



# CHILD ABUSE AND STUDENT'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN BOKI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

**Dr. Effiom Bassey Ekeng**

**Dr. Lucy Obil Arop**

Prof. Elizabeth G. Akpama  
Otu Christina Kankong

## ABSTRACT

This research work focuses on the effects of child abuse on students' academic performance. The study attempts to unravel the causes, effects and remedies to child abuse among secondary school student. It was carried out in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. A sample of 200 student was randomly drawn from selected secondary schools in the local government and questionnaires were administered to the respondents. The mean percentage test, which was adopted in the study's analysis, indicated that excessive battering of a child by parents/teacher/guidance, broken homes, child hawking before and after school and unconditional learning environment are all causes of child abuse. Also, it was found that child abuse negatively affect students school performance; such abused children are vulnerable to early pregnancy, ill treatment as well as causes permanent and life-long trauma, thereby making children develop low cognition to school subjects. The preaching of good morals by religious leaders to parents and guardians was part of the recommendations made in this study. Also meting out punishment in form of fine on erring parents/guardians especially those that physically abuse children, forcing children to hawk and exposing them from bad peer influence will help eliminate or reduce to the barest minimum, the incidence of child abuse among secondary school student in Boki Local Government Area.

**Keyword: Child abuse, Student's , Academic Performance.**

## INRODUCTION

Child abuse is one of the most challenging social catastrophes attracting public attention the world over (Alokan & Olatunji, 2014). According to Moss and Moss (1999) child abuse is any act of omission by parents, guardians or any caregivers that results in non-accidental physical or mental injury, or sexual abuse. In addition, Denga and Denga (2007) state that cruel behaviour on children by teachers, parents, peers, guardians, siblings and the society in general constitute child abuse. The researchers observe that

Boki LGA is not spared of this evil phenomenon, hence the need to carry out a study of this nature.

Child abuse takes place in the home environment, at school, in church, hospitals, orphanages and in any place; public or private. In the light of this therefore, Augustine and Abubaker (2016) lamented that there is no safe place for children anymore because child abuse is rampant everywhere. Many of the children are usually being maltreated or abuse by their parents, caregivers as well as other people in their communities. Child abuse is therefore a practice whereby children are maltreated, battered or deprived of some basic needs in the home, street, religious houses or at school by the elderly. Child abuse could harm children physically, emotionally, sexually or could even lead to their death. It is caused by poverty, lack of parental care, unemployment, marital conflicts and polygamous homes. Child abuse causes pain to both male and female victims. Harmful behaviours of children's teachers, parents, peers, guardians, siblings, so-called mentors and the society in various forms could also lead to child abuse. Child abuse is therefore not a strange phenomenon in Nigeria. There is no safe place for children anymore because it is everywhere. Chalk, Gibbons & Scarupa, (2002) opined that child abuse negatively affects the child physically, psychologically and behaviourally. However, it is not possible to discuss them individually in real world situation. Physical problems (for example destruction of a child's developing brain) can lead to psychological manifestations (for example delay in cognitive development). Psychological effects mostly appear as high-risk behaviours which could affect the abused child academically and ultimately the economy. Also, Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) in their study corroborated this view by disclosing that children who are maltreated usually get low grades in school and do not excel in the society, which slows down the economy. Alokun and Olatunji, (2014) their study on how child abuse influences primary and secondary school children in classroom and their academic performance in Nigeria using a sample of 200 teachers, found out that child abuse and children's concentration in class is positively related. This means that abused children do not concentrate in class with negative implication on the Nigerian economy. In addition, Umobong, (2010) concluded that child abuse is now prevalent in schools with negative consequences on the educational development of children and the economy in the areas of joblessness. Gaudin, (1999) also submitted that abused children's intelligence is low as a result of neglect and abuse. As a result of this, the economy suffers because the abused children are unable to contribute meaningfully to the economy. The abused children, who often try to report such incidences, are often failed by the justice system which do very little to no action in apprehending and prosecuting the perpetrators. Thus,

(Effiom et al 2021) Lamented that many children are turning into thieves, this is due to inadequate planning and poor distribution of resources, this study sought to investigate the effect of child abuse on student academic performance in Boki local Government Area in Cross River State.

