



Prevalence of sexual child abuse among secondary school students in Igunmale, Benue State Nigeria

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Abstract

Sexual child abuse seems to have become a public health problem of great concern in Nigeria with majority of the cases unreported. The impact of sexual child abuse can be long lasting affecting the emotional health of the growing child even into adulthood. The objective of this study is to determine the prevalence of sexual child abuse as well as the association between sexual child abuse and the socio-demographic characteristics of secondary school students in Igunmale, Benue state. Cross sectional research design was used for the study. The population of the study was 800 students from six secondary schools in Igunmale Local Government Area Benue State. A sample size of 300 students was used. A researcher developed questionnaire; Prevalence of Sexual Child Abuse Questionnaire (PSCAQ) was utilized for the study. The research questions were analyzed with frequency and percentage while chi-square statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that 53.3 per cent of secondary school students experienced sexual abuse in Igunmale. Older students experienced higher proportion (56.9%) of sexual child abuse. Majority of male students experienced sexual child abuse (56.6%) more than female students (50.9%). Parents with no formal education have the highest percentage of sexual child abuse of 63.3%. Age and gender are not significantly associated with the experience of sexual child abuse among secondary school students. However, parental education was significantly associated with the experience of sexual abuse. The authors recommended that there is need for health educating parents on the mitigation of child abuse. Training on child sexual abuse should be made public, so that both educated and non-educated parents will know how to guide their children to avoid being sexually abuse.

Keywords: Prevalence, Sexual child abuse, Secondary school

Introduction

Sexual child abuse is a social public health problem of great concern affecting children globally, particularly in developing countries including Nigeria with majority of the cases unreported. The impact of sexual child abuse appears to be long lasting affecting the emotional health of the growing child even into adulthood. Nlewem and Amodu (2017) stated that living and working together by parents have a strong protection against the vulnerability and risk of sexual child abuse which results in mental health complications in adulthood. In a global report, it was estimated that 1 billion children aged 2-17 experienced abuse (Hillis, Mercy, Amobi, & Kress, 2016). One in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child from ages 0-17 years (WHO, 2022). The global estimation of prevalence of sexual abuse is 7.6% among boys and 16.3% among girls (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Also, child sexual abuse in India was high with 23.8% prevalence (Kumar, 2017).

There appears to be a consistent rise in Sexual child abuse in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, in a study in Ghana, the prevalence of sexual child abuse was high (35.7%) with the females more sexually abused than males (Agu et al., 2018). In Nigeria, it was reported that



child sexual abuse prevalence among adolescents in South-east Nigeria was 40% (Chinawa et al., 2013). Gabriel –Job (2019) noted that the females were abused more than the males with the prevalence of 47.4% and 24.9% respectively. The prevalence of sexual child abuse in Enugu State was 35.7 per cent (Chime, Orji, Aneke, & Nwoke, 2021). On the contrary, Rimamnunra (2022) noted that the prevalence of child sexual abuse was higher in the males than the females with the rates of 27.4% and 17.2% respectively. The cause of the discrepancy in the prevalence could either be socio-cultural, geographical or behavioural. Perpetrators of sexual child abuse seem to be un-assumed friends, family members and neighbours. Hassan et al. (2015) noted that the primary perpetrators of sexual child abuse were males and as a result awareness programs on the potential for child sexual abuse by males close to the family should be emphasized. It is reported that 120 million young girls/women under 20 years of age have experienced certain form of forced sexual contact (WHO, 2022). Markwei and Osei-Hwedie (2019) observed that the majority of the abusers of children are well known individuals who held trust and responsibility to these children such as close relatives, friends, neighbors and employers. In a Vietnam study, Do et al. (2019) asserted that school is the central point of child abuse

Among all abuses the most common is physical and sexual abuse, unfortunately, due to the fact that parents and teachers do not create time to discuss about abuse with these vulnerable children, most of them remain in the dark on the enormity of the problem of child abuse (Gutuz & Mapolisa, 2015). Sexual child abuse is largely defined as direct genital contact and indirect communications such as “exposure” or internet-based activity, for instance, sending pornographic pictures to children (Chinawa et al., 2013). American Psychological Association (2024) averred that the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act stated that child abuse is any current act or inability to act by the parents or guardian, resulting in death, severe physical or emotional damage, sexual abuse, or failure to take action that results in imminent risk of serious damage. American Psychological Association added that sexual abuse is the use of a child, persuading or forcing a child to engage in sexual acts or actions related to it. Choudhry (2018) noted that child sexual abuse comprise of varieties of activities such as asking a child to touch or be touched sexually, fondling, child prostitution, intercourse, exposure to pornography and online child luring by cyber-predators.

