



Influence of Child Abuse on the Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the influence of child abuse on academic performance of Government secondary school students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of River State. Specifically, the study tried to; identify the personal characteristics of students and teachers in Government secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of River State and investigate the influence of child abuse on academic performance in Government secondary schools. In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were advanced; what is the extent of the influence of child abuse on students' assessment grades and academic performance? Also, what is the extent of the influence of child abuse on students' participation in class activities and academic performance? Two research hypotheses were also formulated in furtherance of the study; (i) Child abuse has no significant influence on students' assessment grades and academic performance (ii) Child abuse has no significant influence on students' participation in class activities and academic performance. The study uses the survey design and the population of the study was the government secondary schools identified in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. However the research selected 10 out of them for a closer study through the simple random sampling technique. Primary data was collected through the use of questionnaire, presented and analyzed by means of simple percentages. A cut-off mean of 2 points was the bench mark for answering research questions and hypotheses were tested using the one-sample t-test. The research revealed that; child abuse has significant influence on both students' assessment grades and their participation in class activities; and thus concludes that child abuse has significant influence on students' academic performance in Government secondary schools. It was recommended that; child abuse and its influence should receive attention in education policy forums; and that parents should always relate to their children with love and affection and provide for their needs; there should be public enlightenment programs to combat mass ignorance and public awareness on the right to freedom from all forms of child abuse; as much as possible, teachers/caregivers should avoid the use of corporal punishment because it only teaches students that violence is the best way of maintaining control and it encourages them to hit other students.

Keywords: academic performance, child abuse, students

INTRODUCTION

Child Abuse is not a new phenomenon in the history of man. It has been going on right from time immemorial. A child generally is a boy or a girl of any age between infancy and adolescence. The term child abuse is not restricted to common verbal abuse people are fond of giving to children but goes beyond that. This agrees with the United Nations convention where it was resolved through the Child Rights Act, 2003 that a child is anyone who has not attained the age of 18 years. According to Alokun and Olatunji (2014), child abuse is the most challenging social catastrophes attracting public attention in the world. Denge and Denga (2007) state that cruel behaviour on children by teachers, parents, peers, guardians, siblings and society in general

constitute child abuse. The researchers observed that Nigeria is not spared of this evil phenomenon, hence the need to carry out a study of this nature.

There is no safe place for children anymore because it is everywhere (Augustine and Abubakar 2016); home, school, street, religious houses are all possible places for child abuse. Also it can be performed by siblings, parents, teachers, guardians and so-called mentors. Child abuse is any form of maltreatment given to a child. It occurs when an elder one, parent or guardian cause harm, injury, risk, excessive labour, deprivation of basic needs or death to a child by their actions. Harmful behaviours from parents, older people, and care-givers can be intentional or not. Any form of behaviour that leads to the physical or emotional harm to a child is known as 'Child abuse or Maltreatment' according to the section 9 of the Child Protection Act, 1999. Child abuse is punishable under the law and is frowned at by the Child's Protection Agency. Both boys and girls are abused.

According to the researcher, child abuse is a practice whereby children (either biological or adopted) are maltreated, battered or deprived of some basic needs in the home, street, religious houses or at school by the elderly. It is caused by poverty, lack of parental care, unemployment, marital conflicts and polygamous homes. Child abuse describes poor relationships between the child and the parents or guardian. It means any form of physical or psychological mistreatment of a child by parents or guardians. Children that have been victimized by one or more form(s) of abuse exhibit some behaviours different from others. There is always lack of trust in people because they have been disappointed and abuse by those that ought to be source of joy, trust, defense and security to them, they believe nowhere is safe and nobody is to be trusted.

Statement of the Problem

At the heart of every educational system lays the desire for the students, teachers and the institutions to achieve their educational goals; however, the extent to which this desire is achieved in the study period of a student varies based on individual differences. Individual differences in academic performance have been linked to differences in intelligence and personality. Students with higher mental ability and those who are higher in conscientiousness (linked to effort and achievement motivation) tend to perform highly in academic settings. A recent data-analysis suggested that mental curiosity has an important influence on academic performance in addition to intelligence and conscientiousness.

Despite high mental abilities, conscientiousness and intellectual engagement demonstrated by most children it has been observed of late that the academic performance of children in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State is becoming low. It has also been observed that in this recent times issues of child abuse and neglect is on the rise in the state due to economic depression caused by the global economic backdrop and incessant social/civil unrests. It could be that this change negatively portrayed results in some maladaptive behaviours. These forms of behaviours do affect the children to develop antisocial behaviours.