## Statement of the Problem

The increasing number of students and pupils and those out of school hawking and selling goods around the streets and school premises in all rural areas in Boki local government area is alarming. Some of the children look so malnourished and sick, others in pain of being hurt by beatings and assaulted by gangsters. Some of these children are sent out there by their parents or caregivers, the interest of most parents is what the child can bring to the home through sells (hawking goods) or giving oneself for money; many leave school as early as primary school, age 12 to engage in prostitution while others are used as house helps and other menial jobs to bring in money to the family. As a result the moral and social development of the child has no education base, their performance in school is affected. The child is therefore a tool for profit making. It is against this background that the study is carried out to investigate the relationship between child abuse and academic performance of students in Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

The main purpose of the study was to examine child abuse and academic performance of secondary school students in JSSIII in Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was specifically aimed at investigating whether (i) physical abuse of children has any relationship with the academic performance of students; (ii) sexual abuse of children has any relationship with the academic performance of students.

The increasing number of students and pupils and those out of school hawking and selling goods on the streets and school premises in the country is a thing of concern that needs proper attention. Most of the children look so malnourished and sick, others in pain of being hurt by beatings and assaulted by gangsters. Most of these children are sent out there by their parents or caregivers, the interest of most parents is what the child can bring to the home through sells (hawking goods) or giving oneself for money; many leave school as early as primary school, to engage in prostitution, begging around the streets, while others are used as house helps and other menial jobs to bring in money to the family. As a result, the moral and social development of the child has no education basis; their performance in school

is affected. This was what made the researcher to be interested in investigating the effects of child abuse on academic performance in Nigeria using Boki Local Government Area of Cross River state as a case study.

### **Research Questions**

The following are some of the Research questions which this study intends to answer:

- i) What are the effects of physical child abuse on the academic performance of secondary school student in Boki Local Government Area in Cross River State?
- ii) How the experience of sexual child abuse affects the students participation in learning activities in class?
- iii) What are the characteristics behaviors of the abused student in class?
- iv) What are the practical measures to be adopted to curb the issue of child abuse?

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses to be tested include:

- i) H01: There is no significant difference between physical abuse of student and their academic performance in school.
- ii) H02: There is no significant between sexual abuse of student and their academic performance in school.

### **Results of Hypothesis testing**

#### **Hypothesis one:**

There is no significant relationship between physical abuse children and their academic performance. The independent variable in the hypothesis is physical abuse of children while the dependent variable is academic performance of students. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was deployed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table three (3).

Table 3

**Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis for the relationship between physical abuse of children and their academic performance (N=200)**

| Variable             |           | $\Sigma x$ | $\Sigma x^2$ |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| $\Sigma xy$          | r – value |            | $\Sigma y^2$ |
| Physical abuse       |           | 3682       | 6089         |
| 90758                | 0.54*     |            |              |
| Academic performance |           | 3316       | 5486         |

\*Significance at 0.5 probability level; critical r –value = 0.138; degree of freedom = 198

The result in table one indicates that, the calculated r-value of 138 at .05 level of significance, with 198 degrees of freedom. This result therefore shows that physical abuse of children has a significant relationship with their academic performance.

**Hypothesis two:**

Sexual abuse of children has no significant relationship with their academic performance. The independent variable in this hypothesis is sexual abuse, while the dependent variable is academic performance. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

**Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis for the relationship between sexual abuse of children and their academic performance (N=200)**

| Variable                 |           | $\Sigma x$ | $\Sigma x^2$ |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| $\Sigma xy$              | r – value |            | $\Sigma y^2$ |
| Sexual abuse of children |           | 3598       | 3985         |
| 89612                    | 0.56*     |            |              |
| Academic performance     |           | 3316       | 5486         |

\*Significance at 0.5 probability level; critical r –value = 0.138; degree of freedom = 198

The result in table 2 shows that the calculated r –vale of 0.56, is higher than the critical r-value of 0.138 at 95 percent probability level of significance with 198 (200 - 2) degrees of freedom. With this result,

the null hypothesis was rejected. The result therefore revealed that sexual abuse has a significant relationship with pupils academic performance.

