

Socio-cultural factors associated with perception of child abuse among women in Nsukka LGA: Implications for social work practice in Nigeria

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Abstract

Child abuse has become a global epidemic whose background is deeply rooted on perception and socio-cultural structure of the society. As a result, children face a number of social, mental and emotional problems from their parents, family members, guardians and care givers. Therefore, the study was embarked upon to examine those socio-cultural factors associated with child abuse. Data from 498 women were collected and analyzed using questionnaire. Findings from this study revealed that perception of what constitute child abuse differs among women in Nsukka L.G.A. Also, factors such as age, education, occupation, unemployment, marital status, tradition and language have statistically significant association with child abuse. In conclusion, social workers should tackle this societal problem and dehumanizing actions against children through awareness creation to sensitize public perception on child abuse, collaboration with significant others and advocacy for implementation of child protection acts established in Nigeria. Social workers should showcase their professional competence by rendering selfless services in guarding against any form of abuse meted on children which have numerous consequences on growth, development and well-being of children.

Keywords: socio-cultural factors, perception, child abuse, women, social work

Introduction

Globally, the issue of child abuse has become a source of worry to many countries and stakeholders in the society. Regrettably, these children are abused by their parents, family members, guardians and caregivers, who are meant to be the first line of protection for them. Despite the prevalence, perceptions of child abuse vary across cultures and countries. In Africa, child abuse is common and widely accepted as compared to other cultures as parents perceive physical punishment as a method of child-rearing and a way of inculcating moral in a child (Akmatov, 2011). Studies revealed that Nigeria has high prevalence of child abuse (92percent) (NOIpolls, 2017), which is largely unreported.

Child abuse is any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). According to World Health Organization [WHO] (2016),

child abuse is any form of neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and other exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development or dignity. In this context, child abuse is an act or maltreatment on the parts of a parent, family members, guardians or caregiver that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm to a child, or deliberately inflicting injury on a child. In other words, child abuse is a social menace whose negative impact on child development cannot be over-emphasized, despite various policies put in place to protect children from every form of abuse like Child Right Act of 2003. Yet, many have different ideologies about child punishment and correction which sometimes equate to abuse. Nigerian children are no longer safe as they are exposed to dangers associated with abuse which are mistaken for inculcating morals. Children are adversely affected as a result of these ideologies about child punishment, child rearing and correction with regard to what constitute child abuse. These abuses most often result in subnormal growth, social, emotional/psychological, poor physical and academic development of the child. Many children have equally lost their lives in the process, while some who are alive are shadows of themselves. Others have engaged in deviant behaviours as a result of their ordeal in the hands of their parents and guardians. By so doing, they constitute nuisance and become a threat to their neighbourhood and the larger society. It is against the foregoing that the present study examined socio-cultural factors associated with the perception of child abuse among women in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

There are various forms of abuse meted on children. Neglect occurs when someone does not provide the necessities of life to a child, either intentionally or with reckless disregard for the child's well-being such as withholding food, clothing, shelter, or other necessities, inadequate health care, education, supervision, protection from hazards in the environment. Physical abuse involves non-accidental harming of a child such as beating, shaking, burning, and biting and rib fractures. Psychological abuse includes verbal abuse, humiliation, and acts that scare or terrorize a child, which may result in future psychological illness of the child. Sexual abuse is the deliberate exposure of a minor to sex or sexual activities that the child cannot comprehend or consent to such as exposure to sexually explicit materials, inappropriate touching of a child's breasts or genitalia, someone exposing their genitalia to a child, oral-genital contact, genital-to-genital contact, genital-to-anal contact and genital fondling as well as exhibitionism, voyeurism, and exposure to pornography (Gonzalez & McCall, 2018).

