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BUILDING A
SAFER
WORLD
THROUGH
EDUCATION

Edited by
M.K. AKINSOLA
K.O. OJOKHETA
J.A. ADEMOKOYA

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IMPLICATIONS OF PARENTS' KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES OF CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE IN BUILDING A SAFER WORLD

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Abstract

This study investigated parents' knowledge, attitude and practices of child physical abuse in Ogun State. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. A convenience sample of 202 male and female parents from Abeokuta South and Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun state were selected using stratified and random sampling technique. A self-developed questionnaire tagged "Parents' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Child Physical abuse Scale" was used for data collection. Simple percentages and means were used in answering the research questions. It was found that parents' knowledge of what constitute child physical abuse and practice is low. Though, most parents condemned child physical abuse there were believes that some abusive acts can be used as disciplinary measures. It was recommended that enlightenment programmes should be organized and intensified to create more awareness and fast track a paradigm shift from the use of abusive punitive strategies by parents and caregivers to build a safer world.

Key words: Attitude, Child physical abuse, Knowledge, Practices, Safer world

Introduction

Recent media reportages including studies have shown that there is a growing problem of children being abused by adults responsible for their care globally (Anne Lown, Nayak, Kocha and Greenfield, 2011). In almost every community of African societies, children are still being exposed to different forms of abuse and violence within their families, neighbourhoods and in schools. This implies that children are abused precisely in places and by people who ought to offer them protection, affection, shelter and promote their rights. This

trend of abuse runs in contrary to the UNICEF (2006) guidelines on “Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood” which states that, “a child’s survival and growth, as well as intellectual, social and emotional development, depend on the care and nurturing the child receives within the family or community”. This suggests that when children are nurtured in loving and supportive family environment, they are likely to manifest high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, curiosity and the desire to learn but contrastingly any form of child abuse and violence would have negative impact on children’s development and well being. Several studies have reported that abuse and violence disturbs the child’s normal development and creates symptoms, such as withdrawal, aggression, depression, conduct disorder, learning disorders, difficulties in peer relationships and criminal tendencies (McCrorry and Viding, 2015; Norman, Byambaa, De, Butchart and Scott et al 2012).

In Daly and Wright (2016), it was explained that child abuse constitutes a violation of the most basic rights of children and adolescents, which involves all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation with detriments in the form of actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development and dignity. Similarly, Rees, Stein, Hicks and Gorin (2011), has argued that child abuse is the neglect of a child’s survival and developmental needs, physical and emotional injury or harassment and the subjection of a child to measures, situations and experiences, which interferes with healthy development into adulthood. Radford, Corral, Bradley and Fisher (2011), then suggested that child abuse or maltreatment occurs in the context of a child/adult relationship or committed by people entrusted with responsibility or power. However, this contravenes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as contained in The Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 2006), which states that “all persons under the age of 18 have the right to physical and psychological integrity and to protection from all forms of violence”.

Child physical abuse is one of the most common forms of child abuse (Giardino, Giardino and Moles 2013). In addition, Goldman, Salus, Wolcott and Kennedy (2003), referred to child physical abuse as the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that result in harm to the child. Specifically, physical abuse is all acts of commission that results in an actual physical harm or has a potential for physical harm of the child (Runyan, Wattam, Ikeda, Hassan, & Ramiro, 2002). It includes subjecting the child to degrading and inhuman conditions, such as hitting with a hand or any materials, punching, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, burning, choking or beating the child in the name of chastisement, correction, or anger (Hanci, 2002). Also, Giardino, et. al., (2013) has emphasized that physical abuse may result in either temporary or permanent damage to organs, bones, and brain tissues, which can be fatal. However, Olusegun and Idowu (2016) argued that perceptions about what constitute child physical abuse differ with time and culture and this variance in culture and attitudes of parents has created challenges in appropriate classification of the child physical abuse arising from the diverse cultural norms for parental physical disciplinary behaviour. Thus, the complex controversies surrounding the connections between discipline, culture and child physical abuse has generated a myriad of concerns ranging from excessive cultural relativity to reporting biases (Gonzalez, Durrant, Chabot, Trocme and Brown (2008). Culturally in Nigeria, consideration of abusive tendencies in children discipline in recent times is concerned with the age appropriateness, frequency, and severity of the discipline. In some climes, physical discipline is deemed appropriate while they are adjudged abusive by others. Olusegun and Idowu (2016) has argued that physical abusive acts mimicking corporal punishment within the household are widely accepted as a way of instilling discipline in a child and are regarded as part of the socialization process in the home with the children being unaware that it is reprehensible. For example, practices such as spanking and slapping that are now considered abusive and viewed as dehumanizing rather

