

TEACHER-PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AMONGST IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has both psychological and social consequences on the victim especially in the absence of appropriate help or unwillingness to seek redress. Parents' dispositions towards the prevention and management of child sexual abuse is key to steaming the tide of such abuse. In Nigeria studies on child sexual abuse has neglected the views of parents and their approaches to reducing sexual abuse among adolescents. This study investigates the prevalence of child sexual abuse and teacher-parents' involvement in its prevention and management in a Nigerian town. A cross sectional research design that consisted of quantitative and qualitative method was adopted. A questionnaire was administered among 443 in-school adolescents selected from high school using quota sampling technique and 10 teacher-parents of adolescents were interviewed. The findings showed that CSA was high (59.8%). Generally, parental involvement in the sexual issues affecting their children was somewhat negative. Consequently, child education, child security, discouragement of the use of handsets among in-school adolescents and severe punishments to offenders would help prevent and manage this menace. This requires macro, meso and micro levels interventions.

Keywords: *Child sexual abuse; adolescents, teacher-parents*

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a significant social problem and it has gained global attention for some decades, yet the phenomenon remains. Since 1970s, CSA has increasingly been recognised as deeply damaging to children and thus, unacceptable for society. While sexual use of children by adults has been present throughout history, it has only become the object of significant public attention in recent times, yet the occurrence keeps increasing daily. There are calls for wider and multi-sectoral approach in addressing the occurrence and possible implications on child development and their sexuality across the life course.

Evidence abounds that children both boys and girls are in danger of experiencing CSA at one point in their life span. The occurrence can take place at different time and spaces. Homes, institutions and sometimes hidden and public spaces have yielded children to sexual abuse. Parents living apart, the struggle for survival, war and communal crises have all acted to increase insecurity of children and their vulnerability to sexual abuse. There are clear gender gaps, yet boys and girls are vulnerable in diverse ways. Most studies have focused their attention on the girl child with the presumption that they are always the victim. The statistics supports such view, but not the complete picture of this social reality. A longitudinal study in South Africa showed that boys do experience sexual abuse and the consequences can also be devastating (Richter, Mathews, Nonterah, & Masilela, 2018). Child sexual abuse is a global occurrence as it affects at a disproportionate rate both developing and developed countries. A globe glimpse into the situation shows a precarious situation as incidence has grown at a higher degree than institutional and policy response to the monster of child sexual abuse in most African countries (Dubowitz, 2017). A qualitative evidence from a community in Kenya revealed that child sexual abuse has continued to thrive due to sexualisation of the media, poverty and the need for households to do extra to survive (Cynthia, Johanne & Ruth, 2018). Although there is inaccurate estimation of CSA due to its under-reporting, its prevalent rate remains high in the African region (Dubowitz, 2017). Nonetheless, child sexual abuse has continued to hurt many African countries; yet, few studies document prevalence rates, or examine the unique dynamics in specific African cultures.

In South Africa for instance, over 20,000 cases of CSA are reported each year. One school sample suggests that 54% of the respondents had experienced CSA with a person at least 5 years their senior (Madu & Peltzer, 2000). An earlier study on female street adolescents in Nigeria found that more than 15.4 percent female adolescent hawkers had procured abortion at least twice; had been pregnant without knowing who was responsible; had experienced rape and also contracted sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) (Osinowo, 1992). A more recent study showed that 30% of the violence experienced by girls on the street was sexual in nature (Fawole, Ajuwon & Osungbade, 2003). This indicates the spread of CSA, and this is an issue of great importance because in the traditional Nigerian society, the concept of sexuality is enshrouded in secrecy. Then (with poorly developed social network and intervention), many of the girls accept it as their lot and fear of being stigmatized if they should report (Fawole, Ajuwon & Osungbade, 2004).

The vulnerability of this incident rate however depends on what researchers consider to be the definition of CSA. Child sexual abuse, according to Satcher (2001) and World Health Organization (1999), refers to the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that he/she does not fully comprehend to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and give consent, or that violate the laws of the social taboos of society. This study however defines sexual abuse in a very broad sense and it defines it as any act that involves inviting or requesting a child to do something sexual, watching sexual movies with a child, kissing or hugging a child in a sexual way, showing sexual organs to a child, making a child to touch others in a sexual way, attempting or having sexual intercourse with a child, as well as touching or fondling a child's private part. From this definition, it can be deduced that CSA ranges from physical intrusiveness to non-physical contact.