Although sexual abuse is common, many adults seem not to be prepared or willing to deal with the problem when faced with it, this could lead to underreporting of the crime and stigmatization of the victim (Chinawa et al., 2013). Katzenstein and Fontes (2017) affirmed that child sexual abuse has continued to be an underreported crime globally, even in the face of extensive resources and research devoted to informative practices and aiding children in disclosing their experiences. Furthermore, the reason for underreporting is to avoid the stigma associated with child abuse especially when the perpetrator is a relative and most parents would rather conceal it even when pregnancy and infections result from the abuse (Chinawa et al., 2013). Meanwhile, sexual child abuse can only be diagnosed through obtaining detailed history of the experiences of the abuse (Seth & Srivastava, 2017). Tyagi and Karande (2021) pointed out that all hand should be on deck including teachers, parents and the society at large to dismantle the traditional hostile attitudes of concealment and shame regarding child sexual abuse by taking the required educative measures on prevention of abuse.

The effect and the responses to child abuse are reliant on many factors which can be within the child, the family or even the environment (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2018). Gabriel-Job, Alikor and Akani (2019) noted that the trauma of sexual abuse is long-lasting and spans into adulthood resulting in poor academic performance, depression and suicide. WHO (2022) opined that sexual abuse is a type of child maltreatment that results in potential or actual impairment to the child’s health, existence, growth or self-worth in a relationship of responsibility, dependence or power. WHO added that child abuse is often concealed and



only a fraction of child victims of abuse ever gets support from health professionals. Therefore, Pérez-Fuentes et al. (2013) noted that the high risk of suicide ideation in adulthood among abused children requires systemic assessment of suicide risk for them. The WHO (2020) reported that since these children are in their developmental stage, their inquisitiveness in experimenting new things make them vulnerable to their perpetrators when parents and guardians are not at alert. Considering the peculiarities of the stage of life of these young students, there is need for the provision of a conducive environment for them to thrive well (Elufidipe-Olumide, Ofuebe, & Dike, 2023). However, when the environment of these students is plagued with sexual abuse, there would likely be impairment in their developmental process.

Therefore, there is need to explore some of those factors such as age, gender, and parent's educational level contribution to child abuse. This study was anchored on the Bowen family system theory which posited that families are not just groups of individuals functioning independently, but a system, as whatever that happens to a part of the system affects the other parts resulting in tension and anxiety (Kaplan et al., 2014). The implication of this theory on child abuse is that if family should function as a system with the existence of cordial and mutual relationship, there will be high tendency of openness and possible mitigation of abuse. On the other hand, where the above is not present, the chances of abuse may be imminent resulting in increased tension and anxiety with subsequent concealment of the abuse in order to protect the image of the family. The home is meant to be where the children find happiness and spend a lot of time with the family. Children should be given adequate love, care, support and protection in order not to experience or witness abuse from their parents, care givers, neighbours and friends. However, adolescents including secondary school students seem to be exposed to child abuse across the country. Child abuse against children is becoming overbearing as many parents and care givers due to lack of education, age, low income, economic instability among others tend to vent their frustrations and stress on their children resulting to maltreatment/abuse. From the aforementioned children are abysmally abused sexually and studies have been copiously carried out on sexual child abuse. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge there is no conducted study on child abuse among secondary school students in Igumale the head-quarter of Ado local government area of Benue State, where violence is common. It therefore becomes necessary for this conducted study.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been posed to guide the study:

1. What is the proportion of secondary school students who experienced sexual abuse in Igumale, Ado local government area of Benue State?
2. What is the proportion of secondary school students who experienced sexual abuse based on gender, age and parental level of education in Igumale, Ado local government area of Benue State?

