



INFLUENCE OF CHILD EMOTIONAL ABUSE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN ENUGU STATE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent child emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. One research question and one null hypothesis were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study comprised all the ten thousand five hundred and thirty-seven (10,537) public primary school teachers in Enugu State. The sample for the study is 527 public primary school teachers in Enugu State. The researcher used proportionate random sampling technique to draw 162 male and 365 female populations of public primary school teachers in Enugu State. A self-structured instrument was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate. The researcher administered the instrument directly to the respondents using six briefed research assistants. Out of the 527 copies of the administered instrument, only 423 copies were retrieved while 104 copies were not retrieved. Mean ($\bar{x}$) with Standard Deviation (SD) was used to answer the research question. However, the hypothesis was tested using t-test statistic at .05 level of significance. From the result of the findings, it was concluded that emotional abuse to a little extent influence academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. Consequently, no significant difference was found between the mean scores of male and female primary school teachers on the extent to which emotional abuse influenced academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. Based on the findings of the study the researcher recommended that efforts should be made by the stakeholders to further reduce the level of child abuse and neglect among primary school pupils by enforcement of the requisite laws.

Keywords: Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Academic Performance, Primary School Pupils

Introduction

Education is one of the surest ways of achieving self-reliance, National security, transmission of cultural values, norms and national and individual development but abuse and neglects on children seem to be a stumbling block to this fact. This is because researches by Tong (2015), and Pereire (2017), revealed that child abuse is one of the prevailing problems affecting the standard of education not only in Nigeria but also across many nations around the world. Children who are victims of abuse may start to skip or drop classes because of the abuser. The child may lose self-esteem, have low self-confidence or self-image as well as feelings of depression, insecurity and poor sense of belonging to the school subsequent to their abuse experience and finally, worsening of their learning attitude and academic work



performances may be some of the effects. The existence of abuse undermines the educational process of any institution (Sutherland, 2020), and it remains the responsibility of the stake holders in education, to provide a safe environment in order for students and pupils to reach their full potentials which are opposed by the prevalence of child abuse and neglect.

The term child abuse consists of any acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregivers that results in harm, potential for harm or the threat of harm to a child (0-18 years of age) even if the harm is unintentional (Gilbert, Spatz, & Janson, 2019). It encompasses various forms of maltreatment by parents or guardians, as described by Ukpepi, and Ndifon (2020). Axmaher (2020) defined child abuse as any maltreatment or neglect of a child resulting in non-accidental harm or injury that cannot be reasonably explained. Obekpa (2017) saw child abuse as any condition that is injurious to a child's physical or emotional health, inflicted by parents, guardians, or other caregivers. Igbo and Ekoja (2018) defined child abuse as a non-accidental injury inflicted on a child by a parent or guardian.

In Enugu State countless reports have been given on the menace of child abuse and neglect. Research report by Ugwu and Oyeoku (2020), revealed that in Nsukka Education Zone, primary school pupil who are supposed to be in class are seen 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. According to the Premium Times report of August, (2018), a young man of 45 years old within Enugu metropolis was allegedly caught sexually assaulting a female under aged child and was forced to face appropriate sanction. Scholars like Owo (2017) Olubukola (2018) have reported that child abuse is prevalent in Nigeria, Enugu State inclusive. But despite this increasing concern, Kinard (2019) pointed out that “the problem of child abuse has continued to defile solution in Enugu State.

Child abuse is a longstanding issue in human history, having persisted since time immemorial. According to Akoto (2019), in Africa, of which Nigerian societies are a part, what is currently recognized as abuse was not historically perceived as such. Instead, it was commonly viewed as a method for molding children into well-behaved, disciplined, and self-actualized individuals within the community. This traditional perspective holds that children should be exposed to a diverse range of experiences from their parents, caregivers, and other adults within the society. This exposure is intended to equip children with the fundamental norms and skills necessary for effective integration into their respective societies and for their personal growth and development. However, the process of acquiring these skills can sometimes be burdensome for children to endure.