Despite laws and policies enacted on child abuse in Nigeria, it is on the increase and still persists in various communities as reported in news daily due to diverse notions on what constitute child abuse. A look at the literature shows certain acts which constitute abuse are perceived differently in different societies. For instance Akmatov (2011) noted that parental attitudes towards corporal punishment were strongly associated with all forms of child abuse and equally seen as a method of child rearing in African countries. Also Lev-Wiesel, Massrawa and Binson (2019) averred that children and youth unlike parents perceived exposure of embarrassing photos via internet and silent treatment by peers to be severe behaviour whereas parents perceived sexual molestation to be most severe behaviour. Sika-Bright and Nnorom (2013) reported in their study that majority

(81.6%) believed that it is not good to insert fingers or other objects into a child's bodies by an adult while 73% were of the opinion that fondling, caressing or kissing a child by an adult is improper.

Child abuse has become a global epidemic whose background is deeply rooted in the violation of right due to socio-cultural factors, cultural practices and economic constraints. Case study report from Uzodimma, Ogundeyi, Dedeke and Owolabi (2013) revealed that impact of family separation, poor parental education, low parental socio-economic status and very sadly lack of social support and child protection structure are factors fostering abuse and neglect of children in Nigeria. In the same vein, Sika-Bright and Nnorom (2013) were of the opinion that parenting styles, child's age, child's educational level and sex of the child, cultural belief of "sex as a secret" were integrally related to perception on sexual abuse in Cape Coast, Ghana. Other factors contributing to child abuse include poverty and child hawking in order to complement the family income (United Nations Children's Fund 2006 cited in Olaitan & Idowu, 2016 & Okafor, 2010). Alrammah, et al., (2018) revealed that statistically significant variables associated with perception of child abuse were age, educational level, income, number of wives, number of male children and number of female children. Logistic regression showed that the older age group was significantly associated with a good perception score (P less than .046) while risk factors for parental poor perception associated with CSA are poverty and low education. In the same vein, Wangamati, Sundby and Prince (2018) suggest that people perceived CSA as being influenced by multiple factors such as developmental stage, peer pressure, huge gender disparities exacerbated by negative social norms, cultural practices, poverty, the HIV epidemic and social media platforms that circulate sexualized images.

Al Dosari, Ferwana, Abdulmajeed, Aldossari, and Al-Zahrani (2017) reported the risk factors associated significantly with child abuse were parents' history of physical abuse, young parent, witness to domestic violence and poor self-control. Child-related factors included a child who is difficult to control or has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), while parents who were more likely to use physical means of punishment were 5 years younger on an average than those who used a non-physical means of punishment. Also, parents believe that physical punishment is an effective educational tool for a noisy child and it is difficult to differentiate between physical punishment and child abuse. They study further showed that jobs, income, number of children, smoking status, stressful life, marital conflict, relatives living with family, or parents' history of depression were found not to be statistically significant with physical abuse of children. Tran, van Berkel, van Ijzendoorn and Alink (2018) narrated that single parenthood and child age were associated with most types of child maltreatment including sexual abuse, witnessing parental conflict, neglect, and multiple types of child maltreatment. The study further revealed that boys were at higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse and physical abuse than girls, while low socio-economic status (SES) and parental unemployment were associated with a decreased risk on experiencing emotional abuse in the past year and during lifetime. On the contrary, Ali, Ali, Khuwaja and Nanji (2014) in their study revealed that the female child was four times more prone to abuse as compared to male child. They equally revealed that significant covariates of child abuse were found to be the mothers having been abused by their husbands and their perception of home environment and marital

life as being stressful. Also, multivariate analysis indicate that factors found to be independently associated with child abuse were mothers abused by their husbands and child being a girl.