Hypotheses

This hypothesis is postulated to guide the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

There is no significant difference in the proportion of secondary school student who experienced sexual abuse based on gender,

There is no significant difference in the proportion of secondary school student who experienced sexual abuse based on age,



There is no significant difference in the proportion of secondary school student who experienced sexual abuse based on parents' level of education.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

The study adopted the cross-sectional research survey design.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Igumale one out of the five (5) districts that constitute Ado Local Government Area (LGA), which includes Agila, Ulayi, Utonkon, and Ijigban district. Igumale is one of the first areas to be visited European missionaries, and the first place that mission school was cited in the whole of Idomaland (Methodist high school, Igumale). The people of Igumale and Ado in general are known to be violent prone individuals due to frequent communal clash with bounded communities especially Ohaukwu in Ebonyi State. This study therefore aims to determine the prevalence of child abuse using secondary school students in Igumale as the study subjects.

Study Population

The population for the study comprised of 800 secondary school students from six secondary schools in Igumale Community, Benue State, Nigeria (Benue state, School Board, 2021-2022).

Study Sample Size and Sampling Technique: The sample size for the study was 300 respondents selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. First stage involves using simple sampling method without replacement, to select three schools from the six existing schools.

Second stage involves using simple sampling technique, balloting without replacement to select one class from each section. Third stage involved using purposive sampling method, to select 25 students, from each class. Each selected school will provide 100 students, total student for all is 300 students.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was researchers structured "Prevalence of Sexual Child Abuse Questionnaire (PSCAQ), comprising of 15 items. The PSCAQ is divided into two sections: A and B. Section A contains 3 items on personal information such as, age group, gender and parent level of education with varied response options. Section B contains five items that test for sexual abuse in the respondents. Section B has two response options of Yes and No.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by hand for a period of four days by the researchers and collected on the spot. This ensured a return rate of 95%

Method of Data Analysis

The information from copies of PSCAQ was coded and analyzed using Internal Business Machine Statistical Package for Social Sciences, IBM-SPSS (version 22 statistics for windows). The research questions 1-2 were answered using frequencies and percentages while the null hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square statistics at .05 level of significance. In determining the prevalence of child abuse among secondary school students, scores 0 – 39 per cent was regarded as low; scores from 40 – 69 per cent was regarded as moderate; while scores 70 per cent and above was regarded as high level.

Results

Table 1
Responses on the proportion of secondary school students who experienced sexual abuse in Igumale (n=300)

S/N	Sexual Abuse	Yes f (%)	No f (%)
1	Has anybody tried touching your private part before?	274 (91.3)	26 (8.7)
2	Have either of your parents taking a shower with you?	71 (23.7)	229(76.3)
3	Has anybody in school / home ever asked you to perform oral sex?	172 (57.3)	128(42.7)
4	Has your parents/siblings constantly Peeped at you while you are naked in the room/toilet for sexual pleasure?	75 (25.0)	225(75.0)
5	Has anybody ever engaged you in mutual sexual stimulation for sexual pleasure before?	186 (62.0)	114(38.0)
	Cluster %	53.3	46.7

Key 0–39%=Low prevalence; 40%-69%=Moderate prevalence; 70% and above=High prevalence.

Results in Table 1 show that there is a moderate prevalence (53.3%) of child sexual abuse secondary school students in Igumale.

Table 2
Response on proportion of secondary school student who experience sexual child abuse based on age (n=300)

S/N	Sexual Abuse	10-14year (n=170) f(%)	15-19yrs (n=130) f(%)
1	Has anybody tried touching your private part before?	157 (92.4)	117 (90.0)
2	Have either of your parent taking a shower with you?	41 (24.1)	30 (23.1)
3	Has anybody in school / home ever ask you to perform oral sex?	86 (50.6)	86 (66.2)
4	Has your parents/siblings constantly Peeped at you while you are naked in the room/toilet for sexual pleasure?	55 (32.4)	20 (15.4)
5	Has anybody ever engaged you in mutual sexual stimulation for sexual pleasure before?	97 (57.1)	89 (68.5)
	Cluster %	50.6	56.9

Key0–39%=Low prevalence; 40%-69%=Moderate prevalence; 70% and above=High prevalence.

Results in table 2 shows that to 50.6% of secondary school students aged 10-14yrs experienced sexual child abuse while 56.9% of secondary school students aged 15-19yrs experienced sexual abuse. The table in general indicated that there is a moderate prevalence of child sexual abuse on both age groups represented. Although, secondary school students aged 15-19yrs experienced sexual abuse more than secondary school students aged 10-14yrs.