than been corrective, have in years past been accepted to be within the normal parental rights and responsibilities of child nurturing and appropriate disciplinary measures. Consequently, most children have not only suffered physical pain and discomfort in the past but also psychological, cognitive, social and emotional trauma. The situation is particularly intense because children are prohibited from speaking up since they are dependent and vulnerable.

The American Psychological Association Bulletin (2013) has cited corporal punishment as a form of physical discipline while emphasizing the complexity involved in determining the point at which physical discipline becomes an abuse. On one hand, it was explained that a punishment is deemed corrective especially if the child could connect the punishment to a demeanor while on the other hand, when it results in actual or potential harm, it clearly becomes a physical abuse. Coleman, Dodge and Campbell (2010) then suggests that physical abuse practices are perpetrated under the guise of physical discipline or punishment by adults or abusive parents who exert their authority and socialization role negatively on children. Therefore, since the boundaries of physical discipline or punishment are difficult to measure for professionals and parents alike, one serious risk factor is the possibility of its escalation to child physical abuse.

According to Finkelhor (2002) children are to be socialized primarily through love and not discipline since hitting and humiliating children is detrimental to their development. Among several other grave consequences for both parents and children, physical abuse may likely train children to use physical violence to control behaviour rather than rational persuasion. Although, there seem to be an increased recognition worldwide on the need to desist from abusive parenting measures, there is still the need for increased enlightenment of parents to desist from abusive and violent act against children to help build a safer world in Nigeria. With this in view, this study seeks to examine parent's knowledge, attitude and practices of child physical abuse in South west Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the implication of knowledge, attitude and practices of child physical abuse on building a safer world among parents in Ogun State. Specifically, the study will determine the extent of parents' knowledge on acts that constitute physical abuse, attitude of parents to acts that constitute child physical abuse and the various types of physical abuse acts parents practice.

Research Questions

- i. What is the extent of parents' knowledge on acts that constitute physical abuse?
- ii. What is the attitude of parents to acts that constitute child physical abuse?
- iii. What forms of physical abuse acts do parents practice?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type. The population consists of parents in Abeokuta South and Odeda Local Government Areas of Ogun State. These LGAs have features of communities that can be classified as urban, semi-urban and rural areas which represent all the communities that can be found in the state. Two hundred and two (202) participants were drawn through convenient sampling and availability of respondents within the selected areas in the two local government areas in Ogun State.

Data were obtained with a 29 items questionnaire titled "Parents' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Child Physical Abuse Scale". The knowledge sub-scale comprise of 9 items; Attitude sub-scale - 9 items and Practice sub-scale - 11 items. The items were rated on a four point response option ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD) The questionnaire was validated through a pilot testing carried out in Ibadan South West Local Government Area which is not part of the study area and a reliability

index of Cronbach alpha 0.73 was reported. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, simple percentages to answer the research questions.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 202 parents participated in this study comprising of 74 males (36.5%) and 128 females (63.5%). They had an age range of 21 to 60, with a mean of 33.27. A good number of the respondents (N= 162, 80.2%) are married and had intact families while 40(19.8%) were single parents. Research Question 1: What is the extent of parents' knowledge of child physical abuse?