Child abuse may lead to many negative impacts on children's development (Mills & McCarroll, 2012). Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013) reported that effects vary depending on the circumstances of the abuse or neglect, personal characteristics of the child, and the child's environment. Minor physical abuse consequences include; bruises or cuts while broken bones, hemorrhage and death are the severe consequences. Psychological abuse often called emotional abuse is a form of abuse, characterized by a person subjecting or exposing another person to behavior that may result in psychological trauma. Its immediate consequences include; isolation, fear and inability to trust which transcend to lifelong consequences such as self-esteem, depression, relationship difficulty. The authors further stated that difficulty during adolescence, juvenile delinquent and adult criminality, alcohol and other drug abuse, abusive behaviour are behavioural consequence of child abuse. Oseni, Lawani and Oyedepi (2016) opined that child sexual abuse has adverse effects that can lead to severe consequences like sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, school dropout, mental illness and death. Also, Olatosi, Ogordi, Oredugba and Sote (2019) asserted that physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect were majorly identified as bruises behind the ears, oral warts and poor self-esteem respectively.

This study is hinged on ecological theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Ecological theory explained how the inherent qualities of a child and immediate relationships or organizations in the environment they interact with, such as their immediate family or caregivers influence child's grow and development. This theory assumes that multiple levels of risk, ranging from individual characteristics to larger socio-environmental variables, must be taken into account when attempting to understand the antecedents of child maltreatment (Belsky, 1993). Relationship and interaction between a child and family or caregiver determine child's fate as regard abuse which underlying understanding is rooted on socio-cultural factors. To bridge the gap in knowledge, the following research objectives were formulated: 1) To ascertain women's perception of child abuse and how it varies across the towns in the study area; 2) To determine factors associated with child abuse as perceived by women in the study area; 3) To discuss the implications of the findings for social work practice in Nigeria.

Materials and method

Cross-sectional survey research design was used for the study which entails the observation of sample or cross-section of a population or phenomenon at one point in time (Babbie, 2010). The population for the study consisted of 106,287 women in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State within the age range of 18years and above. Five hundred women were drawn as sample size using Cochran (1963) formula from each of the towns in Nsukka LGA. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting respondents for the study. Stage one involved selection of four towns (Opi, Lejja, Obukpa and Nsukka) from the towns that make up Nsukka LGA using simple random sampling (balloting). Stage two was selection of five villages from each town, giving a total of 20 villages. Also, 25 respondents were allocated using quota sampling

to each of the villages, giving 125 respondents for each town. Systematic sampling was used in selecting compound and dwelling unit, while purposive sampling was adopted in selecting respondents from each dwelling unit taking cognizance of sex and age.

The researcher designed a questionnaire that was used for data collection, which was divided into 2 sections with close ended questions. Section A focused on the respondent's demographic data, while section B focused on information relevant to the research questions. The researcher with the help of 3 research assistants used self-administered method to administer 500 questionnaires to the respondents, of which 498 questionnaires were correctly filled and returned.

Data were computer processed using version 22 of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Percentages and frequency tables were used to present results. One-way ANOVA test was used to test the statistical difference on perception of child abuse by women as it varies across various towns in the study area. Five variables were used as indices of women's perception on child abuse were subjected to one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to pinpoint the statistically significant differences between the means of child abuse perception among women in different towns of the study area. Also, socio-cultural factors associated with child abuse were subjected to Chi-square test to determine relationship of socio-cultural factors with child abuse as perceived by women in the study area.

Result

Table 1 show that women between the ages of 38-47years constitute the highest population. With regard to marital status, majority were married (53.0%) while 2.6% were separated. For religion, the result indicated that 66.7% of the respondents were Christians, 7.2% were Islam, while 26.1% were African traditional religion. For education, majority were HND/B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A holders (27.5%), while 2.6% had no formal education. In occupation, 37.3% were traders, and 2.6 % were artisans and unemployed (2.6%) respectively.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-27	136	27.3
38-47	138	27.7
48-57	89	17.9
58-67	24	4.8
68 and above	111	22.8
Marital status		
Single	136	27.3
Married	264	53.0
Divorced	85	17.1
Separated	13	2.6
Religion		
Christianity	332	66.7
Islam	36	7.2
ATR	130	26.1
Education		
No formal education	13	2.6
FSLC	39	7.8
SSCE	125	25.1
OND/NCE/Diploma	96	19.3
HND/B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A	137	27.5
M.Sc	52	10.4
Ph.D	36	7.2
Occupation		
Civil servant	173	34.7
Trading	186	37.3
Farmer	77	15.5
Public firm workers	36	7.2
Artisan	13	2.6
Unemployment	13	2.6
Towns		
Opi	124	24.9
Lejja	124	24.9
Obukpa	125	25.1
Nsukka	125	25.1