Some parents and caregivers establish overly demanding conditions for skill acquisition, making it challenging for children to cope. Ugwu (2017), noted that the problematic aspect lies in the conditions under which children are exposed while striving to become disciplined and industrious individuals. When these conditions become excessively strenuous, they cross the line into abuse. For example, if a child is being taught farming skills and is made to work in the fields tirelessly from dawn till dusk without breaks or proper meals,



this constitutes abuse (Ukpepi, & Ndifon, 2020). Similarly, it may be considered abuse if a child is required to engage in street vending from morning till evening, or if they are expected to sell goods both before and after attending school. Furthermore, many caregivers according to Agbo (2018), subject the children to derogatory names, physical restraints and labeling such as; tinny hands and feet, and confinement in a room for extended periods, sometimes days with little or no food in Enugu State. These actions severely undermine the child's self-esteem and well-being and are off cause abuse (Falaye, 2018). For those children who attend school, their ability to concentrate in class may be compromised due to the demanding work they perform at home.

The classroom may serve as the only respite from their household responsibilities, leading to exhaustion and even falling asleep during lessons. Consequently, they may struggle to engage in classroom activities and fail to acquire proper education (Ukpepi, & Ndifon, 2020). It is worthy to note that child abuse occurs both in affluent and underprivileged households, as well as among the educated and illiterate. Udoka (2016), posited that parents often subject their children to abuse by frequently involving them in labour on farms, in trade, or within family businesses. This is done to contribute to the family's income and at times, to fulfill the children's needs. Ukpepi, and Ndifon (2020), noted that children are sometimes tasked with performing menial jobs like housekeeping, cooking, babysitting, or gardening to augment the family's financial resources. Conversely, in wealthier households, there may be adequate resources to care for children, but they may exploit the young individuals they employ as domestic help and cooks. This exploitation often involves overworking the servants in daily household chores while excluding their own children. These domestic helpers or housekeepers may endure non-stop work, often without rest, and may lack access to proper food, clothing, and decent sleeping arrangements. In some distressing cases, they are subjected to physical abuse, including beatings, kicking, pushing, and even exposure to hot oil, water, or acid as punishment (Falaye, 2018).

In contrast, children from affluent backgrounds may be sheltered from participating in general household activities. Consequently, they may lack essential life skills such as cooking, cleaning, and basic home management. This, too, can be considered a form of abuse because children should be exposed to such activities in preparation for their future responsibilities (Falaye, 2018). Mills (2015), noted that child abuse, no matter the form it takes, has far reaching consequences on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the victim. According to Mba (2017), the prominent forms of child abuse in Nigeria are child battering, child labour, child abandonment, neglect, teenage prostitution, early marriage and forced marriage. Irfan (2019), noted that significant among the forms of abuse is emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse, also known as verbal abuse, mental abuse, or psychological maltreatment, is defined as "acts or omissions by parents or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders." According to Aleke (2016), emotional abuse refers to any actions taken by parents or caregivers that have the potential to, or have indeed caused significant emotional, cognitive, mental, or behavioral disturbances in a child. It becomes evident when a parent or caregiver employs hurtful and derogatory language like "blockhead," "good for nothing," or labels the child as a mistake (Ike, 2018). Ubaka (2017), posited that emotional abuse is also manifested when a child is confined to a room, restrained physically, or denied the opportunity to socialize and make friends. Mba



(2017), asserted that emotional abuse encompasses a constant pattern of blaming, belittling, berating, displaying indifference towards the child's well-being, and outright rejection by parents or caregivers.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child /young people which can have severe and persistent effects on the child's emotional development. It can include: Conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only as they meet the needs of another person. Not giving the child opportunities to express his or her view, deliberately silences them or "making fun" of what they say or how they communicate, inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may lead to interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability (Young, 2016). Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018), defined emotional abuse in a way that can be ambiguous by opining that it is a pattern of behaviour that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. When emotional abuse is chronic and persistent, it can result in emotional harm to the child.