Parents failed to fulfill a major obligation to their children's care. This is because they involve their children in making money - hawking, which exposes the children to immeasurable influences without regard to their age and comfort. They are denied the rights to education, those that are allowed to attend school do so with utmost misery of wearing dirty school uniforms with no writing materials which sets in frustration among the students. These often manifest itself in the form of fighting, quarrelling, and the development of lack of adequate assertive behavior. Furthermore, many children who have been abused in any form develop some sort of psychological issue. These issues may include anxiety, depression, eating disorders, co-dependency or even a lack of human connections. There is also a slight tendency for children who have been abused to become child abusers themselves.

This became the motivation to investigate the influence of child abuse on academic performance secondary school students in Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Local Government Areas. Based on these, the problem of the study therefore is to carry out an investigation on the influence

of child abuse on academic performance of adolescents in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Local Government Areas.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate influence of child abuse on academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Find out the influence of physical abuse on secondary school students' academic performance.
- Determine the influence of emotional abuse on academic performance of secondary school students.

Null hypotheses

In furtherance of the objectives the following hypotheses are hereby projected;

H₀₁: There is no significant influence between physical abuse and academic performance of a child.

H₀₂: There is no significant influence between emotional abuse of a child and his academic performance.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The relevant documentation available in literatures as regards concepts relating to child abuse and performance in the academic domain are brought to book in this section of the literature review for this study.

The Concept of Child Abuse

Child abuse has become an apparent endless and vicious cycle that hurts the image of the country and the dignity of those involved. Child abuse can occur in a child's home or in the schools or communities the child interacts with. The maltreatment of children is deeply enmeshed in historical values and perspectives. The concept of child abuse has been defined and redefined throughout history. Society is slowly evolving from viewing children as property, subject to the whims of the family and society, to the recognition that children have rights of their own. Each period in history as well as each culture has a concept of how children should be treated.

Types of Child Abuse

An abuse according to Isanghedehi (2005) could be seen in three perspectives physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. In almost the same categories Mfonobong (2013) broadly categorized child abuse into five perspectives namely physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and child exploitation (child labour).

Physical Abuse:

Physical abuse refers to any contact with the body of the child, which may result in an injury. Such contact may involve beating, hitting, kicking, shaking, slapping, punching, strangling, biting or any act or omission that is not an accident but that which brings some injuries to the child's body.

Emotional Abuse:

Fontana (1994), defines emotional and psychological child abuse as a particular type of parent-child relationship which have effect on the child's ability to make his or her own decisions, which may lead to the child's feeling of inferiority complex.

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse is defined by CAPTA in (Khartri, 2004) as the employment, use of persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct.

Effects/Implication of Child Abuse on Child Development

Child abuse can affect all domains of child development; physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral and social which are often interrelated. The possible consequences of child abuse identified in literature included high-quality systematic reviews and primary studies with large representative samples in Cross River State and others in the Europe and America. Adverse consequences are broadly linked to all abuse types; however, where appropriate, associations are made between specific types of abuse and negative outcomes.

Attachment problems:

Babies and young infants exposed to abuse are more likely to experience insecure or disorganized attachment problems with their primary caregiver (Hildyard and Wolf, 2002; Jordan and Sketchley, 2009; Schore, 2002; Streeck-Fischer and Van der Kolk, 2000). Patterns of child caregiver attachment are extremely important for a child's early emotional and social development.

Physical health problems:

Research investigating the effect of child abuse and neglect has an overall physical health largely focused on outcomes in adulthood. However, data from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN) in the United States has indicated strong associations between abuse/neglect and health problems in children/adolescents (Flaherty et al., 2006, 2009).

Trauma and psychological problems:

Trauma caused by experiences of child abuse and neglect can have serious effects on the developing brain, increasing the risk of psychological problems (Streeck-Fischer and Van der Kolk, 2000).

Learning and developmental problems:

Strong associations have been made between child abuse/neglect and learning difficulties/poor academic performance (Gilbert et al., 2009; Mills, 2004; Veltman and Browne, 2001) Abuse and neglect in the early years of life can seriously affect the developmental capacities of infants, especially in the critical areas of speech and language (Wolfe, 1999).