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S/N	Statements	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	S.D.
1.	Good parents cannot avoid spanking the child with force to instill proper discipline	10 (4.8%)	24 (11.5%)	72 (36.2%)	94 (47.4%)	3.26	0.85
2.	Hitting the child so hard with an objects e.g. a stick is less likely to cause physical injury	86 (42.9%)	28 (13.5%)	82 (40.7%)	6 (2.9%)	2.24	0.79
3.	Parents can throw an object to hit any part of the body especially when a child is trying to escape when being beaten	10 (4.8%)	16 (8.3%)	96 (47.8%)	78 (39.1%)	3.21	0.79
4.	Parents can use any hot object e.g. hot iron to burn a child to stop a bad behaviour e.g. stealing	86 (42.9%)	32 (15.5%)	78 (38.7%)	6 (2.9%)	2.14	0.79
5.	Parents can tie the child with rope to an object e.g. a chair to prevent running away when beating a child	94 (47.4%)	72 (36.2%)	24 (38.7%)	10 (4.8%)	2.26	0.85
6.	Parents can kick the child in any part of the body when angry	6 (2.9%)	28 (13.5%)	82 (40.9%)	86 (42.9%)	3.24	0.79
7.	It is not an abuse for parents to slap the child on the face or squeeze the ears or nose of a child vigorously.	10 (4.8%)	16 (8.3%)	96 (47.8%)	78 (39.1%)	3.21	0.79
8.	Biting, choking and shaking the child vigorously is abusive	6 (2.9%)	28 (13.5%)	82 (40.7%)	86 (42.9%)	3.14	0.79
9.	Parent can be excused for punching the child when stressed out	6 (2.9%)	26 (12.5%)	88 (44.2%)	80 (40.4%)	3.22	0.77

Average Mean = 25.92/9 = 3

Table 1: Parents' knowledge of child physical abuse? Table 1 showed the extent of parent's knowledge of child physical abuse based on the magnitude of the mean. Majority of the parents agreed that; Good parents cannot avoid spanking the child with force to instill proper discipline (mean=3.26), Parents can kick the child in any part of the body when angry (mean=3.24), Parent can be excused for punching the child when stressed out (mean=3.22), It is not an abuse for parents to slap the child on the face or squeeze the ears or nose of a child vigorously (mean=3.21), Parents can throw an object to hit any part of the body especially when a child is trying to escape when being beaten (mean=3.21), Biting, choking and shaking the child vigorously is abusive (3.14). On the other hand, most parents did not agree to the following items; Parents can tie the child with rope to an object e.g. a chair to prevent running away when beating a child (mean=2.26), Hitting the child so hard with an objects e.g. a stick is less likely to cause physical injury (mean=2.24), Parents can use any hot object e.g. hot iron to burn a child to stop a bad behaviour e.g. stealing (mean=2.14). Based on the findings, it can be deduced that some parents have faint knowledge of acts that constitute child physical abuse, however, it is glaring that majority of the parents have low knowledge on acts that are constitute physical abuse as such acts are used as disciplinary measures on children..

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of parents towards child physical abuse?

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Parents' Attitude towards Child Physical Abuse

S/No	Statements	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	S.D.
1.	Beating a child is a way of ensuring a child turn out goo	12 (6.1%)	26 (12.8%)	84 (42.0%)	78 (39.1%)	3.14	0.86
2.	Parents cannot raise a child without ever spanking and using the cane	88 (44.2%)	26 (12.5%)	6 (2.9%)	80 (40.4%)	2.22	0.77
3.	Gravity of offense should be used to determine the punishment meted out	10 (4.5%)	10 (4.8%)	84 (42.3%)	96 (48.4%)	3.34	0.77
4.	Scars or wound from previous punishment would deter a child from committing another offense.	10 (4.5%)	30 (15.4%)	94 (46.5%)	68 (33.7%)	3.09	0.81
5.	Children learn more and better by example than by punishment	78 (39.1%)	26 (12.8%)	84 (42.0%)	12 (6.1%)	2.64	0.86
6.	Children should not be allowed to get away with any wrong doing	80 (40.4%)	26 (12.5%)	88 (44.2%)	6 (2.9%)	2.61	0.77
7.	It is a waste of time when parents dialogue with children	10 (4.5%)	10 (4.8%)	84 (42.3%)	96 (48.4%)	3.35	0.77
8.	Children will in the future appreciate the beatings and spanking received and thank the parents later	10 (4.5%)	68 (33.7%)	94 (46.5%)	30 (15.4%)	3.21	0.89
9.	Children are very stubborn; the parents have to be tough and harsh on them	12 (6.1%)	26 (12.8%)	84 (42.0%)	78 (39.1%)	3.14	0.86
		Average Mean = 25.92/9= 3					

