

## **Prevalence and Effects of Sexual Abuse of Female Minors in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State.**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined the prevalence and effects of sexual abuse on female minors in the Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Exploring the effects of sexual abuse on female minors and identifying various measures to be used in controlling sexual abuse of female minors were among the objectives of the study using social control theory. A total of 204 respondents were used. Multistage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. The collected data were analysed using simple frequency distribution tables and simple percentages. Findings from the study showed that sexual abuse of female minors is still prevalent. It was also found that there are various factors, such as poor parental upbringing, inadequate housing, sexual perversity, and cultural beliefs that influence the prevalence of sexual abuse of female minors. Also, it was observed in the study that the various forms of sexual abuse of female minors include physical sexual contact with children who are female, indecent exposure to adult genitals, using a female child to produce child pornography, and sexual harassment of underage girls. However, the study found that gynaecological disorders, unwanted pregnancy, memory loss, and unconditional fear are the effects of sexual abuse of female minors. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that the government should ensure that stiffer penalties are taken against perpetrators of sexual abuse, including jail sentences, in order to discourage or deter potential perpetrators from committing the same offence.*

**Keywords:** Child, Female minors, Perpetrators, Prevalence, Sexual Abuse

### **Introduction**

Children are significant to the future of a country. This is because they will become adults and leaders in the future. As a result, their welfare and well-being should be of importance to the government and reflect national policy (Oluwaleye & Adefisoye, 2021). The well-being of children is crucial to the future well-being of society. This implies that whatever threatens the welfare of children in any nation or society is a challenge to the future of the society and nation involved.

In spite of this assumption, all societies at all times have exposed their children to traumatic experiences, most especially those resulting from sexual abuse, which they suffer at the hands of strangers, their relatives, and their parents alike (Ezeh, Abamara, Ndukaihe, & Ikwuagwu, 2013). Sexual abuse is more common than previously

acknowledged. In Europe, the age of consent for sexual relationships varies between 14 and 18 years, while in Asia, it varies between 9 years (Yemen) and 21 years (Hong Kong). In North America and South America, the consent age varies between 16 and 18 years and 14 and 18 years, respectively. In Africa, the age of consent for sexual activity varies by jurisdiction across the continent. It ranges from 12 years in Angola and Sudan, 20 years in Tunisia, and 21 years in Cameroon and Niger, respectively.

In Nigeria, children are regarded as an important and integral part of society. Many perceive children as a blessing that comes from God and, therefore, an important treasure to be cherished by all. As a result, the Child Rights Act (2003) vehemently guarantees the rights of every Nigerian child and protects them from violence and sexual abuse. According to the Child Rights Act (2003), the age of consent for sexual activity is 18 years. This implies that having sexual intercourse with a child under 18 is regarded as abuse, and there are no exemptions (Ster, 2022). Similarly, according to Ster (2022), Section 7 of the Sexual Offences Act bans sexual intercourse with anyone between 0 and 18 years of age. In light of the above, it is a criminal offence in Nigeria for one to have carnal knowledge of a child under the age of eighteen years, as it is assumed that a girl or female under the age of eighteen years should not engage in sexual intercourse, as they are still referred to as minors.

It was hard for many to believe that parents or carers would internally inflict harm on their children; thus, in many countries, child sexual abuse was often ignored or denied as a result of people's acceptance of violence in a given culture or due to their belief that culture must focus on preserving the family (Osamuyi and Isoken, 2022). According to studies from nineteen countries, including Sweden and the Dominican Republic, rates of child sexual defilement range from 7 percent to 34 percent for girls and from 3 percent to 29 percent for boys. Some of these differences in range are due to varying definitions of sexual abuse by country and the accuracy of the reporting system (Milambo, 2015). Statistically, the report of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2020) indicated that around 120 million girls under the age of 20 worldwide have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts. UNICEF further reported that 1 in 4 adolescent girls and 1 in 10 percent of boys have been victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

In Nigeria, despite the glorious belief and perception that children are seen as future leaders and blessings from God, not everything is rosy for them, especially the female ones. In 2020 alone, Nigerian Police recorded 717 cases of defilement of female minors between January and May (Premium Times, 2020). According to Osamuyi and Isoken (2022), amidst the harsh sentences imposed on sexual abuse of minors, more minors, particularly female children, are still being abused and exposed sexually; this invariably implies that female children are living in very difficult circumstances, as the environment in which they are still growing up is no longer safe, and this consequently impacts their development. According to Akpoghome (2016), sexual abuse of female minors has most often affected the victims' mental health. The survivors usually suffer from depression, suicide, and other forms of mental health disorders, which they suffer from almost throughout their lives.