Emotional abuse has been linked to increased depression, anxiety, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Spertus, Wong, Halligan, & Seremetis, 2018). It is often the least understood yet one of the most prevalent, cruel, and destructive forms of abuse (Oniyama, 2024). Emotional abuse attacks a child's self-concept, making them perceive themselves as unworthy, worthless, and incapable. When a child is consistently subjected to humiliation, shame, terror, or rejection, the impact can be more detrimental than physical maltreatment. This can result in children withdrawing from social interactions, experiencing depression, and struggling with concentration in school (Khartri, 2014). Mfonobong (2018), outlined indicators of emotional abuse, to include behaviors such as a child hiding their eyes, lowering their gaze, biting their lips or tongue, forcing a smile, fidgeting, displaying annoyance, defensiveness, exaggeration, confusion, denial, feelings of nakedness, defeat, alienation, or lack of self-worth, regression, poor self-esteem, angry acts, withdrawal, insecurity, alcohol or drug abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts, difficulties in forming relationships, eating disorders, sleep disorders, nightmares, speech disorders, developmental delays, nervous disorders, and somatic symptoms, among others. Victoria (2018), revealed that emotional abuse has significant impact on the primary school pupils irrespective of gender. Ubaka (2017), noted that emotional abuse is one of the worse forms of child abuse as it has far reached effect on the child's cognitive, mental and psychosocial health. Related to emotional abuse is child labour. It is unfortunate to observe that such situations are often encountered by many children in public primary schools to the detriment of their academic performance.

Academic Performance can be seen as the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals. It is commonly measured through homework(s), continuous assessment(s) and examination. A child is a person below the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2016). Success within the academic environment is an important value instilled during childhood. Children who are able to attain academic success within their school years are more likely to have an overall sense of well-being throughout childhood and into adulthood (Center for Disease Control (CDC) 2017). Although it may be ideal for all children to perform well within the school environment, there are many outside factors that can hinder a child's potentials for academic success. Particularly, negative health outcomes related



to child maltreatment such as neglect, hunger and all forms of abuse (which include, sexual, physical, and emotional) are strong indicators of poor academic performance (Ubaka, 2017). Being that the primary school stage is a delicate stage that demands adequate care and attention on the pupil. It is therefore pertinent to explore the influence of child abuse and neglect on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State, as no study known to this researcher ever investigated such. Studies have found that 51% to 71% of abused children exhibit psychological symptoms (Asogwa, 2021). Asogwa, added that the risk of harm is greater if the abuse is a relative or one whom the child or student has trust on and if the abuse involves intercourse or attempted intercourse or if threats or force were used. According to Kenneth, Marrienne and Miller (2017), victims of child labour and abuse demonstrate higher rate of academic and conduct problems and are more likely to be have behavioural maladjustments. In the 2015 United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported, six out of every 10 female children in the country are made to experience sex abuse before the age of 18 and 31% of girls had their first sexual intercourse through rape. In another study on sexual abuse of Enugu State University Teaching Hospital (ESUTH) between 2018 and 2021, analysis shows that 70% of sexually abused victims were under the age of 13 and were females.

Statistics also shows that female are 1.53 times more likely to be abused than the males and that 15.1% of child emotional abuse in the school setting were done by teachers. 51.1% of students were victims of sex abuse while 48.5% of the abuse occurred in assailant's house, hotel room or office. To this light Victoria (2018), noted that the school authority has a great deal of role to play in assisting and equipping the schools to tackle the menace of abuse in the educational institutions. Due to the impact of child emotional abuse on primary school pupils in Enugu State, which is assumed to affect a child's educational and social life, this study hopes to add to the existing knowledge on child abuse and the influence of child abuse on primary school pupils in Enugu State. It is against this background that this study aims at identifying the extent child emotional abuse influence academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher observed with dismay emotional abuse of primary school pupils a form of child abuse in Enugu State. It is a source of worry that these forms of abuse experiences could have detrimental influence on the academics performance of the primary school pupils in Enugu State. There is an indication that abused children who are affected mentally and socially can hardly be well disposed for learning which in turn affect their performance in school activities. It is against this background that this study is carried out to investigate the influence of child emotional abuse on the academic performance of secondary school students in Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which child emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the extent to which emotional abuse influence academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State.



Research Question

The following research question guided the study;

1. To what extent does child emotional abuse influence academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study and was tested at .05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female primary school teachers on the extent to which emotional abuse influence academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State.

