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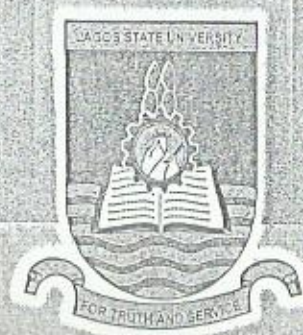


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Table of Contents

Title Page
Editor note
Table of Contents

1.	What did Nigerian Adolescents with Physical Disabilities say about their self-concept? Sulaiman, A. A. (Ph.D)	1-13
2.	High School Seniors' Attitude to Homework and its Effect on their Academic Performance in Biology Bilesanmi-Awoderu, J. b. (Ph.D)	14-22
3.	Assessment of Stress Producing Factors Among Lagos State University Workers Akeredolu O. A. (Ph.D) and Adeogun S. O. (Ph.D)	23-29
4.	Appraisal of Physical Education Teaching Facilities and Equipment in Private Primary and Secondary Schools in Lagos State Olu Ayodabo (Ph.D), Idowu 'Bidemi and Dansu Anthony	30-40
5.	Attitude Towards Economics and Academic Performance Of Students, Gbenu, J. P.	41-45
6.	Differences Between the Nutritional Health Status of Private and Public Primary School in Ojo Local Education District of Lagos State Oladipupo-Okorie, B. O. (Mrs.)	46-53
7.	Graffiti in Tertiary Institutions: Emergent Information from the Hidden Curriculum Sirneon Dosunmu, S. A.	54-61

8.	Acceptability of Mixed Yoruba-English Code Makinde, Solomon Olanrewaju (Ph.D.)	62-77
9.	A Philosophical Examination of the Concept of Globalization and Education Yemi Ambrose Akinkuotu (Ph.D)	78-84
10.	Strategies for Achieving and Maintaining Qualitative Counselling Relationship During Counselling Process in Nigeria Bisi Obadofin (Ph.D)	86-98
11.	Sources of Procurement of Drugs among Students in Lagos Universities Badejo, A. O. (Ph.D)	
12.	Child Abuse and its Implication on Educational System in Nigeria: a Phenomenological Perspective Pemedede, Oluwatobi	99-107
12.	Stylistic Analysis of Humour in Adebayo Faleti's Literary Works: An Appraisal of dialects and Idioms Dayo Akanmu	108-115
13.	The Sport Education Curriculum Model: Setting the Stage for Students' Empowerment in Physical Education Learning Babs Adegbamigbe (Ph.D.)	116-127
14.	Insult and Assault on Teachers by Lagos State Secondary School Students: The Role of Stakeholders Olufowobi Oludare O.	128-137

CHILD ABUSE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN
NIGERIA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY

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ABSTRACT

Child-abuse consists of acts of controversy because to some people, it is home training while to some it is immoral and injustice and as a result, it receives wide national audience. Sociologically, the study explains child abuse from phenomenological perspectives in terms of meanings and interpretations which 'actors' have given to the concept. Recommendations were adequately given which if followed, will curtail the incidence of child abuse and significantly increase enrolment figures in schools, thus, also improving the rate of literacy in any given society.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, child abuse is as old as the creation of the world. In the world today, no country can be exonerated from the concept of child abuse. It is difficult for the government to tackle and provide a lasting solution to the problem in the society. In the Nigerian Society, in homes, street, hospitals, schools and a lot too numerous to mention, there is the prevalence of child abuse and it is gaining momentum.

In this paper, phenomenology, as a theory in the sociology of education presents child abuse and neglect which have reached a high point as a result of the meanings and interpretations 'actors' have given to the concept.

Child abuse is a phenomenon or an occurrence that takes place everyday. It is as old as mankind and as a result, it is abstruse to trace the origin of the phenomenon. It has become a scenario, which cannot be traced to a particular country or century.

Child abuse takes different forms in every society; it is an event that happens in the homes, streets, industries, schools, and many others. Consequently, as child abuse

reached a crescendo, it apparently becomes reminiscent within the realm of social problems' (Ritzer, 2000:201)

The precursor to a true analogy of child abuse is the historical event of the slave trade. A cursory look at ethnological study of the slave trade is a web that cut up both adults and young ones. In other words, the business so called slave trade did not exonerate children and it is a paradox to argue that such an activity is not child abuse.