Table 3
Response on proportion of secondary school student who experience sexual child abuse based on gender (n=300)

S/N	Sexual Abuse	Male (n=129) f (%)	Female (n=171) f (%)
1	Has anybody tried touching your private part before?	116 (89.9)	158 (92.4)
2	Have either of your parent taking a shower with you?	30 (23.3)	41 (24.0)
3	Has anybody in school / home ever ask you to perform oral sex?	80 (62.0)	92 (53.8)
4	Has your parents/siblings constantly Peeped at you while you are naked in the room/toilet for sexual pleasure?	36 (27.9)	39 (22.8)
5	Has anybody ever engaged you in mutual sexual stimulation for sexual pleasure before?	81 (62.8)	105 (61.4)
	Cluster %	56.6	50.9

Key=0–39%=Low prevalence; 40%-69%=Moderate prevalence; 70% and above=High prevalence.

Results in table 3 shows that 56.6% of male secondary school students experienced sexual child abuse while 50.9% female secondary school students experienced sexual child abuse. The table also indicated that both gender have moderate prevalence of child sexual abuse. Although, male secondary school students experienced sexual child abuse more than female secondary school.

Table 4
Response on proportion of secondary school student who experience sexual child abuse based on parental level of education (n=300)

S/N	NFE (n=109) f(%)	PE (n=78) f (%)	SE (n=52) f(%)	TE (n=61) f(%)
1	106(97.2)	67 (85.9)	48 (92.3)	53 (86.9)
2	33(30.3)	13 (16.7)	6(11.5)	19 (31.1)
3	78 (71.6)	41 (52.6)	30 (57.7)	23(37.7)
4	26 (23.9)	16 (20.5)	15 (28.8)	18 (29.5)
5	77 (70.6)	48 (61.5)	25(48.1)	36 (59.0)
	Cluster% 63.3	53.8	42.3	44.3

Key=0–39%=Low prevalence; 40%-69%=Moderate prevalence; 70% and above=High prevalence. NFE=No Formal Education, PE=Primary Education, SE= Secondary Education, TE=Tertiary Education, N. S. = Not Significant, S= Significant

Table 4 shows responses of secondary school student who experience sexual child abuse based on parental level of education; among parent with NFE 63.3%, PE 53.8%, SE 42.3% and TE 44.3%. Parents with NFE have the highest percentage of sexual abuse. Also, parents with PE level of education have higher percentage of sexual abuse than parent with SE and TE. Finally, responses of secondary school student who experience sexual child abuse based on parental level of education are more among Parents with no formal education (NFE, 63.3%). However, there is moderate prevalence of sexual child abuse among all the parental levels of education.

Table 5
Summary of chi-square Test of proportion of secondary school students who experienced sexual Child abuse based on age, gender and parental level of education (n=300)

Variable	N	Yes O (E)	No O (E)	χ^2	Df	p-value	Decision
Age							
10-14years	170	86(90.7)	84 (79.3)	1.188	1	.276**	N.S
15-19years	130	74 (69.3)	56 (60.7)				
Gender							
Male	129	73 (68.8)	56 (60.2)	.964	1	.326**	N.S
Female	171	87 (91.2)	84 (79.8)				
Parental level of education							
NFE	109	69 (58.1)	40 (50.9)	8.917	3	.030*	Significant
PE	78	42 (41.6)	36 (36.4)				
SE	52	22 (27.7)	30 (24.3)				
TE	61	27 (32.5)	34 (28.5)				

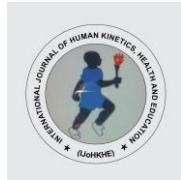
Key: NFE=No Formal Education, PE=Primary Education, SE= Secondary Education, TE=Tertiary Education, N. S. = Not Significant, S= Significant

Results in Table 5 show the Pearson chi-square (χ^2) value with their corresponding p-values for hypothesis of no significant difference in the proportion of secondary school students who experienced sexual abuse based on gender age and parental level of education. The hypothesis was not rejected for age ($\chi^2=1.188$, $df=1$, $p=.276>0.05$) and gender ($\chi^2=.964$, $df=1$, $p=.326>0.05$). This implies that age and gender are not significantly associated with the experience of sexual child abuse among students. The table also shows the hypothesis was rejected for parental level of education ($\chi^2=8.917$, $df=3$, $p=.030<0.05$). This implies that parental education level was significantly associated with the experience of sexual child abuse among students.