Some findings have revealed that some of the causes of CSA are family dysfunction and breakdown, gender discrimination, globalization, poverty, new communication technology, presence of relatives or acquaintances and lack of confidence and self-esteem in child (UNICEF, 2001; Finkelhor, 1994). CSA has great and lasting consequences on all stakeholders in the family, community and broader society. According to some findings, women who are sexually abused as children have been found to be more likely to experience various sexual acts and diseases compare to those who are not (Chen, Dunne & Han, 2006; Jejeebhoy & Bott, 2003; Olsson et al, 2000; Heise, 1994). Some of the sexual acts and diseases include early (voluntary) sexual activity, unintended pregnancy, multiple sex partners, depression, reproductive tract infection and sexually transmitted infections. All these therefore call for immediate prevention and management, especially at the home front.

Theoretical framework

There have been various explanations of why and how children are sexually abused and also why people (perpetrator of sexual abuse) find delight in committing such a 'crime'. The theories underpinning this study (attribution theory, social constructionism, and family system theory) are derived mainly from sociological and psychological explanations of the causes of and reasons for human behaviour as well as how it can be controlled. Heider (1958) first proposed attribution theory. The theory suggests that we all have a need to explain the world, both to ourselves and to other people. In the process of attributing causes to the events around us, we tend to gain greater sense of control. This attribution affects the standing of the people within a group (especially ourselves). Therefore, when the perpetrator of child sexual abuse (CSA) will explain the action of the victim, he/she will often use internal attribution, saying it is due to internal personality factors (for instance, because she is beautiful or the way she dresses). However, when explaining his/her action, external attribution is adopted (for instance, it happened because she came to my house). We will attribute our successes internally and our failure or regret to an external factor. This theory has helped in explaining why perpetrator of child sexual abuse (CSA) often attributes the cause to external or situational factors.

Moreover, social constructionism is based on how social reality is constructed through day to day interaction (with people and/or environment). According to this theory, there is no meaning in the world until we construct it, and that understanding, and meaning are developed through relation with other human beings (Leed-Hurwitz, 2009). This theory emphasizes that children interact with more knowledgeable others in order to find meanings of social phenomena, e.g. love and care. In the

process of finding meanings to social phenomena, children engage in social activities. Their engagements make them susceptible to any dangerous activities like fondling genitals or genital exposure that might be presented to them in the process. Hence, without engaging in social activities (which is not likely for any human being), children cannot be sexually abused.

Family systems theory is a theory of human behaviour which sees family as a systemic unit that consists of interacting members. This theory was originated by a Psychiatrist, Dr. Murray Bowen. According to him, the interaction that exists among members of the family is so strong that it affects all aspects of individual life including religious, economic and sexual life (Bowen, 1966). In fact, such interaction influenced individual thoughts, emotions, behaviour and actions. This has brought about strong emotional ties among members of the family. However, this strong relationship and cooperation has created other negative experiences such as CSA among members of the family system. For instance, a study demonstrated that all the sexually abused children who participated in the study (22 children in 20 families) were described as having close emotional ties to the suspected offenders (Jensen et al, 2005).

Methodology

The study was carried out in two Yoruba communities (Ile-Ife and Modakeke) of Southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted cross sectional research design and employed mixed method approach so as to view social reality from different paradigms. Primary data were collected from in-school adolescents (in forms four, five and six) as well as parents who are teaching in secondary schools. The sample size was 443 respondents and 10 interviewees. Quota sampling method was used to select the sample. A questionnaire was administered among 443 in-school adolescents and in-depth interview sessions were conducted with 10 teacher-parents selected from 8 secondary schools in the study locations. Questionnaire was used because of its ability to make inferences and to gather a vast amount of data within a short period. Also, in-depth interview guide was used in order to bring to light the hidden experiences of teacher-parents which might not be obtained through the questionnaire. These instruments were structured in line with the objectives of the study. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the qualitative data were analysed using content analysis.