Method

Descriptive survey research design was utilized for this study. Descriptive survey research design according to Nworgu (2015), is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. A descriptive survey research is concerned with specified population of persons, item or situation, in a defined geographical location (Idoko, 2011). The descriptive survey research design is considered suitable since the study solicited information from the respondents directly and afford all the respondents equal chance of being chosen for the study. The population for the study comprised all the ten thousand five hundred and thirty-seven (10,537) public primary school teachers in Enugu State. The population is made up of 1,179 male and 9,369 female public primary school teachers in Enugu State. The sample is 527 public primary school teachers in Enugu State. The researcher used proportionate random sampling technique to draw 162 male and 365 female populations of public primary school teachers in Enugu State. This is in line with Uzoagulu (2017), which stated that when the respondents' population are in the thousands 5% and above of the entire population can serve as the sample. The researcher developed a self-structured instrument named "Influence of Child Emotional Abuse on the Academic Performance Questionnaire (ICEAAPQ)". The instrument has two sections, A and B. Section A contains the respondents bio-data. While section B has 11 items structured to assist the researcher in providing answers to the research question that guided the study. The response format for the instrument is a 4-point scale of very great extent, great extent, little extent, very little extent. Each response option has a numerical value assigned to it as follows;

Very Great Extent (VGE)= 4 points

Great Extent (GE) = 3 points

Little Extent (LE) = 2 points

Very Little Extent (VLE) = 1 point

The instrument was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Foundation, Guidance and Counselling Option and one other expert in the field of Measurement and Evaluation, Mathematics and Computer Education Department, all from the Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The experts were requested to assess the relevance, adequacy, suitability and comprehensiveness of the items in addressing the research questions as well as the clarity of the instruction to the respondents. The initial 26 generated items were decreased to 11 items as suggested by the validators, while barrel questions and grammatical errors were corrected on items 3,5,6,7,8, 9, and 11. The



validators' comments were used to draft the final instrument that was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined by administering 20 copies of the questionnaire to a sample of 8 male and 12 female primary school teachers from public primary schools in Ebonyi State, for trial testing to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. The choice of Ebonyi State was dictated by the fact that both states have the same educational characteristics in terms of administration, population and environment. The respondents were assured of confidentiality of the information they supplied. Data collected from the respondents' responses were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha Reliability estimate to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficient was .71, indicating that the instrument is reliable and suitable for the study.

The researcher administered the instrument directly to the respondents using six briefed research assistants. The research assistants were briefed by the researcher on the conduct of the exercise in a one-day consultative meeting, during which they were acquainted with the purpose of the study and how the questionnaire should be administered and collected. Appointments were booked with the respondents for collection at later dates for those who may not be able to fill their own copies of the instrument because of the nature of their job. Out of the 527 copies of the administered instrument, only 423 copies were retrieved while 104 copies were not retrieved. The 104 copies of administered instrument not retrieved were as a result of the fact that the some primary school teachers were on leave as at the time the researcher and the research assistants returned to collect the administered instrument. Series of appointments booked with them was not successful. The data collected were analyzed using Mean ($\bar{x}$) with Standard Deviation (SD) to answer the research question. However, the hypothesis was tested using t-test statistic at .05 level of significance. The analysis was done with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The decision rule; real limit of the numbers was applied for the research question, therefore, the upper and lower limits of the mean is as follows;

Mean scores from 3.50 – 4.49 Very Great Extent (VGE)

Mean scores from 2.50 – 3.49 Great Extent (GE)

Mean scores from 1.50 – 2.49 Little Extent (LE)

Mean scores from 0.50 – 1.49 Very Little Extent (VLE)

The null hypothesis was rejected when the significant level is more than .05 and was not rejected when the significant level is less than .05.



Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does child emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Primary School Teachers on the Extent to which Child Emotional Abuse Influence the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Enugu State. N=423

S/N	Extent emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils include;	Overall		Decision
		$\bar{X}_G$	SD _G	
1	confining the child to a room has positive influence on academic performance	2.14	0.74	LE
2	blaming the child always harms the child's academic performance	1.78	0.67	LE
3	belittling the child increases the child's academic performance	2.14	0.64	LE
4	displaying indifference towards the child's well-being has positive influence on academic performance	1.85	0.64	LE
5	berating the child causes child's good performance	1.99	0.76	LE
6	outright rejection by parents causes child's good performance	1.85	0.52	LE
7	shouting at the child improves his self-esteem in class	2.07	0.60	LE
8	Denial of the child's freedom of expression influence the child's cognitive ability	1.78	0.86	LE
9	emotional abuse influence mental improvement on the child	2.00	0.76	LE
10	emotional abuse improves psychosocial health of the child	1.71	0.59	LE
11	using hurtful words on the child has positive influence on academic performance	2.07	0.70	LE
Cluster Mean/SD		1.94	0.68	LE

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that overall item mean ratings range from 1.71 to 2.14 depicting little extent. This shows that the items have little extent on the influence of child emotional abuse on academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. The overall cluster mean rating of 1.94 indicates little extent. The Standard deviation values are homogenous and closely clustered around the mean. Indicating that the respondent's opinions do not differ remarkably on the items raised. This implies that to a little extent emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female primary school teachers on the extent to which child emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State.

