

# CHILD ABUSE RELATED KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE AMONG PARENTS IN ILORIN SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Despite the serious long-term health and economic consequences, child abuse is still a significant global problem that is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices and is on the increase. Therefore, this study was designed to assess knowledge, attitude and practice of child abuse among parents in Ilorin South Local government Area, Kwara State. Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. A total sample size of 140 parents were used with 1 sample per every 3 households adopted. A modified standardized child abuse questionnaire was used in gathering data. For data analysis, frequency, percentages and chi-square test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The results revealed that majority of the respondents were within the age group of 31-50 years and were married. 60 (42.9%) of the respondents were self-employed with 85 (60.7%) having 3-4 children. **Despite the fact that** majority of the respondents had high knowledge of child abuse, most of them still practice it. The study also revealed that there was significant relationship between practice of child abuse and the occupation of respondents. The study concluded that the practice of child abuse still exists in the study area and the type of occupation influences the practice of child abuse. Therefore, government should intensify efforts towards eradication of poverty in the country by creating job opportunity with good pay so that parents can adequately provide for their children.*

**Keywords:** Child abuse, Knowledge, Parents and Child Abuse, Practice.

## INTRODUCTION

*Child abuse is a global issue that is deeply rooted in the cultural, economic and social practices and is on the increase especially in Nigeria (Adejobi, Osonwa, Iyam, Udonwa, & Osonwa, 2013). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), child abuse is also known as child maltreatment in all forms of physical, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation that lead to actual and potential damage to a child's health and development or dignity. Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2008), stated that child abuse is any form of physical, psychological or sexual mistreatment of a child whereby the survival, safety, self-esteem, growth and development of the affected child is disturbed. Leeb, Paulozzi, Melanson, Simon and Arias (2008) also concluded that any act of commission or omission by parents, guardians, caregivers, or other adults that results in harm, potential for harm or a threat of harm to a child (0-18 years of age) even if the harm is unintentional (Gilbert, Spatz, Widom, Braone, Fergusson, Webb & Janson, 2009).*

Approximately 800,000 children out of the 3.2 million referrals of child maltreatment in 2007 were substantiated, 34% of these cases were very young children of one year or younger, who died as a result of neglect, about 80% of the

perpetrators were the parents of the children with women taking a higher frequency. Girls were also found to be more likely victims of abuse than boys although infant boys were found to be higher victims of fatalities resulting from abuse (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 2009). Child abuse can appear in different forms and there are four major forms of child abuse namely: physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) estimation, between 20 to 65 percent of school aged children reported to have been bullied verbally or physically and about 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years were sexually abused. Physical abuse is an act of a person involving contact of another person intended to cause feelings of physical pain, injury or other physical sufferings or bodily harm (Giardino, Angelo & Eileen, 2008). In most cases, children are the victims of physical abuse and are at the risk of developing aggressive behavior or substance abuse, risk of suicidal attempts is also associated with physical abuse, studies have also shown that children with history of physical abuse may meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (Mash & Eric, 2010).

Children experience abuse in their homes, schools, alternative care institutions, detention facilities, places where children work and communities (UNICEF, 2007). Often times, children are subjected to abuse in the family in the guise of discipline. The family is the most important and the original institution of society for bringing up and protecting children. However, this same institution is the main perpetrator of abuse to the children (Daily Times, 2016). In Nigeria, it is a common act for parents to make use of extreme corporal punishment in dealing with an offending child, the incidence of child sexual abuse is also on the increase, children who have been neglected

are seen on the roads fending for themselves. Abuse can have severe implications for children's development. It can affect children's health and ability to learn. It can lead children to run away from home, exposing them to further danger. Abuse destroys children's self-confidence and esteem and undermines their ability to grow into well adjusted adults. It was reported in Daily Times (2016) that exposure of children to violence results in their greater susceptibility to a wide range of lifelong social, emotional and cognitive impairments.