Despite the numerous studies undertaken to determine the prevalence of sexual abuse of female minors in Nigeria, not much has been done to unearth the reasons for this heinous crime. Probably, it is a result of the fact that the majority of the survivors does not seek redress or report the act due to shame, stigma, prolonged court cases, and the fact that the majority of perpetrators are people close and familiar to them and not strangers. This horrendous crime has negatively impacted the nation's morals, economics, and spiritual values and requires an urgent panacea.

Hence, against the above background, this study is designed to investigate the prevalence and effects of sexual abuse on female minors in Awka South L.G.A. of Anambra State. Specifically, the study will focus on the factors influencing the prevalence of sexual abuse of female minors, the effects of sexual abuse on female minors, and measures to be put in place to control sexual abuse of female minors.

### **Literature Review**

Issues arising from or related to the subject of discussion are examined under the following sub-headings: Prevalence of Sexual abuse of Female Minors, Factors influencing the Prevalence of Sexual Abuse of Female Minors, Effects of Sexual Abuse of Female minors, and Measures to be put in place to control Sexual Abuse of Female Minors

*Prevalence of Sexual abuse of Female Minors:* The subject of child sexual abuse has, in recent years, become a topical issue all over the world. The incidence of sexual abuse of female minors in Nigeria has become more rampant, with more cases being reported for prosecution by authorities (Ikechebelu, 2008). According to Dada (2016), a day hardly passes without hearing of news from the Nigerian media (Printed and Electronic) that a child has been sexually abused somewhere. For example, according to reports on January 18, 2022, a Yaba Chief Magistrate's Court in Lagos State arraigned a 35-year-old man, identified only as Oladele, who allegedly inserted his fingers into the private part of a three-month-old baby at his residence. A medical doctor who examined the baby confirmed that she was defiled (Madike, 2022). On April 8, 2023, a 70-year-old divorcee, Usman Ibrahim, in Adamawa State, was arrested for allegedly abusing two minors sexually who were seven and four years old, respectively (Onimisi, 2023).

From the outset, it is glaring that sexual abuse of female minors is prevalent in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the past ten years have seen an increase in child sexual abuse cases. According to the media reports of March 8, 2013, 6,277 Nigerian girls had been abused sexually between 2010 and 2013. Of this total figure, 2,419 cases were recorded in 2010, while in 2011 and 2012, there were 1,339 and 2,369 cases, respectively. Out of these, 2,839 cases were prosecuted, and 789 convictions were secured (<http://dailymail.co.nigeria>). In a related development, Salama Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Gambo Sawaba General Hospital, Zaria, Kaduna State, reported that between February 2019 and August 2021, over 652 rape cases were recorded, and the victims were children under the age of 17 (Madike, 2022). Conclusion: Statistics and findings have indicated that child defilement in Nigeria is common, and unfortunately, 90 percent of victims are female (Chiazor, Ozoya, Udume, & Egharevba, 2016).

**Factors influencing the Prevalence of Sexual Abuse of Female Minors:** Previously, most people attributed the increase in sexual abuse cases to the weak laws existing in society that do not offer any form of protection to children, especially female ones. The genesis of sexual violence (sexual abuse included) is rooted in the social and cultural norms that entrench patriarchal gender relations and perpetuate discrimination and inequality against girls (Beninger, 2013). This created problems with sexuality, which is very much a socio-cultural invention that is closely linked to power and to the process of subjugation (Tamale, 2014). Despite the imposition of a 15-year imprisonment sentence for those convicted of the offence of sexual abuse of minors, cases have continued to be perpetrated at alarming levels. According to Banda (2017), there are various factors influencing the prevalence of sexual abuse among female minors, including: **(a) Sexual perversity:** Sexual perversity is a situation where those involved have no control over their sexual desires and therefore take advantage of young female minors left in their care (Banda, 2017). According to Ndosì (2008), in Nigeria, due to the lack of adequate institutional day care centres for children as well as the prohibitive fees of the few available ones, the majority of parents, especially working mothers, leave their children with relatives, friends, etc. who tend to abuse them. In addition, Nwokoye (2017) asserted that some perpetrators are paedophiles, which is a form of sexual perversion where children are the preferred sexual objects for reasons they may not even comprehend. **(b) Beliefs that having sex with minors cures HIV and AIDS:** Milambo (2015) asserted that many men who were diagnosed with HIV and AIDS have developed the irrational belief that having sex with a minor would bring them healing. Therefore, in their search for healing, such people would find an opportune time to convert this belief into practise. This belief could be seen in the mushrooming of messages on billboards, radio, and TV programmes by HIV and AIDS activists to reject this kind of thinking (Milambo, 2015).

