox 2008).

There are four major forms of child abuse. These are physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect (Wolf *et al*, 2001). Physical abuses are those acts of commission by a parent or care giver that cause actual physical harm to the child. Sexual abuses refer to the acts

whereby a parent or caregiver uses a child for sexual gratification. Neglect is the failure of parents to provide for the development and basic needs of the child where the parent has the resources to do so. Emotional abuse is the emotional neglect of a child. It is also known as psychological abuse and can seriously damage a child's emotional health and development. Child abuse often has lifelong effect on the children. Abused children often become broken, worthless and sad and sometimes have mental consequences that last long after the physical wounds have healed (Hermes 2014).

Many circumstances lead to child abuse in various homes. Some parents have difficulty in meeting the demands of parenthood, making them to become abusive when they do not know what else to do. Other factors include mental health problems, drugs and alcohol problems and domestic violence and frustrations (Hermes 2014).

The objective of this study is to identify the various forms of child abuse prevalent in Ogbia Town, Bayelsa State, with the following null hypothesis: There is no significant independence of respondents on the forms of child abuse mete out to children in Ogbia Town.

Ogbia Town is one of the principal towns in Bayelsa State and the headquarters of Ogbia Local Government Area. It is a semi urban centre with many commercial activities and heterogeneous population. It is the business orb of Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State and link port to many owns and villages in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area also in Bayelsa State. According to the National Population Commission, Ogbia Town has a population of about 180,000 and is the host community of the Bayelsa State College of Health Technology.

2. MATERIALS/METHOD

We adopted a descriptive survey design. The study population is the entire residents of Ogbia Town, from which a sample size of 400 was purposively determined. This was drawn through convenience sampling technique. They were served a structured nominal scale questionnaire on YES/NO response format. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents in their homes. They were later collected back for analysis. The exercise was completed in one week. Result is presented in tables and analyzed in simple percentages. Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis. It was calculated at 0.05 p. value.

3. RESULTS

TABLE I: PRESENTATION OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

| VARIABLES | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE % |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| AGE: | | |
| 15-19 | 61 | 15% |
| 20-29 | 160 | 40% |
| 30-39 | 83 | 21% |
| 40-49 | 35 | 9% |
| 50-59 | 28 | 7% |
| 60 and above | 33 | 8% |
| TOTAL | 400 | 100% |
| MARITAL STATUS | | |
| Married | 143 | 36% |
| Single | 210 | 52% |
| Divorce | 47 | 12% |
| TOTAL | 400 | 100% |
| OCCUPATION | | |
| Student | 120 | 30% |

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Civil service | 85 | 21.25% |
| Farming | 36 | 9% |
| Trading | 75 | 18.75% |
| Fishing | 15 | 3.75% |
| Commercial transportation | 69 | 17.25% |
| TOTAL | 400 | 100% |

The table above shows that respondents within age bracket 20-29 made up 40% of the sample with 160, while the least number of respondents are within 60 and above with 8%. Though the distribution is not perfect, it is still within acceptable limit. The table also shows that 143 married, 210 single and 47 divorces responded to the questionnaire. The occupational distribution of the sample came out top with 47% for students and 4% for fishing as the least. The high number of students represented in the sample reflects the large students' community in the town because of the presence of the Bayelsa State College of Health Technology. Traditional occupations like farming and fishing have low frequency in the sample. This reflects the changed occupational status of the town. The town is now a commercial centre with more traders and transporters than fishermen and farmers.

TABLE II: PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

| S/N | ITEMS | Yes | No | Total |
|-----|--|--------------|--------------|-------|
| 1 | PHYSICAL ABUSE | | | |
| a) | Physically beating a child resulting to injury. | 321 (80%) | 79 (20%) | 400 |
| b) | Physically beating a child to the level of sustaining dislocation | 279 (70%) | 121 (30%) | 400 |
| c) | Physically beating a child to the level of the child becoming blind/deaf | 225 (56%) | 175 (44%) | 400 |
| d) | Beating a child to the level of having scars | 289 (72%) | 111 (28%) | 400 |

The above table shows that all forms of physical child abuse occur in Ogbia Town, though at different levels. The percentage of positive response is very high in all, upward of 72% except in physical abuse resulting in being deaf/blind having only 56%. A child sustaining general injury is very common in the community having 80% positive response. The high positive response percentage in physical abuse is understandable since the acts and the results are easily observable by neighbours and others.