Table 2 revealed the rankings of parent's attitude towards child physical abuse based on the magnitude of the mean. Majority of the parent agreed that; It is a waste of time when parents dialogue with children (mean=3.35), follow by; Gravity of an offense should be used to determine the punishment meted out (mean=3.34), children will in the future appreciate the beatings and spanking and later thank the parents (mean=3.21), Beating a child is a way of ensuring a child turn out good (mean=3.14), Children are very stubborn; the parents have to be tough and harsh on them (mean=3.14), Scars or wound from previous punishment would deter a child from committing another offense (mean =3.09). On the other hand parents disagreed on the fact that; Children learn more and better by example than by punishment (mean=2.64); Children should not be allowed to get away with any wrong doing (mean=2.61); Parents cannot raise a child without ever spanking and using the cane (mean=2.22). This finding revealed that though most parents do not endorse child physical abuse acts, yet the approval of certain measure of discipline suggests they support the use of some forms of child physical abuse as a way to curb children excesses.

Research Question 3: Do you engage in any of these practices in the upbringing of your children?

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Parents' Practice of Child Physical Abuse

S/No	Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	S.D.
1	Hit the child with an object	64 (32.4%)	36 (17.6%)	16 (8.3%)	86 (51.7%)	2.20	0.96
2	Bite the child with teeth	78 (38.5%)	38 (18.9%)	66 (33.3%)	18 (9.3%)	2.91	0.97
3	Pinched the child all over the body	24 (11.9%)	36 (18.9%)	64 (32.3%)	76 (37.5%)	2.96	1.02
4	Put hot pepper in the child's mouth, body, eyes etc	30 (14.7%)	64 (32.1%)	34 (16.7%)	74 (36.5%)	2.90	1.06
5	Kicked the child repeatedly	78 (38.5%)	38 (18.9%)	66 (33.3%)	18 (9.3%)	2.93	0.97
6	Gave repeated knocks on the head of the child	14 (7.4%)	18 (9.3%)	70 (34.9%)	96 (48.4%)	3.24	0.90
7	Threatened the child with a knife	88 (43.6%)	78 (38.8%)	20 (9.9%)	16 (7.7%)	2.01	0.92
8	Beat the child repeatedly with cane, belt, wire etc	16 (8.3%)	24 (11.9%)	82 (40.7%)	78 (39.1%)	3.11	0.91
9	Twisted the child's ear	16 (8.0%)	24 (11.9%)	88 (43.6%)	74 (36.5%)	3.09	0.89
10	Slapped the child's face or head	20 (9.9%)	16 (7.7%)	88 (43.6%)	78 (38.8%)	3.11	0.92
11	Used hot object to burn the child	24 (11.9%)	36 (18.3%)	64 (32.4%)	76 (37.5%)	2.96	1.02
Average Mean = 25.92 ÷ 9 = 3							

Table 3 showed the magnitude of the mean based on parent's practice of child physical abuse. Most parents agreed that they had given repeated knocks on the head of the child (mean=3.24), Beat the child repeatedly with cane, belt, wire etc (mean=3.11), Slapped the child's face or head (mean =3.11), twisted the child's ear

(mean=3.09), hit the child with knuckles (mean=2.96), used hot object to burn the child (mean=2.96). While majority of the parent reported that they do not; Kicked the child repeatedly (mean=2.93), Bite the child with teeth (mean=2.91), put hot pepper in the child's mouth (mean=2.90), hit the child with an object (mean=2.20), threaten the child with a knife (mean=2.01). The findings revealed clearly that parents are still engaging in child physical abuse.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that though parents recognize their responsibilities in protecting their children they have inadequate knowledge of the boundaries between acceptable punishment and physical child abuse acts. This outcome is in line with the findings of Akpunne (2015) who stated that about 74.2% adolescents in Nigeria are reported to have experienced one form of physical abuse or the other as a child. In addition, Strauss and Stewart, (1999) found that parents who physically abused their children reported two thirds of their abusive incidents began as an attempt to change the child's behaviour. They also found that over one fourth of parents reported using an object to hit the child in the bid to discipline..