**Effects of Sexual Abuse of Female Minors:** In Nigeria, children are regarded as an important and integral part of society. Some people think of children as a blessing that comes from God and, therefore, an important treasure to be cherished by all. However, despite this glorious belief and perception about children, not everything is rosy for them, especially the female ones. According to Smith (2012), many underage girls have suffered various forms of sexual abuse, either from their friends, peers, or relatives. This abuse has created wounds and post-traumatic disorder, which they are likely to live with all their lives. According to Smith (2012), child sexual abuse has psychological, sociological, and spiritual effects on the children, irrespective of who the perpetrator is.

According To Milambo (2015), the effects of sexual abuse on female minors are profound; some have short-term effects while others have long-term effects. The short-term effects include altering the brain, aggression, school problems, hyperactivity, and regressive behaviours. The long-term effects include post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive distortions, emotional distress, an impaired sense of self, avoidance, interpersonal difficulties, etc.

**Measures to be put in place in Controlling Sexual Abuse of Female Minors:** Sexual abuse is a crime against humanity. According to the International Criminal Court (ICC, 2002), a crime against humanity is any of the following acts when committed as part of a

widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population with knowledge of the attack: According to Ogunwofokan and Fajemilehin (2015), sexual abuse of female minors is a menace that has been reported globally and is increasing at a very alarming rate.

In light of the preceding discussion, according to Gbemileke and Oladepo (2015), despite the stiff penalty involved in sexual abuse of female minors, there should be health education programmes that should also sensitise parents, teachers, and other trusted adults, as well as health care providers and law enforcement agencies, on the importance of communicating about sexual matters with youths and providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As provided by Travis Hirschi in 1969, social control theory avers that humans are selfish beings who make decisions based on the choice that has the greatest benefit. Social control stresses how weak bonds between the individual and society free people to deviate or go against the norms, or that people who have weak ties would engage in crimes and delinquent acts so they could benefit from or gain something that is in their own interest. According to the theory, behaviour is caused not by outside stimuli but by what a person wants most at any given time. This implies that a weaker social system results in more crime and deviant behaviour. Therefore, following the postulations of this theory, it is established that the reason behind the incessant rise of sexual abuse of female minors, which is regarded as an abhorrent and horrendous crime in our society, is literally a result of weak social bonds in the major elements of society, which are attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs. Consequently, the rate of sexual abuse of female minors can be drastically reduced if the parents and carers assume their roles and, most importantly, if the bond existing among members of society is strong. For instance, if family members, carers, teachers, and all agents of socialisation played their expected societal roles, especially in the lives of the minors under their care, the issue of sexual abuse would undoubtedly be a thing of the past.

### **Research Methodology**

The study design for this work was a cross-sectional survey. The area of the study was Awka South Local Government Area, located in Anambra State, with its headquarters in Awka. Awka South has a land mark of 10.95 square metres and Nine (9) towns, namely Awka, Nibo, Nise, Isiagu, Mbaukwu, Okpuno, Ezinato, Umuawulu, and Amawbia. A sample size of 204 respondents was adopted for the quantitative component of this study. The Taro Yamani (1967) statistical formula was applied to determine the sample size of the study.

The multi-stage sampling procedure, comprising simple random sampling techniques and systematic sampling techniques, was adopted for this study. Using the balloting method of simple random sampling, two towns, namely Awka and Nibo, were selected as representative case studies for Awka South L.G.A.

The questionnaire and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide were the instruments used for data collection. Section A of the questionnaire comprised the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, such as age, gender, religious affiliation, educational attainment, and occupation. The In-depth interview guide was designed to gather relevant qualitative data from respondents and also elucidate and support the quantitative data. The In-depth interview guide was divided into the consent section and the section that deals with the substantive issues of the research as drawn from the study objectives.