Behavioral problems:

Researchers have found that child abuse and neglect is associated with behaviour problems in childhood and adolescence (Ethier *et al.*, 2004; Mills, 2004; Shaffer, Huston, and Egeland, 2008).

Teenage pregnancy:

Adverse consequences of teenage pregnancy and risky sexual activity may also be associated with experiences of abuse and neglect (Fergusson, Horwood, and Lynskey, 1997; Gilbert *et al.*, 2009; Hillis *et al.*, 2004; Mendes and Moseleuddin, 2006; Noell, Rohde, Seeley, and Ochs, 2001).

The Concept of Academic Performance

To perform is to take a complex series of actions that integrate skills and knowledge to produce a valuable result (Elger, 2012). Academic achievement or performance is the outcome of education; the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals (Von Stumm and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Academic performance according to the Cambridge University Report (2003) is frequently defined in terms of examination performance. In this study academic performance is characterized by performance in tests/assessments and performance in examinations of primary school pupils.

Factors affecting Academic Performance

Education is a very costly project for nations and individual families. Therefore, it is very crucial to understand the factors affecting its provisions and the performance of learners.

Teacher Remuneration

Remuneration refers to payment or compensation received for services or employment. This includes the base salary and any bonuses or other economic benefits that an employee or

executive receives during employment (Investopedia, 2010). Thus teacher remuneration refers to the total compensation received by a teacher, which includes not only the base salary but options, bonuses, expense accounts and other forms of compensation.

Teacher Quality

Teachers are central to any consideration of schools, and a majority of education policy discussions focus directly or indirectly on the role of teachers. There is a *prima facie* case for the concentration on teachers, because they are the largest single budgetary element in schools.

Teacher quality involves the level of qualification and research on the value of a teacher's advanced degree is mixed: some studies show that while additional teacher education has a positive correlation with student achievement/performance in some cases, others find that it negatively affects achievement (Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine, 1996; Hanushek, 1986).

Teacher absenteeism

An observable indicator of teacher effort and performance has been the focus of several recent studies. Chaudhury *et al.* (2000) report on surveys in six developing countries that yield observational data on absence of teachers and health workers: India, Uganda, Peru, Ecuador, Bangladesh and Indonesia; averaging across the six countries, they found an absence rate of 19 percent among primary school teachers. Teacher absence predicts lower scores of pupils in tests in general.

School Quality and Socio-Economic/Cultural Level of Parents/Guardians

In enumerating the factors that could be responsible for varying intra-and inter-school/academic achievement/performance, Coombs (2009), listed four important factors including the acute scarcity of instructional resources which he said constrained educational systems from responding more fully to new demands'.

Learners' Characteristics/social conditions

About the learners' characteristics as factor to academic performance, very important are the children themselves with regard to how ready they are to blend into the mix we call schooling. It is clear that the factors are connected in an intricate way since we are dealing with social issues where how one factor influences an outcome cannot be entirely independent of the many other factors in the process.

Theoretical Framework

This section brings to book relevant theories or models relating to academic performance in order to provide theoretical bases for the study.

- a. Weiner's Model of Attributions
- b. Bowlby's Theory of Attachment
- c. Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bowlby's Theory of Attachment

The theory of attachment was originally developed by John Bowlby (1907 - 1990), a British psychoanalyst who was attempting to understand the intense distress experienced by infants who had been separated from their parents. Bowlby observed that separated infants would go to extraordinary lengths (e.g., crying, clinging, frantically searching) to prevent separation from their parents or to reestablish proximity to a missing parent. At the time of Bowlby's initial writings, psychoanalytic writers held that these expressions were manifestations of immature defense mechanisms that were operating to repress emotional pain, but Bowlby noted that such expressions are common to a wide variety of mammalian species, and speculated that these behaviors may serve an evolutionary function.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory (1977) emphasizes that part of what a person learns is through imitation or modeling and that learning takes place in a social situation. During interaction an

individual may learn to modify his behaviour as a result of how others in the group are responding.