In addition, abuse has a serious impact on the victims' physical and mental health, well-being and development throughout their lives and the society as a whole will continue to pay the price for child abuse and neglect (Butchart & Harvey, 2006; Wafaa, Helal & Louise, 2012). Numerous children have died as a result of abuse and neglect and yet it has received little attention and the laws of the nation do not provide adequate punishment for offenders. Moreover, abuse against children in Nigeria is hard to determine since there is still substantial under reporting and studies have shown that majority of the known perpetrators of abuse in children were the parents (National Family Safety Registry, Annual report, 2010). Therefore, in order to eradicate the practice of child abuse, an assessment of parents' knowledge and practice of child abuse becomes a significant requirement.

#### Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- 1 Assess the level of child abuse related knowledge among parents in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria
1. Determine the practice of child abuse among parents in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive study design to determine the Knowledge and Practice of child abuse among parents in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State. Kwara State is located in North Central geo-political zone of Nigeria and South-East of River Niger: Its capital is Ilorin and it is the gate way between the south-east and north of Nigeria. It has about 75000km landmass. It has a population estimate of about 1.054million and comprises of nine local government areas of which Ilorin South is one of them. Ilorin South LGA has its headquarters in the town of Fufu. It has an area of 174km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 208,691 as at the 2006 census and a projected population of 243,120 as at 2011.

Data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire containing 33 items. The knowledge of child abuse amongst the

respondents were assessed using yes/no questions while the practice of child abuse was assessed using 5-point Likert scale format of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and don't know. The questionnaires were administered purposively to 140 parents who have children or wards below the age of 18 years and were living/ working in the communities of Ilorin South Local Government Area. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers to parents in every 3 household and 3 offices/shops. Data collection was done over a period of 12weeks after which all questionnaires were collected and were subsequently coded and analyzed using SPSS version (22.0). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics in form of frequency and percentage table while Chi-square was used in testing the hypotheses generated.

## RESULTS

Table 1: Respondents' knowledge of child abuse (n=140)

Question items	Yes N (%)	No N (%)
Are you aware of the term 'child abuse'?	118 (84.3%)	22 (15.7%)
Are you aware that there is a difference between child abuse and child discipline?	130 (92.9%)	10(7.1%)
Do you agree that locking up a child in a room can be used as a form of discipline?	57 (40.7%)	83(59.3%)
Do you agree that shouting at a child in public is a form of abuse?	81 (57.9%)	59 (42.1%)
Do you believe a child should be commended for good behavior?	132 (94.3%)	8 (5.7%)
Are you aware that insulting a child can kill the morale?	109 (77.9%)	31 (22.1%)
Do you believe that your child's needs are of high importance?	124 (88.6%)	16 (11.4%)
Is taking away privileges from a child after an offence a form of discipline?	86 (61.4%)	54 (38.6%)
Is being abused as a child is a predisposing factor for being abusive in the future?	79 (56.4%)	61 (43.6%)

Table 1 shows the majority of the respondents claimed to be aware of the term “child abuse” and the difference between child discipline and child abuse, while large proportion of the respondents agreed that shouting at a child in public, insulting a child can kill the morale of such a child, taking away of privileges from an offending child is a form of disciplinary measure. Furthermore 56.4% of the

respondents attested that parents who were abused as children are predisposed to abuse to their children. In the contrary, 59.3% of respondents disagreed that locking up a child is a form of discipline and 94.3% opined that a child should instead be commended for good behavior and 88.6% agreed that their child's needs are of high importance.

Table 2: Respondents’ Practice of child abuse (n=140)

Forms of chide abuse	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don’t Know
Give a child a hard spanking when he/she offends is a form of abuse	56(40.0%)	60(42.9%)	16(11.4%)	2 (1.4%)	6 (4.3%)
A child should be rewarded f or being of good behavior	7(5.0%)	6 (4.3%)	81(57.9%)	46(32.9%)	0(0%)
Starving a child is a good measure for discipline	9 (6.4%)	22(15.7%)	43(30.7%)	64(45.7%)	2 (1.4%)
Shouting at and insulting a child in public is a good measure for correcting the child	12 (8.6%)	26(18.6%)	46(32.9%)	52(37.1%)	4 (2.9%)
It is alright to listen to a child’s explanation before punishing him	87(62.1%)	32(22.9%)	13 (9.3%)	4 (2.9%)	4(2.9%)
Children who hawk are simply being tr ained t o assist their family financially	0 (0%)	68(48.6%)	72(51.4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