Socio-economic characteristics

The ratio of female to male was 3:2 and the average age of the respondents was 15 years. Only Christianity and Islam were the dominant religions in the communities and two-third of the respondents were of medium standard of living. More information on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 443)

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	178	40.2
Female	265	59.8
Age (years)		
9-12 years	14	3.2
13-16 years	359	81.0
17-20 years	70	15.8
Religion		
Christianity	330	74.5
Islam	111	25.1
Traditional	2	0.4
Level of Standard of living		
Low standard of living	160	36.1
Medium standard of living	263	59.4
High standard of living	20	4.5
Total	443	100.0

Results

Prevalence of child sexual abuse

Sexually abused children (59.8 percent) were more than non-sexually abused children (40.2 percent), and 60.7 percent knew of friends who had been sexually abused. Inviting or requesting children to do something sexual was the most-common form of child sexual abuse (52.8 percent) while the least among these forms was an attempt to have or having sexual intercourse with the respondents (32.8 percent). Kissing or hugging in a sexual way (41.9 percent), watching sexual movie (40.4 percent), fondling of the private part (39.6 percent), showing of sex organ (36.2 percent), and touching in a sexual way (34.7 percent) were other forms of child sexual abuse identified in this study. Majority (28.3 percent) of the sexually abused children met the perpetrator in schools and at the same time had a kin relationship with them. While 65.3 percent first experienced this sexual abuse act between ages 12 and 16 years, almost half (48.7 percent) had experienced it in less than six months ago. The prevalence of child sexual abuse across socio-demographic data is summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: Child Sexual Abuse according to respondents' socio-demographic data

Variables	Total	Sexually abused	%
Gender			
Male	178	117	65.7%
Female	265	148	55.8
Age			
9-12 years	14	11	78.6
13-16 years	359	203	56.5
17—20 years	70	51	72.9
Religion			
Christianity	330	188	57.0
Islam	111	75	67.6
Traditional	2	2	100
Standard of living			
Low	160	108	67.5
Medium	263	143	54.4
High	20	14	70.0

Parental involvement

Parents were involved but negatively in the sexual issues affecting their children. In expressing his view on the involvement of parents, a male teacher (above 40 years) with a child said: "in our society, some parents use their children for business". He considered those who sell 'akara,' 'moimoi,' fruits, palm wine, etc. where people rush to for cafeteria. According to him, instead of sending their children to school, parents engage them in their own business and from there, those who are coming to buy have interest. Surely, ladies under pressure can succumb at any time and those that really want to have canal knowledge of these ladies will only want to come in the name of buying something. In support of this, a 40 years old male teacher with three children affirmed thus: "Parents are the most cause of this problem (child sexual abuse). some parents indulge their children in this kind of habit. When the parents saw his/her child and caught him/her in that kind of habit, they need to be very furious about the action and counsel him/her very well, but they will just treat it lightly". Sharing slightly contrary opinion, a 40 year old male interviewee with a year old child stated that, although there are some parents that give sexual education to their children, some parents do not do that. According to him, those parents that give sex education contribute positively to the sexual issues affecting their children. However, some other parents see sex education as an eye-opener, that is, when they give their children sex education, it will expose their children to child sexual abuse. As a result, some parents are not in support of sex education, hence, their negative contribution to sexual issues affecting their children.

While investigating the roles that teachers play in the prevention and management of child sexual abuse (CSA). Majority of the teachers affirmed that they often give their students sex education while very small percentage stated that they had limited time to give them adequate sex education.

From the majority perspective, a man (above 40 years) with a child said: “Teachers should sermonize the students often; moral instruction should be entrenched into the curriculum of the school”. According to him, teachers often give sex education to their students and that assembly period is devoted to that. Therefore, school management should take it upon themselves to make sure that students are channeled in line with God's face and let them know the penalty of committing child sexual abuse offences. Sharing slightly different opinion, a male interview (45 years old and above) stated as follows: “Teachers have limited role to play, you see, most often, the society always see the teachers as the almighty when it comes to the moulding and taking proper care of the children. However, in the actual fact, it is never so.” One of the interviewees was able to declare that they were not permitted to teach sex education aside their main duty; he, however stated that moral instructions were usually told. He (a 33-year old male informant with one child) expressed himself thus: “We are not allowed [to give sex education], so we can only counsel them to live godly life, live a holy life, and they should not use their bodies to be an instrument of the devil. So we sermonize them that’s the only thing we have been doing – just to sermonize them.