TABLE III: PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF SEXUAL ABUSE

| 2 | SEXUAL ABUSE | Yes | No | Total |
|----|---|--------------|--------------|-------|
| a) | Genital mutilation especially the female child. | 254 (64%) | 146 (36%) | 400 |
| b) | Forcing a girl below 14 years to sleep with her. | 285 (71%) | 115 (29%) | 400 |
| c) | Father or guardian sleeping with his daughter | 256 (64%) | 144 (36%) | 400 |
| d) | Encouraging a male child below 14 years to have sex | 218 (55%) | 182 (45%) | 400 |

This table shows that all forms of sexual abuse occur in Ogbia Town. But the level is not as significant as the forms of physical abuse. Only forcing a girl below 14 years to have sex has up to 71% positive response. The significance was even less in the case of encouraging a male child below 14 years to have sex which has only 55% positive response. The acts of child abuse under this group are not generally easily observable. Some of these acts may not be narrated to others even by the victims as the element of shame and stigma is always attached to them, and

also these are acts that are committed always indoors away from other members of the household and neighbours.

TABLE IV: PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

| S/NO | ITEMS | Yes | No | Total |
|----------|--|--------------|--------------|-------|
| 3 | EMOTIONAL ABUSE | | | |
| a) | When parents or guardian ridicule a child | 250 (63%) | 150 (37%) | 400 |
| b) | Making the child to be afraid all the time. | 275 (69%) | 125 (31%) | 400 |
| c) | When parent/guardian discriminate among the children | 325 (81%) | 75 (19%) | 400 |
| d) | Constantly and unnecessarily threatening a child | 310 (78%) | 90 (22%) | 400 |
| e) | Rejection of paternity of a child | 275 (69%) | 125 (31%) | 400 |

This table shows emotional abuse is common in Ogbia Town with parents/guardian discriminating against children coming out top with 81% positive response. This is followed by unnecessarily threatening a child with 78%, rejection of paternity and making a child fearful have 69% each and parents ridiculing a child having 63% positive response. This is another high occurrence group and like physical child abuse they are easily observable. Some of these acts are committed in course of normal social interaction.

TABLE V: PRESENTATION OF RESULT ON CHILD NEGLECT

| 4 | NEGLECTION OF A CHILD | Yes | No | Total |
|----------|---|--------------|--------------|-------|
| a) | Deprive a child of education | 325 (81%) | 75 (19%) | 400 |
| b) | Deprive a child of food. | 225 (56%) | 175 (44%) | 400 |
| c) | Parents/guardian unable to provide clothing for the child | 245 (61%) | 155 (39%) | 400 |
| d) | Parents/guardian unable to provide security for the child. | 240 (60%) | 160 (40%) | 400 |
| d) | Abandonment of a child by parents or guardian. | 225 (56%) | 175 (44%) | 400 |
| e) | Parents/guardian unable to provide good health care for the child | 275 (69%) | 125 (31%) | 400 |

The table above shows that 81%, 56%, 61%, 60%, 56% and 69% of the respondents said that child neglect in the different forms occurs in Ogbia Town while 19%, 44%, 39%, 40%, 44% and 31% of the respondents said child neglect in the various forms does not occur in Ogbia Town. This shows that child neglect occurs in Ogbia Town; though depriving a child of education is of highest significance at 81%.

TABLE VI: SUMMARY OF CHI SQUARE CALCULATIONS

| X ² - cal | X ² - critical | DF | P. Value | Decision |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----|----------|----------|
| 45.3 | 7.82 | 3 | 0.05 | Rejected |

This table shows that with a calculated chi square value of 45.3 against chi square critical of 7.82, the null hypothesis is rejected. It means that there is actually a significant independence of respondents in the forms of child abuse meted out to children in Ogbia Town.