Table 2 shows Parents' Practice of child abuse was assessed using a 5-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to don't know. Many parents strongly agreed to the necessity of giving children a strong hard spanking when he/she offends while on the action of rewarding a child for good behavior,57.9% of parents strongly disagreed. A low percentage of parents agreed that starving an offending child is a form of discipline, while, also a low

percentage of parents strongly agreed that shouting or insulting a child in public is a form of correcting a child. Majority of parents (90.0%) claimed a good attitude towards listening to a child's explanation before punishment, as against few who disagreed. Child hawking being training to assist the family financially was seen by many (51.4%) of parents as a child abuse as against 48.6% of parents who practice it.

Table 3: Relationship between practice, knowledge, and occupation of respondents

	Practice			Remark
	chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )	P-value	df	
Occupation	4.687	0.046	2	significant association
Knowledge	1.067	0.308	1	No significant association

Table 3 reveals the significant relationship that exists between occupation and practice of child abuse with 4.69 greater than  $P < 0.05$ . However, no significant relationship exists between knowledge and practice of child abuse with 1.06 compared to  $P > 0.05$  level of significance.

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Child abuse is a common practice, despite various sources of information dissemination to the population within and around communities in Nigeria and particularly in Kwara State. The findings of this study revealed that majority of parents were within the mean age group of 40 years and were married, thus qualifying them for the study intended for parents of children below the age of 18 years. Most of the parents were knowledgeable about the term child abuse and knew the difference between child abuse and child discipline contrary to the study carried out by UNICEF, (2013) in Nepal where the level of knowledge was quite low. This study also shows that a high percentage of parents were found to be practicing the act of child abuse despite their high knowledge about and the difference between child abuse and child discipline. However, this finding is in contrast to a study conducted in Eastern Anatolia where there was inadequate knowledge but good attitude of parents towards child abuse (Acik, Deveci, & Oral, 2004).

About three quarters of the parents in this study agreed to the necessity of giving a child a hard spanking when he/she commits an offense, this finding disagreed with the 2007 child maltreatment report which listed physical abuse as one of the common forms of abuse (UDSHHS, 2009). This study further revealed that majority of parents are with the opinion that a child should be rewarded for good behavior instead of being starved as a form of child discipline, however, some parents disagreed to shouting and insulting a child in public in order to correct the child. These parents' opinions are in agreement with the 2007 child maltreatment report that psychological abuse being the least practiced form of abuse (USDHHS, 2009).

Most of the parents in this study were found to be practicing the act of child abuse despite their demonstration of high knowledge about child abuse. This may probably be due to the fact that, the child right act is not firmly rooted to protect the children in Nigeria or it could be due to the poor economic status of the respondents since majority were either self-employed or unemployed. This study agreed with a study which established significant relationship between socioeconomic status of the parents and the practice of child abuse, which in most cases is child neglect (Sedlak et al., 2010; Yang, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising to observe a significant relationship between practice of child abuse and the occupation of respondents in this

study, since the type of occupation most often determine the wages an individual earns which in turn determines the financial/economic status of that individual. In addition, various studies have also shown that the problem of child abuse is common in countries associated with low incomes, poverty, high rate of unemployment, increased level of stress and unstable political situation (Jordan, Welbury, Tiljak, Cukovic-Bagic 2012; Al-Habsi, Roberts, Attari & Parekh, 2009).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concluded that a significant relationship exists between occupation and practice of child abuse but revealed no significant relationship between knowledge and practice of child abuse among parents in Ilorin South LGA at  $P > 0.05$  level of significance.

This implies that child abuse still occurs in Ilorin South LGA. Although, most of parents demonstrated high knowledge of child abuse and their attitude towards child abuse was relatively commendable but the practice of child abuse is still high in our societies. Therefore, more adapted educational and counseling approach should be put in place for parents, guidance and families in the community at large.

Based on the conclusion of the study, it was recommended that, a nationwide awareness should be created in order to educate parents on the difference between actions that are abusive and actions that are geared towards child discipline. Also, parents should develop a good relationship with their children such that the children can report whatever happens to them with utmost confidence, this will help improve the diagnosis and legal dealings of child sexual abusers.

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