Responsible factors for child sexual abuse

The findings reveal that low standard of living was the major factor responsible for child sexual abuse. Table 3 reveals the factors that are responsible for child sexual abuse

Table 3: Responsible factors for child sexual abuse

Variable	N	%
Low standard of living	118	26.6
Sexual desire	103	23.3
Insecurity of children	96	21.7
Lack of love and care	86	19.4
Facial outlook	9	2.0
Lack of sex education	2	0.5
Multiple choices	29	6.5

“Many factors can contribute to that. ... for example, ...it depends on what society defines as right (or wrong) sexual acts, if sexual offense is not forbidden in society, children might take it as a normal thing. Moreover, also, it depends on communication media. If the TV programmes are not benefiting the society, what is in there then, the children might take it as part of life. Especially, the films that do not contribute to the society rather creating negative effects on the children. Also, the parenting, if parents is wayward, there is no way the children will not be wayward.”

Preventing and managing child sexual abuse

Majority (43.1 percent) suggested that sexually abused children should go for counseling while 23 percent stated that parents should be informed whenever their children are sexually abused. Moreover, while 13.5 percent of the respondents would like victims of child sexual abuse to keep it to themselves, 11.7 percent desire that they victims inform their friends. Only 7.2 advised that they should expose the perpetrator. Further details are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Managing child sexual abuse

Variables	N	%
Go for counselling	191	43.1
Inform parents	102	23.0
Keep it to himself/herself	60	13.5
Inform friends	52	11.7
Expose the perpetrator	32	7.2
Multiple choices	6	1.4

All the participants gave various suggestions concerning the practices that can be put in place for the prevention and management of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Nigeria. Among these are the inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum, enforcement of severe punishment for the perpetrators, organisation of enlightenment programmes through media, institutionalisation of matrimony, education of children to fear God, encouragement of youth by providing jobs for them, etc. For

instance, a male teacher (40 years old) with three children said: "Government should bring out laws on mode of dressing especially in our institutions. If that is done, it can, to a large extent, reduce the occurrence of child sexual abuse (CSA). Then, prohibition of abortion in private hospitals because they are encouraged by having hope of the aborting pregnancy in private hospitals aside public hospitals. Government should increase the number of girls' and boys' only schools and mix schools should be encouraged.... The use of the handset by adolescents should be discouraged in secondary schools. Most of these students communicate with perpetrators far beyond our thoughts."

Suggesting other practices, a male participant (33 years old) with a one year child put forward as follows: "there should be enactment against child sexual abuse (CSA). Severe penalty should also be put in place to deal with sexual abusers or perpetrators. Then, whosoever that is caught in such an act should be dealt with according to the law. Government and parents should also educate and enlighten their children on sexual abuse; dangers involve and how to prevent it. Children should also be protected adequately from sexual abusers. In this case, parents have a lot to do. Parents should make sure that there is adequate protection."

Identifying the major practice that should be adopted, a Christian male interviewee (above 40 years of age) with a child stated as follows: "I think the major practice is on the parents, they said "charity begins from home. So, the way you behave at home is what these children will display outside. If you behave well, a child who comes from a cultured home – whether Christian or Muslim –, that will radiate out to mix with others. So parents have a lot to do. The same thing with community too, every member of the society should be carried along to make sure that this issue is something that has to be nailed in the bud."

Ways to recognize a child that has been sexually abused

All of the participants claimed that there are ways to identify a child that has been sexually abused. In supporting this position in terms of social and psychological factors, a Christian adult female (53 years old with four children) living in Ile-Ife said: "A child that is sexually abused psychologically, you will know in her behaviour. She will isolate herself among others because the feeling will be affecting her. She will have to stay away from them a little beat, seat alone, do all sorts of things alone."

Another male interviewee (45 years and above) with three children explained comprehensively while combining physical, psychological and social factors altogether, he stated as follows: "Physically, you can recognize a child who is sexually abused especially at that very moment whereby you see the child maybe the child could appear harass, I mean in the child appearance, maybe a cloth, especially the underwear, could be turn. Then if one goes into the private area, there could be some element of some forceful entry because the manhood would be much bigger than what the child has as a female private part. There could be lots of evidences that could show that there have been a sought of sexual abuse either in term of rape or manhandling of the child." Furthermore, "psychologically, you will see the child will be having inferiority complex whenever she is in the midst of her colleagues and at times verbally, she could be altering some words that are beyond her reasoning or even exhibiting such while in the midst of her colleagues. Then, most often, you will see a child crying or weeping by the time the child recollects whatever things that could have transpired between her (the victim) and adult." In addition, "Socially, the child could be a sought of spoil child in the midst of her colleagues, having been exposed to such negative acts, she could be exhibiting such."

