

PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN NSUKKA  
EDUCATION ZONE OF ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract**

This study investigated parents' perception of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 38,694 of male and female parents in Nsukka education zone. The sample for this study was 1,935 parents that represents 5% of the total population of both male and female parents in Nsukka education zone which was selected through multistage sampling technique procedure. The instrument used in this study for data collection is the researchers developed instrument titled Parents' Perception of Child Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (PCANQ). Mean and standard deviation with a benchmark mean score equal to or greater than 2.50 was adjudged agree, while a mean score below 2.50 was adjudged disagree. Results showed with the exception of items statements 2,5and 14, all other item statements were agreed by the respondents to be "parents' perceived behaviours of child abuse and neglect. the result further revealed that the respondents agreed to all the listed possible causes as causes of child abuse and neglect. it was recommended among others that educating parents and other childcare givers on the appropriate parenting skills must receive appropriate attention if the rate of child abuse and neglect will be reduced.

**Introduction**

Child abuse and neglect are devastating global phenomena prevalent in various cultures today. Child abuse and neglect involves actions by parents and caregivers such as denying a child food, clothing, shelter, access to school, child labour exploitation for economic gains, sexual, physical and emotional abuse among others. Child abuse according to Dhake and Kale (2018) is the non-accidental injury, sexual abuse, emotional

abuse or trauma inflicted on a minor by a parent or other caregiver. It includes all forms maltreatment that threatens the overall well-being of a child such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse among others. Dhake and Kale (2018) further opined that child neglect on the other hand occurs when a caregiver fails to provide those basic human needs that are necessary for a child to grow into a healthy adult.

Child abuse and neglect are issues of violence and violation of the child rights, and are plaguing most societies today including Nigeria and Nsukka education zone in particular. Thulin (2019) opined that child abuse is when an adult exposes a child to physical or psychological violence, sexual abuse or neglect to meet the child's basic needs. According to Leeman (2018) child abuse and neglect refers to a range of types of childhood maltreatment. Similarly, National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) (2015) defined child abuse and neglect to include actions or omissions of parents or caregivers that result to serious harm to the wellbeing of a child.

In many societies in the world especially the African society, discipline and punishment are seen as part of the process of child upbringing. Unfortunately, most parents and child caregivers go beyond discipline and punishment to abuse and neglect a child. Child neglect is the failure of the parent or other persons with the responsibility for providing a child with needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision to the degree that the child's well-being, safety and health are threatened with harm. Bicakci, Er and Aral (2016) in their study stated that child neglect is the inhibition of a child's physical, psychological, moral or social development due to negligence on the part of the parents, caregivers or other adults to provide the child with basic essentials for living by either the parents or other caregivers.

The pervasiveness of child abuses and neglect represents a serious social problem to many families, the government institutions and the global community at large. Bicakci, Er and Aral (2016) in their study opined that child abuse is the act of exposing a child to circumstances which in the inhibition of his/her physical, sexual, economic or psychological development by parents, caregivers or other adults. Child abuse and neglect is the product of social, cultural, economic and biological factors which occurs in all societies with the economically disadvantaged more at risk. This has resulted to various social injustice and health inequalities in our societies today.

Nobody with the genuine interest and welfare of a child at heart will deliberately expose such child to harm. Theoklitou, Kabitis and Kabitsi (2011), emphasized that child neglect to include lack of attention from the people surrounding the child, and non-provision of the relevant and adequate necessities for the child's comfort and survival. Some of the observable signs in a neglected child according to Theoklitou, Kabitis and Kabitsi (2011) include school absenteeism, starvation or hunger, and lack of medical attention when the child falls sick or sustains injuries. According to Abamara (2016) some of the causes of child abuse and neglect include marital conflicts and domestic violence, economic or financial status of a family, and societal norm as well as views of certain cultures about raising children. Bicakci, Er and Aral (2016) in their study identified denying a child education due to economic reasons, forcing a child into labour for economic gains, among others as acts of child abuse and neglect perpetuated by parents and other childcare caregivers.

Biologically, a child is generally viewed as anyone between birth and puberty, or in the developmental stage of childhood, between infancy and adulthood stage. A child

refers to people under the age of 18 (Thulin, 2019). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2013), a child is a human being below the age of 18 years unless the age of majority is attained under a State's own domestic legislation. UNCRC (2013), generally refers a child to a minor, that is a person that is younger than the age of majority. The phrase "age of majority" according to the UNCRC (2013), "is the threshold of adulthood as it is conceptualized (and recognized or declared) in law". It is the chronological moment when minors cease to be legally considered children, assume control over their persons' actions and decisions, thereby terminating the legal control and responsibilities of their parents or guardians over and for them. The word "majority" here refers to having greater years and being of full age, it is opposed to minority, the state of being a minor (UNCRC, 2013). The present study seeks to examine parents perception of child abuse and neglect as perpetuated by those in the position to give children care.