Though, over the years there had been campaigns discouraging the use of abusive child disciplinary measures, many parents are still culpable. This negates the findings of Bussman (2004), who found a significant decrease in the use of severe physical abuse such as slaps in the face, spanking, and other violent disciplinary tactics. This implies that parents largely violate the children through physical abuse in the name of discipline and their lack of awareness of the boundaries of discipline could contribute to the increased physical child abuse rates in Nigeria. Also, it can be inferred that since parenting strategies are strongly influenced by cultural norms and expectations and there are no strong legislations against corporal punishment in this clime many parents cross the borderline between corporal punishments and physical child abuse. Many people are not aware that some cultural practices serve as an in-

fringement on the rights of children, and are considered abuse. Many of these practices are viewed as normal, especially because they are culturally accepted and have been in existence for a long time. The negative consequences that arise from these practices are thereafter ignored or termed as challenges that are part of the experiences of life. For example, some Nigerian parents beat their children excessively because they believe they need discipline, and do not view it as a form of abuse. Also Hyland, Alkhalaf and Whalley (2013) reported that cultural differences and common beliefs about parenting styles could be responsible for the difference in forms of acceptable punishment. Ceballo (2004) also believes that parental attitudes and knowledge have important role in parental behaviour. This study further showed that parent's attitude to physical child abuse is positive. It implies that parents support the use of abusive disciplinary measures. The result agrees with the findings of a study by Qasem, Mustafa, Kazem and Shan (1998) about child physical abuse which showed that 86% of parents agreed with physical punishment as a method of discipline. However, it negates the findings of Jabraeili, Asadollahi, Asghari Jafarabadi and Hallaj (2015) which reported that mothers' attitudes toward child abuse are negative. In other words, they disagreed with physical child abuse and neglect and also the findings of Agha Bakhshi, Harir Chi and Janghravi, (2005) which showed that mothers' attitudes toward child abuse were moderate. This study has indicated that parents' attitudes towards physical child abuse are significantly correlated with their disciplinary behaviours. It also corroborates the study of Vittrup, Holden and Buck (2006) that parents who indicated positive attitudes towards corporal punishment and more severe forms of physical abuse are also more likely to perpetrate these types of aggressive behaviour on their children. Overall, the present analysis found that parents hold divergent opinions when judging "reasonable" discipline tactics and those that could be harmful to the child. Though more parents than not were able to recognize that some form of disciplines were abusive, a significant proportion of parents did not rate such

punishments as abuse.

Implication

In Nigeria, it is undoubted that child physical abuse is not only a social health problem and violation of children's right issue that can lead to a variety of adverse effects in terms of physical and psychological problems on children with massive socio-economic implications on the society at large. Many parents uses punishment, based on their belief of its appropriateness and effectiveness as means of correcting their child in the event of committing a wrong doing and to serve as part of a child's upbringing with the aim to influence the child's turn out and become useful in the society.

Although, such practices are perceived by many people in other cultures as an infringement on the rights of children, it is viewed as normal due to being culturally rooted and generally accepted in the society while the consequent negative outcomes are often ignored then considered as challenges that are essential part of life experiences. This indicates that many parents still lacks the appropriate knowledge on the negative impact despite the enlightenment and advocacy on prevention of different forms of child physical abuse.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the issue of child physical abuse though detrimental in the society is still very much practiced by parents. This negates the responsibility of providing love and care. It is evident that perpetrators of child physical abuse is not necessarily limited to strangers but most often being carried out by family or family friends. While much studies have been carried out on the subject of child physical abuse, there is less evidence to suggest that much stringent rules or laws exists to prosecute the offenders or seek justice for abused children. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the parents, government and the society at large to provide a secure environment that would help foster children's growth and promote their general health and well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

There should be increased social awareness and advocacy on the rights of the child and increased awareness of what constitute child physical abuse among the populace. Also, since most countries have policies and programs aimed at contributing to the well being of children, including preventing and reducing the risk of child abuse and violence, clear cut legislation to enforce compliance with the Child rights act across the nation and strict prosecution of violators should be put in place in Nigeria as well.

Parents could benefit from receiving more information regarding the legal boundaries when disciplining a child through physical means, in order to increase intervention and prevention of child physical abuse. Therefore, early prevention efforts should be focused on educating parents on how to deal with children in non-abusive ways. This suggests that if parents were provided with information on the boundaries of disciplinary measures or effective alternative discipline tactics, they would be less likely to cross the line into physical abuse when disciplining their child.

Parents should be encouraged to adopt reinforcement and reward strategies when children exhibit desirable behaviours and conversely when they exhibit deviant behaviour. It is better to deny children privileges when they do something unacceptable, as well as reward them when they do something good; this teaches children that there are consequences for their actions.

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