Table 2: Result of One-way ANOVA on the women's perception of child abuse in Nsukka LG.A

Women's perception	Mean score by Townss			P-value
	Mean Square difference	df		
An act of maltreating a child	32.278	3	.000	***
A way of rearing a child	67.115	3	.000	***
A way of inculcating moral in a child	1.463	3	.224	
A way of punishing a child for doing wrong	2.735	3	.043	*
Inflicting serious injury or harm on a child	16.398	3	.000	***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$; *** $p < 0.000$

Perceptions of what constitute child abuse by women differ across Nsukka LGA is presented in Table 2. Perception of child abuse among women in different towns in Nsukka local government was statistically significant on four opinions namely; seeing child abuse as a way of maltreating a child ($\chi^2 = 32.278$; $df = 3$; $p < .000$), a way of rearing a child ($\chi^2 = 67.115$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$) and inflicting serious injury on a child ($\chi^2 = 16.398$; $df = 3$; $p = .000$) while seeing child abuse as a way of punishing a child for doing wrong was slightly significant ($\chi^2 = 2.735$; $df = 3$; $p = .043$). Again, perception of child abuse as a way of inculcating moral in a child ($\chi^2 = 1.463$; $df = 3$; $p = .224$) was not statistically significant across the Nsukka LGA. This is not surprising as understanding of women with regards to what constitute child abuse differ as a result of various socio-cultural factors.

Table 3: Women's perception on different types of child abuse

Types of child abuse				Responses	Total (%)
	Yes	Per (%)	No	Per (%)	
Sexual abuse					
Raping or having sexual intercourse with a child	435	87.3	63	12.7	498(100.0)
Fondling with child's breast or genital organs	383	76.9	115	23.1	498(100.0)
Kissing and caressing a child	421	84.5	77	15.5	498(100.0)
Fingering child's genital organ	402	80.7	96	19.3	498(100.0)
Adults exposing their private part or masturbating in front of a child	316	63.5	182	36.5	498(100.0)
Having oral sex with a child	386	77.5	112	22.5	498(100.0)
Physical abuse					
Strangling a child	228	45.8	270	54.2	498(100.0)
Hitting a child with heavy or hard object	355	71.3	143	28.7	498(100.0)
Burning a child's skin with hot metal	434	87.1	64	12.9	498(100.0)
Excessive flogging	212	42.6	286	57.4	498(100.0)
Giving a child wound or deep cut with a sharp object	449	90.2	49	9.8	498(100.0)
Psychological abuse					
Torture	352	70.7	146	29.3	498(100.0)
Excessive criticism	400	80.3	98	19.7	498(100.0)
Labeling or name-calling	252	50.6	246	49.4	498(100.0)
Humiliating a child	462	92.8	36	7.2	498(100.0)
Ridiculing a child	52	10.4	446	89.6	498(100.0)
Neglect					
Denial of food	246	49.4	252	50.6	498(100.0)
Denial of clothing	286	57.4	212	42.6	498(100.0)
Denial of shelter	348	69.9	150	30.1	498(100.0)
Denial of medical care	275	55.2	223	44.8	498(100.0)
Lack of love and affection	322	64.7	176	35.3	498(100.0)

Data on Table 3 show that different types of abuse as perceived by women. Highly perceived sexual abuse were raping or having sexual intercourse with a child (87.3%), kissing and caressing a child (84.5%) and fingering child's genital organ (80.7%). Also majority perceived giving wound or deep cut with sharp object (90.2%), burning child's skin with hot metal (87.1%) and hitting a child with heavy or hard object (71.3%) as type of physical abuse. Again, psychological abuse perceived by majority include; humiliating a child (92.8%), excessive criticism (80.3%) and torture (70.7%). On the other hand, types of neglect perceived by majority were denial of shelter (69.9%) and lack of love and affection (64.7%).