Empirical Studies

Apebende, Umoren, Ukpepi and Ndifon (2010) in their study “The Influence of Child Abuse on Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Primary Science in Cross River State, Nigeria” use ex-post-facto research design. The population of study consisted of all primary six pupils in Cross River State in the 2005/2006 school year that made up to 68,201 pupils from 994 primary schools in the State. The sampling procedure was stratified random sampling and the sample was 2,940 pupils selected from 49 schools. Two instruments were used: a “Child Abuse Questionnaire” (CHAQ) and a “Primary Science Test” to test the academic performance of pupils’. The independent t-test was used to analyze the data. The result revealed that children that were not abused perform better than their counterparts who are abused. Based on these findings the following recommendations were made; that parents and caregivers should see beating, hitting, burning etc as physical abuse and not a way of discipline and so should desist from using it on their children under their care; that abusing the child emotionally may demoralize them and may make them feel that they are of no value in the home as well as in the society.

Alokan and Olatunji (2014) in their study “Influence of Child Abuse on Class Room Behaviour and Academic Performance among Primary and Secondary School Students”. A descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all teachers in primary and secondary schools in both public and private sectors in Ado local government area of Ekiti State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 200 teachers drawn from 10 schools through stratified random sampling. A questionnaire tagged “Child Abuse and Classroom Behaviour Questionnaire” (CACBQ) was used to collect data. Expert judgments were used to ensure face and content validity. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result revealed a significant relationship between child abuse and children’s attention span in class. The result also showed a significant relationship between child’s active involvement in parent’s business and his/her attitude to class work. Based on these findings the following recommendations were made among others; that the effects of child abuse on children’s classroom behaviour and later academic performance should receive attention in education policy forums; and that parents should always relate to their children with love and affection and provide for their needs.

Summary of Related Literature

The chapter covers the review of concept that makes up the study, relevant theories, and empirical review of related literatures. Under the conceptual framework; the authors were unanimous on the concept of child abuse and academic performance with just differences in terminologies. The theoretical framework considered three theories related to academic performance and child abuse (i.e Weiner’s attribution theory), (i.e bowlby's theory of attachment)and (Bandura’s social learning theory).

Also in the empirical studies there was consensus among authors that child abuse be it in any of its forms have a significant negative effect on the academic performance of student as well as the entire child development and the educational sector. It is this that the study is set to further validate.

METHODOLOGY

The research design that will be used for the study is survey design. The design is deemed appropriate since data will be collected from the elements or subjects without imposing any condition or treatment on them..

The study will be carried out in Government secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers states. The population of the study will be all the public secondary schools in

Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State according to Rivers State Education Board. The study will adopt the simple random sampling technique. This is because it allows all elements equal opportunities to be included into the sample; in this manner approximately ten (10) public secondary schools will be selected in total making up 47% of the total number of public secondary schools in the three Local Government Areas of River State. The researcher will also select 1,000 students who constituted 10% of the total of approximately 10000 students, and 100 teachers; making a total of 1,100 respondents to be served with questionnaires. The researcher deemed it appropriate because the combination of schools in all the areas that makes up the local government will enhance the study to arrive at a synthesized result and findings in this manner further enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings.

The close-ended questionnaire called Academic performance and child abuse (APACA) will be used to elicit data from respondents, this is because it facilitate quicker recording of opinions and gives a clear and easy analytical procedure. The questionnaire is designed based on a four- points "Likert-Summated Rating Scale" ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) and weighted 2.5. The instrument will be pilot tested to check for the reliability and the validity of the study. To facilitate easy understanding, the instruments will further be divided into 2 sections: section A which covers respondents' personal data and section B containing items relating to the influence of child abuse on students' academic performance.

The questionnaire will be distributed to students and teachers who were aware of the subject to seek their opinion on the topic "child abuse and influence on academic performance of students in public secondary in River State. The instrument will be constructed with simple English for clarity. The researcher will distribute the questionnaires and retrieve them from the respondents on the spot. One thousand one hundred (1100) questionnaires will be distributed to students. The instrument will be based on a 4-point Likert Summated Rating scale with numerical values assigned to the responses as follows:

Strongly Agree (A)	-	4 points.
Agree (A)	-	3 points
Disagree (DA)	-	2 points
Strongly Disagree (SDA)	-	1 point

The T-Test Statistics will be adopted to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significant. Mean and standard deviation will be used to answer research questions. Based on this; an item and variable which have mean less than the cut-off mean shall be judged not to be influenced by child abuse. However, items and variable with mean equal or more than the cut-off mean shall be considered to be influenced by child abuse. Child abuse here is called the independent variable, while academic performance is the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Data collected were analyzed using T-test statistics

Hypothesis 1:

Child abuse has no significant effect on pupils' assessments grades and academic performance.