A parent is a person in the position of a father or mother that provides guidance, support for the upbringing and general wellbeing of a child. Parent according to Thulin (2019) refers to the child's caretaker. According to Thulin, in reality, a parent could be a step parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or someone else taking a parental role. Thulin further stressed that a parent could be perceived as a person, animal or plant that reproduces offspring or gives birth to or nurtures and raises a child who may be either a male (father) or female (mother), or a progenitor. Stressing further that a parent could equally be represented as an organism that produces or generate an offspring.

Schechter and William (2009) opined that a parent is a caregiver of the offspring in their own species. Schechter and William emphasized that in "humans", a parent is of a child (where child is referred to as offspring). Gerdes (2009) posits that a biological parent consists of a person whose gamete resulted in a child, for a male through the sperm and a female through the ovum. An individual can also become a parent through surrogacy. In this situation, parents are not biologically related to their child or children. Parents represent a person or animal that gives birth to, raises or nurtures a child. The processes involve raising a child is known as parenting. Parenting like in other fields of human endeavour, should be done with the parent bearing in mind that the good of society is dependent on their products, responsible or irresponsible children. Parents are to employ any known suitable strategies that will enhance excellent and positive behaviours in the children as expected by the society. In raising children of good moral standing, discipline and often time punishment cannot be over looked. According to Bank (2002), discipline should be instructive and age-appropriate and suppose to include reinforcement upright show or display of attitude. Bank (2002) further stressed that punishment as an aspect of discipline in child up bringing must be prompt, consistent and fair to be an effective means of shaping behaviour since it affects the social and emotional development of children. An extreme aspect of punishment such as corporal punishment often results in poor self-esteem, depression violent behavior and substance use (Bank, 2002).

Child abuse and neglect has been perceived to differ from one culture to another on what view that constitute it from one society to another, people to people including parents in different situations and environment. Many people from time to time perceive the same event or situation differently based on what particular aspects of the situation or event they choose to selectively absorb based on their environment or culture. Because of

societal role differences that exists from one culture or society to another, with respect to the accepted roles of parents' and caregivers, the government sometimes spelt out rules and guidelines through the law as boundaries in child upbringing and what constitutes abuse and neglect.

In some societies, the culture of the land and the parents themselves use their discretion to provide instructions for a child's discipline, literacy and numeracy, craftsmanship or vocational training, religion or civics as well as punishment in order for the child or children to become responsible and productive member of their society. Banks (2002) succinctly puts it that punishment is an aspect of discipline in child's upbringing, and that it must be prompt, consistent and fair to be an effective means of shaping behaviour. Banks stressed further that punishment for correcting behaviour must be distinguished from corporal punishment since both has a way of affecting the social and emotional development of children. Hence, the need for a study to examine parents' perception of child abuse and neglect which is a global phenomenon and prevalent today in Nsukka education zone, Enugu state, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The prevalence of child abuse has become a serious social problem to families, the government and the larger society. Child abuse and neglect is fraught with series of risks among which include health, physical, emotional, psychological and sociological. The pervasiveness of various forms and acts of child abuse and neglect could be noticed within and around us on daily basis in the family, workplace, schools, marketplaces and religious houses. In Nsukka education zone, for instance, it remains a common and worrisome occurrence to see children who are supposed to be in their primary or secondary school levels hawking different kinds of wares, ranging from such edibles like banana, groundnuts, sachet water, cow pea, oranges, garden eggs and fried plantain. In most occasions still, the hawking children get involved in traffic accidents, are kidnapped, killed for ritual purposes, rapped or even fall into filthy hands of those individuals or groups that use them as the means of their livelihood. By exposing these children to such shocking dangers, their chances of becoming future leaders through education becomes a mirage. Scholars (Owo 2014 Olubukola et al., 2018) have reported that child abuse and neglect are prevalent in Nigeria, Nsukka inclusive.

The perception of many parents is that child abandonment, sexual abuse, neglect, vagrancy, kidnapping and hawking are most common forms of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone. Also, parents believe that children who work as house helps may also be required either by their guardians or caregivers to sell food items, clothing and general merchandise on the streets. Thus, they become part time street traders and are subjected to many of the damaging aspects of street life. Parents in Nsukka education zone are worried by this incessant abusive state of affairs as this impacts negatively on the education and development of their children and wards. It is therefore the intention of this study to investigate the parents' perception of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone, Nigeria so as to proffer sustainable remedies for the development of the child in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate parents' perception of child abuse and neglect. Specifically, the study:

1. determined behaviours perceived by parents as child abuse and neglect
2. found out possible causes of child and neglect

**Research Questions**

1. What are the behaviours that parents perceive as child abuse and neglect?
2. What are the causes of child abuse and neglect?

**Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features and facts about a given population. The design was considered suitable and appropriate for the study because it allowed the researcher to elicit detailed information from respondents on the parents' perception of child abuse and neglect.

**Area of the Study**

The study was conducted in Nsukka education zone, Enugu State, South East Nigeria. Nsukka education zone is made up of Igbo-Etiti, Nsukka and Uzo-Uwani Local Government Areas. Nsukka education zone shares boundaries with Udenu Local Government Areas in the East, Aghamerem Local Government Areas in the Southern part of Nsukka education zone. The communities in these areas share common features and characteristics in culture, politics, socio-economic activities and educational pursuit.

**The Population of the Study**

The population of this study was 38,694. The population comprised of both male and female parents in Nsukka education zone (National population Commission, 2006).

**Sample and Sampling Technique of the Study**

The sample for this study was 1,935. This number represents 5% of the total population of both male and female parents in Nsukka education zone which was selected through multistage sampling technique procedure. The choice of 5% of the total population is premised on the recommendation of Ali (2006) that when a population is in several thousands, few percentages should be selected for the study.

**Instrument for Data Collection**

The instrument used in this study for data collection is the researchers developed instrument titled Parents' Perception of Child Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (PCANQ). The instrument was divided into two sections A and B. Section A contains demographic information of respondents while section B has two clusters with response options of Strongly Agree (SA-4), Agree (A-3), Disagree (D-2) and Strongly Disagree (SD-1). This section has 22 items that elicited information on the two purposes of the study.

### Validation of the Instrument

The research instrument Parents' Perception of Child Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (PCANQ) was face validated by three experts to ascertain its reliability. Two from Sociology of Education, and one from Measurement and Evaluation, the experts assessed the initial draft of the instrument with 38 items in terms of clarity of language, appropriateness and adequacy of items in addressing the purpose of the study. The corrections and suggestions of the experts were adhered to by the researchers in producing the final draft of the instrument with 22 items.

### Reliability of the Instrument

To ascertain the reliability of the instrument Parents' Perception of Child Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (PCANQ), the validated instrument was trial-tested on 20 parents in Enugu East education zone. Enugu East education zone is outside the zone for this study but possesses similar characteristics. The trial-tested instrument yielded the following co-efficient 0.67 and 0.85 respectively. This indicated that the instrument for this study was reliable, hence was adopted.

### Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Direct contact method with the respondents was employed by the researchers and other research assistants to ensure timely completion and retrieval of the completed instrument from the respondents. Mean and standard deviation with a benchmark mean score equal to or greater than 2.50 was adjudged agree, while a mean score below 2.50 was adjudged disagree.

### Results

**Table I: Mean Responses of Parents on perceived behaviours of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nsukka Education Zone**

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	Severely beating a child on a flimsy excuses	3.27	0.79	A
2	Excessively scolding a child when he/she misbehaves	2.04	0.95	D
3	Frequently spitting on a child whenever he/she falls sick.	3.07	0.89	A
4	Denying a child adequate attention/care when he/she falls sick.	3.33	0.78	A
5	Accusing an innocent child falsely.	1.85	1.04	D
6	Exposing a child to pornographic objects	3.48	0.56	A
7	Denying a child opportunity for empowerment through education.	3.35	0.71	A
8	Denying an ailing child medical attention.	3.35	0.71	A
9	Assigning extremely difficult jobs to a child.	3.37	0.67	A
10	Giving out or forcing a child into marriage.	3.27	0.83	A

11	Sending out a child to hawk on the streets	3.43	0.68	A
12	Encouraging a child to indulge in examination malpractice.	3.35	0.70	A
13	Verbally abusing a child.	2.96	1.06	A
14	Female-male favouritism/ preference.	1.82	0.86	D
15	Child exploitation through labour.	3.47	0.61	A
		3.026		
		460		

Table I presents the mean ratio and standard deviation of the respondents on the behaviours perceived by parents as child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone. With the exception of items 2,5 and 14, all the other items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.5 and above. Therefore, the behaviour perceived by parents as child abuse and neglect include severe beating of children, frequent spiting on the children when they are sick, denying them attention and care, exposing them to pornographic objects, denying them opportunity for empowerment through education and medical attention. Others are assigning extreme difficult task, giving or forcing children into marriage, sending children out to hawk on the streets, encouraging examination malpractice, verbally abusing them and exploitation through labour.