Table 4: Result of Chi-square test on perceived factors associated with child abuse among women in Nsukka LGA

Factors associated with child abuse	Opi	Lejja	Obukpa	Nsukka	χ^2 -cal	P=value	
Social factors							
Age (Yes)	111(25.5%)	112(25.7%)	88(20.2%)	125(28.7%)	52.820	.000	***
(No)	13(21.0%)	12(19.4%)	37(59.7%)	0(0.0%)			
Education (Yes)	38(50.7%)	12(16.0%)	0(0.0%)	25(33.3%)	50.901	.004	**
(No)	86(20.3%)	112(26.5%)	125(29.6%)	100(23.6%)			
Family resources (Yes)	88(27.1%)	74(22.8%)	88(27.1%)	75(23.15)	6.469	.246	
(No)	36(20.8%)	50(28.9%)	37(21.4%)	50(28.9%)			
Occupation (Yes)	112(46.1%)	38(15.6%)	64(26.3%)	29(11.9%)	1.350E2	.000	***
(No)	12(4.7%)	86(33.7%)	61(23.9%)	96(37.6%)			
Unemployment (Yes)	124(26.2%)	124(26.2%)	125(26.4%)	101(21.3%)	75.242	.000	***
(No)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	24(100.0%)			
Family size (yes)	74(23.8%)	88(28.3%)	88(28.3%)	61(19.6%)	17.544	.086	
(No)	50(26.7%)	36(19.3%)	37(19.8%)	64(34.2%)			
Place of residence (Yes)	74(22.0%)	98(29.2%)	88(26.3%)	76(22.6%)	14.006	.775	
(No)	50(30.9%)	26(16.0%)	37(22.8%)	49(30.2%)			
Marital status (Yes)	111(40.4%)	49(17.8%)	63(22.9%)	52(18.9%)	81.902	.000	***
(No)	13(5.8%)	75(33.6%)	62(27.8%)	73(32.7%)			
Cultural factor							
Tradition (Yes)	37(19.8%)	26(13.9%)	64(34.2%)	60(32.1%)	33.437	.000	***
(No)	87(28.0%)	98(31.5%)	61(19.6%)	65(20.9%)			
Language (Yes)	37(12.0%)	99(32.0%)	86(27.8%)	87(28.2%)	76.743	.000	***
(No)	87(46.0%)	25(13.2%)	39(20.6%)	38(20.1%)			

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$; *** $p < 0.000$

Result in Table 4 show that socio-cultural factors as perceived by women in Nsukka LGA were associated with child abuse. Factors such as, age ($p = .000$), education ($p = .004$), occupation ($p = .000$), unemployment ($p = .000$) and marital status ($p = .000$) have statistically significant association with child abuse. Also, tradition ($p = .000$) and language ($p = .000$) were cultural factors significantly associated with child abuse.

Table 5: Women's perception on the consequences of different types of child abuse

Consequences	Responses				Total (%)
	Yes	Per (%)	No	Per (%)	
Sexual abuse					
Sexually transmitted infections	299	60.0	199	40.0	498(100.0)
Unplanned pregnancy	212	42.6	286	57.4	498(100.0)
Reproductive health problem	347	69.7	151	30.3	498(100.0)
Death	254	51.0	244	49.0	498(100.0)
Physical abuse					
Disability	244	49.0	254	51.0	498(100.0)
Fracture	326	65.5	172	34.5	498(100.0)
Bruises and scar	374	75.1	124	24.9	498(100.0)
Damage of spinal cord	230	46.2	268	53.8	498(100.0)
Psychological abuse					
Depression	358	71.9	140	28.1	498(100.0)
Anxiety	309	62.0	189	38.0	498(100.0)
Feeling of shame	322	64.7	176	35.3	498(100.0)
Poor self-esteem	348	69.9	150	30.1	498(100.0)
Suicide	237	47.6	261	52.4	498(100.0)
Mental disorder	425	85.3	73	14.7	498(100.0)
Neglect					
Prostitution	398	79.9	100	20.1	498(100.0)
Crime involvement	460	92.4	38	7.6	498(100.0)
Dropping out of school	289	58.0	209	42.0	498(100.0)
Drug addiction	223	44.8	275	55.2	498(100.0)
Death	400	80.3	98	19.7	498(100.0)