Table 1: Child Abuse and Pupils' Assessment Grades and Academic Performance

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Total of Item on Child Abuse and Assessments Grades	-50.255	945	.000	2.036

The table presents a one-sample t-test on the effect of child abuse on pupils' assessment grades and academic performance in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State. The table reveals $t = -50.255$, $df = 945$ and $p = 0.00$ at $\alpha = 0.05$. the research concludes that since $p < 0.05$ at

$\alpha = 0.05$, the difference between the total items on child abuse verses pupils' assessment grades mean and the bench mark mean was considered significant. This confirms that pupils' and teachers significantly agree that child abuse has effects on pupils' assessment grades and academic performance in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State

Hypothesis 2

Child abuse has no significant effect on pupils' participation in the class and academic performance.

Table 2: Child Abuse and Pupils' Participation in the Class and Academic Performance

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Total of Item on Child Abuse and Participation in the Class	-15.758	945	.000	2.087

The table presents a one-sample t-test on the effect of child abuse on pupils' participation in the class and academic performance in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State. The table reveals $t = -15.758$, $df = 945$ and $p = 0.00$ at $\alpha = 0.05$. the research concludes that since $p < 0.05$ at $\alpha = 0.05$, the difference between the total items on child abuse verses pupils' participation in class mean and the bench mark mean was considered significant. This confirms that pupils' and teachers significantly agree that child abuse has effects on pupils' participation in class and academic performance in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Child abuse has significant effects on pupils' assessment grades and academic performance

The result of hypothesis one shows that child abuse has significant effects on pupils' assessment grades and academic performance. The probable explanation for this is that a child who is maltreated suffers from emotional trauma, loss of will power and a feeling of inferiority complex which makes his/her mental strength weak.

This finding is in line with Ligeve and Poipoi (2012) who found a significant difference in the academic achievement of pupils who were involved and those who were not involved in fishing activities, and that the academic achievement of boys involved was significantly higher than that of girls involved in fishing activities. Also in Mfonobong (2013) it is reveal that child abuse and neglect is a global problem that takes place in many setting one of which is the school; and it has serious implications on the educational system in Nigeria. It makes the students perform badly in both internally and externally administered examinations thus presenting a serious draw back on the child educational development by hindering societal growth and development.

Child abuse has significant effects on pupils' participation in class and academic performance

The result of hypothesis two shows that child abuse has significant effects on pupils' participation in class and academic performance. The probable explanation for this result is that a child who is maltreated has the tendency to think a lot and have his attention drifted away from the work at school. When a child is abused, he/she would find it difficult to concentrate in class and the child's level of assimilation would be affected, thus finding it hard to understand whatever he/she is being taught. This would make the child a passive listener and also a passive participant in the class which would culminate in poor academic performance.

This finding is in line with Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) who found a relationship between child abuse and child performance competencies such as engagement in academic tasks and paying attention in the classroom. In the same vein, Chalk, Gibbons and Scarupa (2002) also found an association between child abuse and attention deficit disorders. Also in Alokun and Olatunji

(2014) they reveal that there is a significant relationship between child abuse and children's attention span in class. The result also showed that there is a significant relationship between child's active involvement in parent's business and his/her attitude to class work.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

In the study, the researcher tried to investigate the effects of child abuse on academic performance of pupils' in public primary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State. This was done through investigation of the personal characteristics (data) of pupils' and teachers in public primary schools and the effect of child abuse on pupils' assessment grades and their participation in class which are identified to be measures of academic performance of primary school pupils' in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State.

The statistical analysis reveals that; child abuse has significant effects on pupils' assessment grades and their participation in class activities during and after lessons periods. Base on this, the research therefore conclude that child abuse has significant effects on academic performance of primary school pupils' in Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of River State

From the findings, it therefore recommended that the effects of child abuse on children's classroom behaviour and later academic performance should receive attention in education policy forums; and that parents should always relate to their children with love and affection and provide for their needs. Moreso, there should be public enlightenment programs to combat mass ignorance and public awareness on the right to freedom from all forms of child abuse.

As much as possible, teachers/caregivers should avoid the use of corporal punishment because it only teaches children that violence is the best way of maintaining control and it encourages them to hit other children. Finally, there should be provision of nurturing and supportive child friendly school, learning environment free from noise, distractions, discrimination and abuse of any kind.

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