With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result therefore revealed that sexual abuse has a significant relationship with students' academic performance.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study showed that child abuse affects the academic performance of learners. The abused learners who participated in this study indicated that due to abuse, they now get low scores in tests, exams and class work. Some of them would not write all the tests and examinations given to them, owing to abuse. In addition to that, some abused participants in this study believed that the experiences of abuse led them to repeat classes. Since abused learners may find themselves missing classes, tests and/or examinations; they were bound to underperform in their studies as they will be lagging in fulfilling school requirements. The findings of this study agree with those of Eckenrode, Laird and Doris (2003) who stated that there are cognitive implications of child abuse and this include difficulties in learning and academic performance. One participant learner indicated that before abuse, he was performing better but he dropped in his performance after being a victim of abuse. Rew (1999) is in concurrence with this observation when he argued that child maltreatment is widely accepted as having a negative effect on children's academic achievement.

Bad experiences always crossed the abused children's minds during lessons and the result is divided attention. The abused learners in this study revealed that they paid more attention to their painful experiences and fail to concentrate to their school work. This impacted on their full concentration and participation in class. Home work was normally not done since some of them were supposed to be assisted by their relatives; who happen to be their abusers. Hildyard and Wolfe (2002) also noted that abused children tend to be more isolated at school compared to other groups of children and have difficulty making friends. Conoley (2005) concurs with the results of this study when he revealed that child abuse impacts on the child's academic performance in various ways, including reduced cognitive capacity, sleep disturbance (causing poor concentration), difficulties in memory, language delays, understanding and expressing. The result is poor performance in class work and low achievement in

tests. Also, Turner and Tanner (2005) agree with these findings when they noted a link between child abuse and poor performance at school, associated exclusions and repeat years.

In this study, it was found out that some children were also used as a source of cheap labour. One participant reported to have been collecting construction stones for his father and would be caught sleeping in class during lessons. His class teacher reported that the learner missed a lot and ended up repeating the grade. Participating teachers in the study also revealed that some abused learners tend to sleep in class and show signs of fatigue most of the time. Eckenrode,

Laird and Doris (2003) concur with the findings and stated that abused children are more likely to repeat a grade, do poorly on cognitive tests and have discipline problems in school.

The study showed that abused learners are affected emotionally and they spend much of their time meditating on their situation. They feel rejected and forsaken by the entire society and hence see no need to spend their time on books. Consequently they go into self-imposed solitary confinement which affects their academic performance.

Some of them have anger and are eager to revenge. Hence, quite often this anger is misdirected to innocent classmates who normally suffer from this misdirected retributive aggressive behaviour which may come in form of both hurt language, verbal and physical assault.

The class teachers in this study revealed that learners tend to be aggressive and bully such that they find out that abused learners are also discipline problem children. They vent out their anger by beating other learners and could be constantly living under fear due to abuse. Generally, abused children in this study reported to have developed abnormal behaviour and always angry to other learners and have mistrust and hatred to people around them, thus, becoming bully.

The same observation was also made by Hildyard and Wolfe(2002) and Holt, Buckely and Whelan (2008) when they stated that neglected children may also display aggressive and disruptive behaviour. Thus, in a nutshell, the study showed that child abuse affected the academic performance of primary school learners in Boki Local Government Area.

The result of the analysis revealed that physical abuse of children has a significance relationship with their academic performance. The finding was in line with the views of Theoklitou, Kabitsis & Kabitsi (2012). They consider physical abuse as the deliberate infliction of serious injuries or actions that place the child at obvious risk of serious injury or death, to be illegal – bruises, scratches, burns, broken

bones, lacerations, as well as reported “mishaps” and rough treatment that could cause physical injury. It could also affect the child academic performance and interest. Isangedighi (2005) also pointed out that child physical abuse is a global phenomenon, in United States of America (USA) for instance, about 14% of children are physically abused yearly and out of those who are abused an estimated 20,000 die as a result of the abuse.