Findings and discussions

Child sexual abuse is one of the major world problems especially in South Western Nigeria and it needs urgent attention and remedy. One of the most-striking findings involved the gender and living standard of those respondents who indicated that they had been victims of child sexual abuse (CSA). The study demonstrated that the prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the two Yoruba communities in the South-Western part of Nigeria was 59.8 percent bringing the ratio of those who had been sexually abused to those who had not to 3:2. Males (66 percent) were more likely to be sexually abused than females (56 percent) and people with low and high living standard (68 percent) were more prone to experience child sexual abuse (CSA) than those with medium living standard

(54 percent). The findings further showed that although teachers sometimes sermonized the students, many parents negatively contributed to the sexual issues affecting their children while few others were now. As a result, the question is how come child sexual abuse is escalating in our contemporary society? In addition, some of the factors responsible for child sexual abuse (CSA) were poverty, children insecurity, sexual desires and negative media influence. Suggesting various practices to prevent and manage child sexual abuse (CSA), counselling/sex education, child security, discouragement of the use of handsets among in-school adolescents and severe punishment to offenders were emphasized. Sexually abused children could be recognised psychologically (isolation and inferiority complex), physically (harass in appearance and element of forceful entry in the private area of the body due to bigger manhood) and socially (exhibiting such negative acts in the midst of their colleagues).

Over half (59.8 percent) of the adolescents in the two Yoruba communities reported to have been sexually abused, a prevalence that is considerably higher than the one-third prevalent rate found in previous studies (Romero et al, 1999; Wyatt et al, 1999). The results of the current study are consistent with the report of Madu and Peltzer (2000), which found higher prevalent rate of CSA among South Africans (54.3 percent). Many past studies had established that incidents of child sexual abuse (CSA) were significantly higher for females than for males (Driver & Droisen, 1989; Levett, 1989; De Jong, Hervada, & Emmett, 1983). As a result, preventive measures should be more directed to females. However, this study showed that 66 percent of males and 56 percent of females had been sexually abused. This might be as a result of the neglect of male children in addressing child sexual abuse issues. Also, battered female relatives might see male children as instruments of satisfying their sexual desires. Consequently, this study advocates balanced attention to both male and female children as both have the capacity of been sexually abused. This will help to prevent and manage child sexual abuse adequately.

Majority (65.3 percent) of the respondents under study first experience sexual abuse between ages 12 and 16 years; this confirms two past studies (Finkelhor, 1980; Russell, 1983) which reported that the onset of child sexual abuse (CSA) were before the age of 13 and 14 accordingly. Negative parental involvement in the sexual issue affecting their children was a pressing issue that needs to be addressed especially by the government. A law should be enacted on the prosecution of parents who engage their children in unwanted acts or unacceptable businesses. This will help to curb this menace. Also, since low standard of living was the main cause of child sexual abuse, more priority should be given to education and its standard should be raised. Also, given birth to too many children should be discouraged. All these will contribute to increasing family income and providing better accommodation. Furthermore, the study revealed that parents as well as community as a whole had vital roles to play in the process of preventing and managing child sexual abuse.

The implication of this study is that the high prevalence rate of child sexual abuse (CSA) among adolescents' males and females in the two Yoruba communities under study emphasised the need to intervene both at the family and community levels. The issue of gender as a risk factor needs further exploration to determine whether or not the experience of male victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) substantially differs from the experience of female victims. Irrespective of which is more however, preventive measures should be equally directed to both sexes. These findings further contribute to the body of knowledge by confirming the family system theory which proposes that emotional system that evolved over several billion years governs human relationship system; however, this emotional system which brought about cohesiveness and cooperation have created other negative consequences like child sexual abuse (CSA).

Conclusion

The study concluded that high prevalent rate of child sexual abuse existed among in-school adolescents. Also, parents negatively contributed to the sexual issues affecting their children. Therefore, there is need to intervene at macro, meso and micro levels. Furthermore, considering the nature and the high prevalence rate of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the two Yoruba communities in Osun State, Southwest of Nigerian, the study recommends that all stakeholders (including governments and parents) should perform their roles in the areas that concern them for proper prevention and management. Therefore, there should be change of parents' orientations to

contributing positively rather than negatively to the sexual issues affecting their children, and that matrimony should be well entrenched in the Southwest Nigerian society and in the world.

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