Data on Table 5 show that of out all the consequences of different types of child abuse as mentioned by the women, neglect has the highest responses on crime involvement (92.4%). On psychological abuse, majority perceived mental disorder (85.3%) as the greatest consequence. The greatest consequence for physical abuse are bruises and scar (75.1%) while the greatest consequence for sexual abuse reproductive health problems (69.7%).

Discussion

Prevalence of child abuse is alarming in Nigeria and perception of what constitute abuse differ across different towns in Nsukka as findings from one way ANOVA revealed so. Perception of child abuse among women in different towns in Nsukka was statistically significant ($P=.000$) when cross tabulated with three variables namely; seeing child abuse as a way of maltreating a child, a way of rearing a child and inflicting serious injury on a child, but slightly significant as a way of punishing a child

for doing wrong ($p=.043$). Again, perception of child abuse as a way of inculcating morals in a child had no statistically significant difference ($p=.224$) across Nsukka LGA. Also, majority of women perceived sexual abuse to be raping or having sexual intercourse with a child, kissing and caressing a child and fingering child's genital organ; major physical abuse perceived by women are giving wound or deep cut with sharp object, burning child's skin with hot metal and hitting a child with heavy or hard object as type of physical abuse; psychological abuse include humiliating a child, excessive criticism and torture while neglect behaviour such as denial of shelter and lack of love and affection were perceived to be major types of child abuse. This could be as a result of prevalence rate in various communities and viral information on social media on child abuse, the type meted on the victim, the perpetrator and how the incident happened. In agreement, Akmatov (2011) asserted that parental attitudes towards corporal punishment were seen as a method of child rearing in African countries than in transitional countries.

In addition, Chi-square result on factors associated with child abuse as perceived by women showed that social factors (age, occupation, unemployment and marital status) have significant association ($P=.000$) so also education ($P=.004$). Cultural factors (tradition and language) have significant association ($P=.000$). Education to an extent is a key factor that informs women's perception and behaviour towards things of which child abuse is not an exception. The more educated and enlightened women are, the more their perception changes about what constitute child abuse. These results validates previous finding that parenting styles, child's age, child's educational level and sex of the child, cultural belief, mother's age, mother's education level, income, number of wives, number of male children and number of female children influences perception of the child sexual abuse (Sika-Bright and Nnorom, 2013; AlRammah, 2018; Wangamati, et al., 2018). On the contrary, Al Dosari et al. (2017) reported that age influences physical abuse while jobs, income, number of children, marital conflict, relatives living with family were found not to be statistically significant with physical abuse of children.

Findings from this study were in affirmation with previous studies as women perceived major consequences of child abuse to be crime involvement, followed by death and prostitution for child neglect; mental disorder, depression, poor self-esteem, feeling of shame and anxiety for psychological consequences; bruises and scar and fracture for physical consequences, while reproductive health problems, sexually transmitted infections and death were consequences of sexual abuse. This finding could be attributed to the observation made by adults on children that have experienced one form of abuse or the other living within their environment from their parents or guardians as the menace is rampant in the society. Studies have shown that child abuse has adverse effect on the child's growth and development (Mills & McCarroll, 2012). Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013) reported that bruises or cuts were minor consequences while broken bones, hemorrhage and death are the severe consequences of physical abuse. Psychological abuse immediate consequences include; isolation, fear and inability to trust which transcend to lifelong consequences such as self-esteem, depression, relationship difficulty. In the same vein, Oseni et al (2016) affirmed that child sexual abuse has severe consequences like sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, school dropout, mental illness and death.