Stride and Ifeka (1978:212) revealed that during the slave trade, items like whips and chisels were used to remove the front teeth so that slaves who tried to starve to death could be forcibly fed. The argument here is that there was no age limit for the capturing; at any age, anybody could be captured. If this is correct, it is obvious that the European merchants then also practiced child labour or child abuse otherwise 'age' should be spelt out in order to limit the ugly event at that epoch. Alas! 'age' was not recognized. Similarly, Stride et al (1978: 215) noted that European merchants accrued enough profits from slave trade and America too could not have developed beyond a class of small-scale farmers without the help of the slaves.

In the same vein, Bolarin (1995:69) aptly explains that industrialization improved trade and commerce but significantly, it affects people belonging to the poor class. One of the tenable reasons for this is the advent of industries which ushered in the introduction of child labour all over Western Europe. Things became so bad that in 1802 and 1803 an act was passed to eliminate children from working in factories in order to abolish child abuse in Europe. Also, in Africa, the killing of twins centuries ago was typically child abuse.

THE CONCEPT OF CHILD ABUSE

There is no universal definition for the concept of child abuse. According to Akinade (2001:28) defines child abuse as deliberate negative and unfair actions or inactions, attitudes or dealings perpetrated against children by some older people or adults with the intention of hurting them. Examples of child abuse include sexual abuse, emotional, physical abuse, structural abuse, neglect and child labour. In other words, child abuse can be described as an act being inflicted on child, which is detrimental to the health of the child. To phenomenologist, child abuse is a social problem that focuses on what people think and do to a child. (Ritzer 2000:217).

Daodu (1999:25) posits that child abuse is a phenomenon that cuts across all of Africa. In other words, as it is in Nigeria, so it is in Sierra Leone, Libya and many

other Third world countries. The issue of child abuse becomes an ill wind; that blows no one any good. As a result, there are child prostitutes, kid-robbers, kid assassins as well as kid soldiers. A typical example of kid soldiers is "an 8-years old boy blazing away a Kalashnikov gun, AK47 during the Liberian Civil War" (Ibim, 2000)

Statistically, the International Labour Organization (ILO) as reported in Daodu (1999:35) estimates that 250 million children are actively engaged in work between the ages 5-14. In Asia, according to ILO 61 percent (or 153 million) of all child workers which include 32 percent in Africa and 7 percent in Latin America. In all, Africa has the highest rate of participation of children in economic activity. It is worth of note that, the issue of child abuse is not peculiar to the African continent. It also includes Western Europe, North America and the host of others. In other words, it is a global phenomenon.

SOME INDICATORS OF THE EXTENT OF CHILD LABOUR IN COUNTRIES WHERE NATIONAL SURVEYS WERE CONDUCTED RECENTLY

Indicators	Proportion of children 5 - 4 years of age both sexes		
	%	Boys %	Girls
Economically active children	25	27	-
Boys/Girls ratio at work	100	56	-
Children attending school of whom	39.87	49.90	23
With economic activity	00.33	00.25	00
Not attending school	13.81	10.51	10
Of whom:			
In economic activity only	39.56	56.74	23
In house keeping activity only	12.32	8.14	15
Working 40 hours or more per week	37.38	41.42	24
Working 49 hours or more per week	14.17	11.19	12
Working 56 hours or more per week	11.13	9.15	8
Completely idle (not going to school, nor with economic or house keeping activity)	29.32	27.37	23
Children whose work is hazardous	34.68	33.67	27
Sectors where actual incidence of injuries/illness is higher than 10%			
Construction	26		26
Mining/quarrying	16		12

Transport/storage/communication	17	19
Agriculture	12	12
Children:		
Whose work is stressful	Up to 50% of working children	
Who came home from work exhausted	Up to 60% of working children	
Who have no day off/no free time	Up to 80% of working children	

Source: ILO Bureau of Statistics (Geneva 1997)

The table above indicates number of working children between 5-14 years of age 1997 (ILO Bureau of Statistics, Geneva 1997 in Kebebew, 1998).

GENDER

The data so far obtained show that more boys than girls work $\frac{3}{4}$ close to three boys to two girls, on average. It should be borne in mind, however, that the number of working girls is often underestimated by statistical surveys which usually do not take into account unpaid economic activity carried out in and around the household, including household enterprises.