Discussion

The findings in Table 1 showed that there is moderate prevalence of sexual child abuse among secondary school students in Igumale. The finding was expected and therefore not surprising, incidence of sexual abuse abounds everywhere in homes, schools and the society and interferes with the normal, healthy development of the child. This finding is in line with the finding of Gutuza and Mapolisa (2015) who averred that an increased number of students were abused because teachers do not talk about child abuse to students. It also agrees with the finding of Kumar et al. (2017) who also reported a rise in the prevalence of sexual child abuse. There is need for more creation of awareness in schools and homes in order to curb sexual child abuse

The findings in Table 3a showed that there is a moderate prevalence of sexual child abuse among secondary school students based on age in Igumale. Although, secondary school students aged 15-19 years experienced sexual abuse more than secondary school students aged 10-14yrs. The corresponding hypothesis in Table 2 showed that age is not significantly associated with the experience of sexual child abuse among students. The study is in line with that of Gabriel –Job (2019) who reported that students aged 14-19 years experienced higher prevalence of sexual child abuse than others. Also, Rimamnunra (2022) reported that students



aged 17-19 years experienced higher prevalence of sexual child abuse. On the contrary, Hillis et al. (2016) reported that younger children of 2 years and above experienced higher prevalence of sexual child abuse. The implication of the findings is that though there is moderate prevalence of sexual child abuse among secondary school students, the older students are more prone to sexual abuse and therefore more attention should be given to them. The finding from Hillis et al. (2016) also implies that younger children should not be overlooked on the issue of sexual child abuse. Therefore more awareness is needed to be created on sexual child abuse in schools, homes and the society at large.

The findings in Table 3 showed that there is moderate prevalence of sexual child abuse among secondary school students based on gender in Igumale. However, higher percentage of males experienced sexual child abuse than the females. The corresponding hypothesis showed no significant difference between experience of sexual abuse and gender. This is not expected, because one expects that there will be a significant difference between sexual abuse and gender. It was also expected that there will be higher percentage of the females experiencing sexual abuse because women are known to be more vulnerable. This study is in line with that of Rimamnunra (2022) who reported that the prevalence of sexual abuse was higher among males than females. However, the finding differs from that of Agu, Brown, Adamu-Isaah, and Duncan (2018) and Gabriel-Job (2019) who reported higher prevalence among the females than the males. The differences in findings could be as a result socio-cultural beliefs and orientations. This finding has revealed the need to health educate the male students alongside the female student because before now emphasis has been on preventing the girl child from sexual abuse.

The findings in Table 4 showed there is a moderate prevalence of child sexual abuse on response of secondary school students based on parents' education level. Also, secondary school students whose parents had no formal education experienced more sexual child abuse than others in Igumale. The corresponding hypothesis in Table 5 showed that parental level of education is significantly associated with the experience of sexual child abuse among students. The finding is expected and not a surprise because it is believed that with higher education more knowledge is gained. The study is in line with that of Chime, Orji, Aneke, and Nwoke (2021) who reported that sexual abuse had a significant association with parental education. Furthermore, Payne (2015) reported that there is greater risk of child abuse among parents with low education level. Contrary to the finding of this study, Sambo and Isa (2016) reported that majority of the children who experienced sexual child abuse was from parents who attained secondary school education. This implies that though education is beneficial in the reduction and mitigation of child abuse, several factors can interfere with the benefits of education including, quality of education received by the parents, commitment to educational processes such as learning and relearning, history of abuse of the parents and the natural disposition of the educated parent.

Conclusion

Based on the finding, the study concluded that there is moderate prevalence of sexual child abuse among secondary school student in Igumale. Secondary school students from ages 15-19 experienced more sexual child abuse than the younger students within ages 10-15 in Igumale. Though, both groups experienced moderate prevalence of sexual abuse. Male secondary school students experienced sexual child abuse more than the females and the secondary school students whose parents had no formal education experienced more sexual abuse in Igumale. Gender and age are not significantly associated with the experience of sexual child abuse among students in igumale but parents' education level is significantly associated. However, there should be more awareness on sexual child abuse should be created especially among senior students aged 15-19 years. Male student should be advised to report any form



of sexual abuse. Parent should be encouraged to attain higher level of education to enable them counsel their children better. Government and non-governmental body should conduct seminars and workshop to enlighten the students and parents on sexual child abuse.

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