**Table II: Mean Responses of Parents on the Perceived Causes of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nsukka Education Zone**

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	Poverty state of the family	3.57	0.52	A
2	Large family size	3.57	0.51	A
3	Lack of appropriate child rearing skills	3.30	0.77	A
4	Marital strife	3.36	0.67	A
5	Unpleasant behaviours of the child	3.27	0.73	A
6	Unintended pregnancies	3.21	0.78	A
7	Authoritarian parenting styles	3.28	0.83	A
		3.366851		

Table II the mean responses of parents on the perceived causes of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone. The respondents agreed that poverty state of the family, large family size, lack of appropriate child rearing skills/practice, marital style, unpleasant behaviours of the children, unintended pregnancies and authoritarian parenting styles were causes of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone.

### Discussion of Results

Results as presented in table I revealed the degree of agreement and disagreement on the “parents’ perceived behaviours of child abuse and neglect”. Majority of the items statements were agreed by respondents to be “parents’ perceived behaviours

of child abuse and neglect in exemption of items 2, 5 and 14 excessively scolding a child when he/she misbehaves, accusing an innocent child falsely and female-male favouritism / preference with mean ratings and standard deviations of 2.04, 1.85 and 1.82; 0.95, 1.04 and 0.86 respectively disagreed as parents perceived behaviours of child abuse and neglect. This finding is been supported earlier in the study of Theoklitou, Kabitis and Kabitsi (2011) that indicated some of the observable signs in an abused and neglected child to include school absenteeism, starvation or hunger, and lack of medical attention when the child falls sick or sustains injuries. This finding also seems to agree with the findings of Bicakci, Er and Aral (2016). Bicakci, Er and Aral (2016) findings identified that denying a child education due to economic reasons, forcing a child into labour for economic gains are acts of child abuse and neglect perpetuated by parents and other childcare caregivers.

Result as presented in table II revealed that the respondents agreed to all the listed possible causes as causes of child abuse and neglect. They include poverty state of the family, large family size, lack of appropriate child rearing skills, marital strife, unpleasant behaviours of the child, unintended pregnancies and authoritarian parenting styles. This result agrees with the studies of Dhake and Kale (2018), (Nels, 2013) and Theoklitou, Kabitis and Kabitsi (2011) on causes of child abuse and neglect. Similarly, this result finding is in line with findings of Abamara (2016), and Bicakci, Er and Aral (2016) on the causes of child abuse and neglect. According to the authors above, some of the causes of child abuse and neglect include marital conflicts and domestic violence, economic or financial status of a family, and societal norm, as well as views of certain cultures about raising children. These among others, are acts of child abuse and neglect perpetuated by parents and other child care caregivers in many societies and cultures especially in Nsukka education zone.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the result of the current study, the conclusion of this study is that parents in Nsukka perceive act of child abuse and neglect that range from physical to emotional abuse and neglect. It is also the conclusion of the current study that the causes of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka include poverty state of the family; Large family size; lack of appropriate child rearing skills; Unpleasant behaviours of the child; unintended pregnancies; authoritarian parenting styles and Marital strife. The basic contribution of the current study is that it has provided evidence for understanding the perception of parents on the causes of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka. This information will be beneficial for designing policies and programmes aimed at combating the menace of child abuse and neglect in Nsukka.

### **Recommendations**

The result of the study revealed that children have over the years been subjected to series of abusive conditions which usually dampen their mental and physical development. The researchers therefore make the following recommendations to reduce child abuse and neglect in Nsukka education zone.

- Poverty was identified as a cause to child abuse and neglect in this study. The government should take proactive measures that will improve the welfare of the parents to enable them discharge their statutory responsibilities to their children.

- The education of parents and childcare givers on the appropriate parenting skills must receive appropriate attention if the rate of child abuse and neglect will be reduced. This will help create mutual and friendly relationship between children and parents or caregivers.
- The present study views child and abuse and neglect as a monumental social problem which needs everybody (the parents, caregivers, the government at all levels, the non-governmental organizations and the general public) to have a stake in the fight against child abuse and neglect in the society so that the targeted aims and objectives intended to reduce the scotch will be achieved.
- Appropriate laws on child abuse and neglect must be invoked in line with its provisions and implemented accordingly against offenders whenever the need arises. The impartiality of the law in this regard will serve as deterrent to future would-be child abusers.
- Some integration and reformation programmes and training should be organized for the abused children and children who have been previously exposed to forms of abuse. When this is done, it is hoped that the children would develop strong and emphatic interpersonal relationship with others in the society.
- Enlightenments and awareness campaigns be carried out from time to time through workshops, seminars, radio and television jingles and advertisement to create awareness on the consequences of abusing and neglecting a child by the governments and other NGOs in Nigeria especially in Nsukka education zone. This no doubt will help equip parents and child caregivers with appropriate parenting skills necessary for the upbringing of the child, which undoubtedly will help bring child abuse and neglect ratio to an insignificant ebb in Nigeria and Nsukka education zone in particular.

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