Also more girls than boys perform full-time housework of non-economic nature e.g. house keeping in their own parents' household-many of them between 8-12 years -in order to enable their parents or guardians to go to works, or take care of sick or handicapped members in the household. Such work is reported to be the main reason for about one-third of the youngsters who do not attend school -they were either never enrolled or were obliged to drop out of school because of the full time house work. If such full time house work were taken into account, there will be little or no variation between the sexes in the total size of working children, and the number of girls could even exceed that of boys (Kebebew, 1998).

CAUSES OF CHILD ABUSE

POVERTY

In 1995, the Social Summit's programme calls for national poverty eradication; that is, in discussing structural causes of poverty. However, the Summit expects the local, national and international actions to eradicate extreme poverty. In doing this, it is envisaged that while the poverty rate is drastically reduced, the level of child abuse would also reduce or been eradicated at all levels (United Nations Development Programme Poverty Report, 2000:32). Thus, child abuse is significant and an ill that affects the society at large. It suffices to ask why child abuse? Poverty is no exception. The developed countries too had their own stories to tell as far as the

issue of child abuse is concerned, but the rate of poverty in Third World countries is so high that even children are engaged in economic activities. A typical example of this can be seen on all highways in Nigeria where hordes of children between ages (4-18) are hawking in the name of assisting the parents. Ebigbo (1986:287) reveals that 61% of the respondents agreed that hawking is not legal for a child under 15. Interestingly, a child who refuses to engage in this economic activity may face sanctions according to the parents and may even miss some meals.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The high rate of unemployment is another factor that brings about child abuse. Many families depend on profit of sales, which their children will bring as a supplement in order to keep body and soul together.

PEER GROUP INFLUENCE

The peer group is one of the agents of socialization, a motivational factor and inevitable in human society. The type of peer group in which children find themselves determine their way of life. In other words, a wrong choice of peer group may result in child abuse. Similarly, a lot of children are not given proper guidance and counselling by parents and members of the family. Such children are left to learn from the streets, as a result, a lot of children end up engaging in anti social acts.

NEGLIGENCE OF GOVERNMENT

The issue of child abuse is at its apex as a result of negligence on the part of Federal, State and Local Governments. Most of the laws or decrees to eradicate child abuse are only written but never enforced. In other words, negligence on the part of government has been seen as a way to encourage child abuse and neglect in the society. The failure of these laws and decrees could accelerate the number of dropouts, truants teenage mothers, miscreants as well as increase in social vices in the society.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO EDUCATION - A SLOGAN

Manifestation of child labour and neglect is apparently a clear picture of government attitude towards education. For instance, UNESCO (1999:20) argues thus "state funding for education declines and a segment of the population can no longer afford to send their children to school". Furtherance of this, a 1998 UNICEF study as reported in Analysis of Nigeria's Response to the Libreville platform of Action, 2000) indicated that 4,000 children were trafficked from Cross Rivers State to various parts of Nigeria as well as to other countries within the region. Also, researches shows that

school children are living in the street in Port Harcourt, Owerri, Calabar, Lagos, Sokoto, Maiduguri and Kano statistically showed that:

19 per cent school children were trafficked and 98 per cent of them were Nigerians. This indicates that most trafficking in Nigeria is internal.
92 per cent were between 10 and 16 years of age and the boy to girl ratio was 2:3
71 per cent of the children claimed that they worked for people other than their parents for a fee after school hours.
per cent had been sexually abused- 33 per cent by their relatives, 67 per cent by others.

In Nigeria, teenagers are on the streets as well as highways selling different item of goods even during the school hours. The question then is does the child have right to education? The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (1997: 12) argues that every child (male or female) is entitled to receive free and compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education based on individual ability and prepare the child for responsible life in the society. Also to promote and develop the child's personality, talents, mental and physical, potential to the maximum level and so on.

In the same manner, Olisa and Willy (2002: 74) outlined the right of every citizen to education. It includes:

- a. Universal primary and secondary education, including technical and vocational education, shall be free, compulsory and available to all and
- b. every citizen shall have equal access to higher education, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means and in particular, by progressive introduction of free higher education.