Table 2: Summary of t-test Analysis of Mean Response of Male and Female Primary School Teachers on the Extent to which Child Emotional Abuse Influence the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Enugu State

VARIABLES	N			Sig. (2tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Decision
		t	df				
MALE	121	.434	421	.665	.18751	.43245	NS
FEMALE	308						

The result of t-test analysis in Table 2 shows that the t-value at .05 level of significant and 421 degree of freedom for the items is .434 with a significant value of .665. As the



significant value of .665 is more than the .05 level of significant the null hypothesis is not significant. This means that no significant difference exists between the mean scores of male and female primary school teachers on the extent to which child emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State.

Discussion of Findings

The result on table two revealed that child emotional abuse to a little extent influenced the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. This finding agreed with Udeaya (2020), who asserted that children who have been emotionally neglected are more likely to experience mental health problems including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The finding is in line with Khartri (2024), who noted that emotional abuse can result in children withdrawing from social interactions, experiencing depression, and struggling with concentration in school. The finding is also in consonance with Ubaka (2017), who noted that emotional abuse is one of the worse forms of child abuse as it has far reached effect on the child's cognitive, mental and psychosocial health. Being that emotional abuse is a form of child abuse often neglected yet with more negative impact, parents and care givers of the primary school pupils should be sensitized on the menace of emotional abuse on primary school pupils so as to ameliorate its impact on their academic performance in primary schools in Enugu State.

The comparison of the male and female primary school teachers showed that no significant difference exists in the mean response scores of male and female primary school teachers on the extent to which emotional abuse influence the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. This finding agrees with Victoria (2018), who revealed that emotional abuse has significant impact on the primary school pupils irrespective of gender. It should be noted that emotional abuse triggers different form of actions on individual such as isolation, social withdrawal and suicidal thoughts irrespective of gender. Therefore, there is need to periodically organize a workshop on child emotional abuse, neglect and sensitization, involving parents, care givers and for male and female primary school teachers in Enugu State.

Educational Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study hold implications for primary school authorities, teachers and students. The study holds implication for the school authorities as the result of this study there is an indication that school authorities have little or no interest in ascertaining the extent to which the menace of child abuse influenced academic performance of primary schools in Enugu State. The findings of this study thus provide guide to the school authorities on the best strategy to be adopted in school environment at each given situation while dealing with the issue of child abuse.

The study holds implication for the primary school pupils who stand to gain more from the results of this study. The educational implication of this study indicates that child abuse to a great extent influence academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu State. Thus, the findings of this study serve as a guide to the pupils against negative thoughts as a result of their abusive experiences and assist the pupils to develop high self-esteem, assertiveness and adjustment in behaviour, in the hope of making them better contributors and academic efficient members of society.

The findings of this study hold an implication for school counsellors and teachers whom are saddled with the responsibility of assisting the pupils with educational, vocational and personal social problems of which abuse and neglects influences. The educational implication



of this study, therefore, provides the school counsellors and teachers with better strategies of assisting primary school pupils under abuse and neglect, bearing in mind that, it appears that incidences of child abuse of primary school pupils are rarely reported or given adequate attention in Enugu State to the best knowledge of the researcher.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made.

1. There is need for awareness campaign against emotional abuse of primary school pupils by counsellors and stake holders in Education so as to curb the occurrence of abuse of primary school pupils in Enugu State.
2. Parents and care givers of the primary school pupils should be sensitized on the menace of emotional abuse on primary school pupils so as to ameliorate its impact on their academic performance at schools in Enugu State.
3. There is need to periodically organize workshops/ seminars on child emotional abuse sensitization, involving parents, care givers and for male and female primary school teachers in Enugu State.
4. Efforts should be made by the stakeholders to further reduce the level of child abuse and neglect among primary school pupils by enforcement of the requisite laws.

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