Result from this study support the ecological theory especially on the relationship between environmental influences and child abuse. Intervention aimed at eliminating abuse and child protection should address multiple levels of risk, ranging from individual characteristics to larger socio-cultural factors across various towns in Nsukka. Such formidable task should be bestowed on social workers who are skilled and competent in handling such societal problem. Social workers are change agents who seek to promote social change and development, social cohesion, empowerment and liberation of people (International Federation of Social Workers, 2017).

Undisputedly, children suffer different types of abuse from parents, family members, guardians, care givers among others as a result of perception hold about child abuse as seen in this study. As a result of this notion, children undergo series of trauma, brutalization, torture from older persons which is devastating and detrimental to their growth, development and well-being. As such, social workers remain experts who should be at the forefront campaigning against public perceptions towards child abuse. Social workers should be at the helm of affairs in policy formulation and implementation in tackling issues of child abuse which is on the increase in the society. Child welfare and clinical social workers should be actively involved in eliminating any form of abuse towards children, creating awareness programme on psychological implication of abuse on children's development and wellbeing. They should also create awareness about various child protection acts and agencies established in Nigeria as well as ensuring implementation and accessibility of those acts and agencies by victims of child abuse. Social workers are professionals in counseling, advocacy, mediating, behaviour modification, activism, sensitization, linking people to available services, and awareness creation. As change agents, social workers should create awareness and sensitization programme through media, to foster attitudinal change towards abuse of children and factors associated with it. The present study noted that psychological abuse and sexual abuse were perceived to be high and its consequences has been discussed in other studies (Fakunmoju & Bammeke, 2013).

Social work is not only concerned with individual and personal problems but also with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment, communal crisis and domestic violence. As such, campaign should be taken down to grass root level in various communities with collaboration of government, stakeholders, traditional rulers and other community group leaders especially women forums. Findings from this study shows that perception of women about child abuse were mostly embedded in their cultural belief, values and tradition which such campaign should target. Since social workers are concerned with social issues such as poverty and unemployment among others, therefore, it is their responsibility to help parents and guardians in seeking means to alleviate poverty and advocate for job creation and skill acquisition. As activists and advocates, child welfare and clinical workers should stand against all dehumanizing attitude towards children's right, ensure that perpetrators of these acts are brought to book and provide psychotherapy and clinical assessment for victims.

There is also need for collaboration between social workers (especially those in child welfare, clinical and medical social workers, child protection agencies) and health care personnel in enlightening the public on the psychological, physical and health

consequences of child abuse and neglect on children through community based programmes. This is pertinent to eliminate social, mental, emotional crisis experienced by children which may result to death and suicidal behaviour if not well taken care of. Finally, this study is not void of limitations. A major limitation is the inability of the researcher to ascertain opinion of known perpetrators of child abuse as well as that of children who are the victims of abuse. Secondly, the study was limited to women in Nsukka L.G.A without sampling the opinion of women in other L.G.As in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Social workers are pioneers and advocates of child protection, social change and elimination of societal problems. With these attributes, child welfare and clinical social workers should tackle this societal problem and dehumanizing actions against children through awareness creation to sensitize the public on what really constitute child abuse. There is also need for collaboration among different stakeholders who are advocates for implementation of child protection acts in Nigeria. They should also partner with both governmental and non-governmental child protection agencies in protecting the rights of the child and make referral when the need arises. Although social work professionals have not been recognized in Nigeria by law, social workers should nevertheless, showcase their professional competence by rendering selfless service in guarding against any form of abuse meted out on children and work to remove various socio-cultural factors associated with child abuse which have numerous consequences on growth, development and well-being of children.

Reference

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