An average of 1,000 to 5,000 children die each year in USA as a result of injuries arising from maltreatment. Similarly, in a long term study of adult retrospectively reporting adverse childhood experiences including verbal, physical and sexual abuse, as well as other forms of childhood trauma found 25.9% adults reported verbal abuse as children, 14.8% of adults report physical abuse, 12.2% of adults reported sexual abuse (Data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention - CDC). Hence, child physical abuse may result to improper education of the child, loss of opportunities in life, poor performance in school and eventual dropping out of school. While the result on sexual abuse and academic performance revealed that sexual abuse has a significant relationship with students academic achievement. The findings was in agreement with the reports of the National Demographic Health Survey report in 2008, that over 25% of adolescents in Nigeria often experience the first sexual act at the age of 15.

However, cases reported of the law enforcement agents of Nigeria (Nigeria police) are less than unreported cases by parents or guardians of the victims. Also the News agency of Nigeria reported in 2013 that 1,200 girls were raped in Cross River State, a coastal state in south south Nigeria, that share a common border with Cameroon to the east (Vanguard News, 2014). Similarly in Nigeria, Boki LGA specifically, the tradition and practice of marrying under-age children makes it inevitable for young teenage girls to be sexually abused under the name of marriage. Putting a total stop of the child dreams for education and academic work but a diversion to family life of child caring and domestic activities resulting to final enslavement of the child.

Counselling recommendations Counselors, in conjunction with parents, caregivers, government and entire society should adopt good parental care, love and concern for their children, and mention good societal values, morals and norms, which should be subject to change. The cry of school dropout, gangsterism, unemployment should be redress and jobs created for youth to enable the young ones



achieved their goals focus and dreams of a better tomorrow. Family ties of old should be revisited to avoid marital conflict and good Christian virtue be put into practice. To prevent polygamy and the eventful crisis of it out come – step fathers, brothers harassment of step sisters; likewise uncles to be educated on the need to show love rather than harm. The family and society in general should be more security conscious on the whereabouts of the child. Be interested in their welfare, dialogue issues of conflict, giving room for peace and harmony to reign at home, school and society. Government and non-governmental agencies should create awareness campaign exercise to discourage parents from leasing out their children for housekeeping, prostitution, early marriage, or any other reason for money making. Also the government should make sure that perpetrators of these vices are punished according to the law enacted for offenders and used as examples for others whose cases may not be reported; as many of these incidents are under close.

### Summary

The study was carried out to investigate the relationship between child abuse and academic performance of students in Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The main purpose of the study was to examine child abuse and academic performance of primary school pupils in pry 5 & 6 in Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was specifically aimed at investigating whether (i) physical abuse of children has any relationship with the academic performance of students; (ii) sexual abuse of children has any relationship with the academic performance of students. Literature review was carried out according – physical abuse of children and their academic performance physical abuse is any accidental injury to a child.

### Conclusions

- i. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the abused learners tend to absent themselves from class, lose concentration and focus on their abusive experiences. They also do not participate in class discussions or other class activities. Thus they find themselves having to repeat grades.
- ii. It was also concluded that the abused learners in this study paid more attention to their painful experiences and fail to concentrate to their school work. This affected their full participation in class. Some of them tend to sleep in class and show signs of fatigue most of the time.

- iii. Another conclusion drawn from the study is that an abused child develops bad behaviour such as bullying other learners and has hatred to people surrounding him/her. These learners are often discipline problem children. They prefer solitary environments. Hence, academic achievement declines due to low concentration and divided attention.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Teachers should pay special attention to identify forms of abuse and support abused learners. Upon identification of the abused learners, teachers should report such cases to the police.
- ii. Abused learners should be referred to professional counselors for counseling. Abused learners need many counseling sessions for them to cope with their situations. Counseling is not a once off activity.
- iii. Some abused learners should be referred to health institutions for medical assistance.
- iv. The Ministry of Education and Training should ensure that teachers are equipped with counseling skills. This can be done by introducing short courses on counseling or ensure that such courses are compulsory at teachers' training institutions.
- v. Where such cases are reported, school administrations should invite professional counselors to assist abused learners in their healing process.
- vi. The abused learners should be provided with extra remedial classes to assist them catch up academically.
- vii. Parents, school administrators, teachers should work hand-in-hand in handling abused learners in order to help them improve academically.

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