It has been observed that in Nigeria, the right of a child to education has been eroded. Formal education has become a slogan not a reality. That is, education in Nigeria has become a privilege not a right having considered the state or standard of education in the country. In addition, government has failed to provide the child with the essentials of life like food, good health care system, sound education and so on. It is an eye sore to see that in Nigeria, students have to take furniture (desks) to school before they could sit and write while some sit on floor, teachers have no tables and seats and buildings are dilapidating.

It is worrisome to see teenagers on highways during school hours hawking wares. Also, many are victims of child abuse since they are drop outs as a result of finance. Furthermore of this, some parents are ignorant as a result they put their children to

work as early as possible. Also, it has been observed that all democratically elected governments in Nigeria have a blue-print of free education as their manifesto but having assumed an office the manifesto becomes a slogan. In other words, a situation where government plays a passive role in enhancing quality of education, abolition of free education as well as poor funding will lead to child abuse, brain drain and other social vices in the society.

A child who is involved in this "modernized slavery" would be affected educationally, sociologically and psychologically. The humiliating and dehumanizing treatment children are subjected to would leave some indelible marks on their psyche. Their attitude to life and towards others remains distorted because they are maladjusted. For instance, girls who have been used as prostitutes would always look for the easy way out. They condition their minds such as 'it is better to sell their bodies for money than to engage in any other meaningful work'. Besides, the foundation of the society, which is family life is disrupted and they do not think of marriage and its attendant gains.

The health implications of the continued trade in children as prostitutes cannot also be overlooked or underestimated. Child prostitution increases the risk of several health-related hazards. The girl child involved in prostitution stands serious risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV/AIDS virus. This increases the risk of damage to the reproductive system, which eventually may lead to infertility. Secondly, there is the possibility of unwanted pregnancy resulting in teenage mothers – a case of a child having a child herself. Some may not have the courage and encouragement to have their babies thereby resorting to criminal abortion.

Criminal abortion often leads to death and where the child survives, there is the likelihood that so much damage is done whereby the womb is ruptured or completely removed in order to save the teenage mother. Even, if the child has to carry the pregnancy; to a term, because of her age, she may have complications during birth resulting in Vesico Vagina Fistula, (V.V.F) a condition whereby a woman does not have muscle control and defecates and urinates uncontrollably. The operation for restoration and reversal of this condition is very delicate and so expensive that victims themselves cannot afford to pay the bill and victim becomes social outcasts.

The implication of the continued trade in children within and outside the country receives a wide national audience. The National Policy on Education (1978) maintains that education is the most important instrument of change in the intellectual and social outlook for any society. However, there is need to curb child abuse in the

society. Failure of this, technological advancement will remain a mirage, conundrum and an illusion in our education industry.

Furthermore, illiteracy breeds other ills for the society. The social problems resulting from illiteracy and poor orientation and socialization culminate unfortunately in hunger and poverty. Poverty and hunger have pushed some parents to allow their children to hawk in the name of "home training".

CONCLUSION

The phenomenological point of view is related to the meanings and interpretations the 'actor' gives to a particular situation. In other words, while some groups of people may see child abuse as injustice, maltreatment, injurious, unwholesome as well as violence, others may perceive the interpretation as "informal education" or 'home training'. That is, meanings and interpretations of situation determine the way an individual in the society will judge such situation.

However, the thrust of this paper is that child abuse in its meanings and interpretations is a crime and an ill wind, which must be eradicated. It is a social ill, as well as social problem which must be diagnosed and appropriate prescriptions of laws and decrees must be enacted or promulgated so as to curtail crimes in the society.

Accordingly, the duty to eradicate any form of child abuse concerns everybody in the society. However, better social infrastructure more economic opportunities and better education must be available to all and especially the rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should increase its annual budget expenditure directed towards the welfare of the children. There is need to increase financial assistance to institutions and agencies concerned with the promotion and defense of the rights of the child.

Government should put in place economic policies aimed at eliminating poverty and hunger among the Nigerian populace. Job opportunities should be made available and inflation curbed.

Formal education should be free and compulsory at all levels.

The National Policy on Population with regards to family size should be reviewed and adequately monitored in terms of its implementation. Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria should intensify the campaign on the need for family planning.

Also, there should be seminars as well as group and individual counselling in order to curtail this modern day slavery.

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