4. DISCUSSION

This study has shown that all forms of child abuse occur in Ogbia Town. Many items in the different categories have significant levels of occurrence particularly in physical abuse and neglect. These forms of child abuse are much more easily observable and could become subjects of discussion in the neighbourhood and even within the extended family. Other forms particularly the forms under emotional child abuse are not easily noticed as they have to do with the psychology state of the child. Sometimes the effects of emotional child abuse do not manifest until adult life when the victim is required to manage a particular social relationship independently with other members of society.

The 81% positive response on depriving a child of education should be of particular concern to us, given the implication it holds for the development of future generations. Many studies (Otite & Ogionwo 2006, Binns 1977, Reeves & Venator 2014, OECD 2010, Golden 2015) have shown that in many parts of the world particularly in the third world, education is the most singularly important factor responsible for social mobility. They say that good education is not just an indicator of social mobility, but is the source of most other indices of social mobility such as good healthcare, good housing and good income. When a child is deprived of education today, injustice has not just been done to that child, and denies the basic rights of not just that child, but has invariably reduced the capacity and ability of future generations to attain personal goals and contribute to the development of society at large. The relatively low level of positive response on forms of sexual abuse may not necessarily reflect the true level of prevalence. Because of the element of shame and stigma attached to such acts respondents may not respond positively particularly if it occurred in their own household.

Some studies (Shamazizadeh *et al* 2014, Hermes 2014, Brand and Fox 2008, Davidson 1977) have concluded that a combination of many factors is responsible for the high incidence of child abuse in the world. These include frustration arising from lack of parenting skills, low income and unemployment, inability to communicate properly due to some mental or social disabilities, divorce and separation, lack of self-confidence, sickness, domestic violence, and substance abuse among others.

The situation of child abuse in Ogbia Town could be explained by some of these factors. We can see from the study that though it is a semi urban centre, the occupational structure places most respondents within the low income bracket. All the predominant occupations in Ogbia Town command low income. Most of the people could be frustrated often particularly when they could not meet the basic needs of their children. Apart from the general down turn of Nigeria's economy with the attendant high unemployment rate and frustration, we believe the situation in Ogbia Town has been compounded by the closure of the Nembe port in the town early in 2013.

The Nembe departure point with the big market it provided with other factors such as location, made Ogbia Town the transport and business hub of Ogbia, Nembe Local Government Area and parts of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area. Since the Nembe port was closed with the provision of road link to Nembe, it is of general observation that there has been a noticeable drop in business and many people associated with the port are now redundant. This situation could heighten tension in many homes and lead to frustration and consequently child abuse. The low level of education could also be a contributory factor. Ogbia Town is a community full of traders, local transporters, fishermen, farmers and little percentage of junior civil servants, all these occupations fall within low education category. The attitude of parents

towards their children could encourage or discourage abuse of children. The attitude itself is to a great extent the product of education. Most of them are still within the grips of traditional parental attitude towards child rearing which does not place much obligation on the parents to treat their children with much care. In traditional African setting there is very little comprehension of the concept of child right. These conditions we believe account for the high incidence of child abuse in Ogbia Town.

The rejection of the null hypothesis means there is significant independence of respondents in the forms of child abuse mete out to children from household to household. It shows the different nature and background of the respondents and the varied family experiences we have in society.

Findings of this study correlated with the findings of similar studies. Abumere (2013), U.S Department (2013), Brand & Fox (2008) and Schmitt (1986) concluded in their studies that child abuse in all forms is widespread and occurs on daily basis everywhere. The high incidence recorded in this study has only confirmed what they have observed in other parts of the world. We recommend that the Bayelsa State Ministry of Women and Gender Equality should establish the social welfare unit in Ogbia Town with qualified social workers to provide guidance and counseling for parents.

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