Concluding, the quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The researchers made use of frequency distribution tables and percentages to present the data for easy understanding and clarity. Chi-square inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. The qualitative data was used to complement the quantitative data

### Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

**Table 1:** SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	99	52.4
Female	90	47.6
Total	189	100
Age		
18 – 23	71	37.6
24 – 29	85	45.0
30 – 35	18	9.5
36 and above	15	7.9
Total	189	100
Marital Status		
Married	32	16.9
Single	143	75.7
Widowed	4	2.1
Divorced	5	2.6
Separated	5	2.6
Total	189	100
Education		
No formal education	12	6.3
FSLC	29	15.3
SSCE	39	20.3
OND/NCE	37	19.6
B.Sc. and Above	72	38.1
Total	189	100
Religion		
Christianity	180	95.2
Islamic	6	3.2
African Traditional Religion	3	1.6

Total	189	100
Occupation		
Unemployed	104	55.0
Farmer	15	7.9
Trader	36	19.0
Civil Servant	20	10.6
Artisan	7	3.7
Other Occupation	7	3.7
Total	189	100

Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, and it shows that majority 99(52.4%) of the respondents are males, while the females are 90(47.6%). With regards to the age of the respondents, majority 85(45.0%) are within the ages of 24 – 29; majority 143(75.7%) of the respondents are single. In terms of educational qualification, majority 72(38.1%) of the respondents have gotten B.Sc. degree and above. More than half 180(95.2%) of the respondents are of Christian religious affiliation. However, more than half 104 (55.0%) of the respondents are unemployed.

**Table 2:** RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON VIEW ABOUT THE PREVAILING FACTOR OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF FEMALE MINORS

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Sexual perversity	74	39.2
Poor parental upbringing	65	34.4
Inadequate housing	11	5.8
Cultural beliefs	39	20.6
Total	189	100

Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows the respondents' views on the various prevailing factors influencing sexual abuse of female minors. Majority 74(39.2%) of the respondents identified sexual perversity as the major prevailing factor. 65(34.4%) identified poor parental upbringing, 11(5.8%) said it was inadequate housing and 39(20.6%) of the respondents posited that cultural beliefs is the prevailing factor of sexual abuse of female minors. One of the interviewee stated thus: *“Some men are naturally promiscuous; that they cannot spend a single day without sleeping with a female partner, thus when a matured woman is not available they tend to resort to the vulnerable minors”* (Civil servant, 43years, Female, Isiagu-Amikwo). Another interviewee stated thus:

Many men out there suffer from low self-esteem, in the sense that they cannot easily approach a matured woman to express their sexual urges and thus they starts looking for small girls that they can use biscuits and other enticing gifts to lure into sexual acts (Nurse, 28 years, Female, Umuanum village).

**Table 3:** RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON WHAT THEY THINK IS THE MAJOR EFFECT OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF FEMALE MINORS

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Gynecological disorder	57	30.2
Unwanted pregnancy	55	29.1
Memory loss	26	13.8
Unconditional fear	51	27.0
Total	189	100

*Field Survey, 2023*

Table 3 presents the various effects of sexual abuse of female minors and majority 57(30.2%) of the respondents identified gynecological disorder as the major effect, 55(29.1%) identified unwanted pregnancy, 26(13.8%) stated it was memory loss and 51(27.0%) equally identified unconditional fear as the major effect of sexual abuse of female minors. One of the interviewee stated that *“cases of Vesico Vagina Fistulae (VVF) have been attributed to be the leading effect of sexual defilement of female minor, followed by other gynecological problems such as genital ulcer, infertility among other”* (Nurse, 28years, female, Umuanum village). Another interviewee added that:

Victims of sexual abuse especially female minors are likely to suffer from psychological problems; this is as a result of the fact that many of the victims live with the pains and trauma after being defiled without reporting out of fear of what people might say or maybe threats from their abusers (Pharmacist, 35years, Male, Isiagu-Amikwo).

### Discussion of Findings

Sexual abuse of female minors is a serious social malady that affects both the psychological, physical, and mental wellbeing of female minors. The prevalence and effects of sexual abuse of female minors in Awka South L.G.A. of Anambra State are thus evaluated in this section. Observations in the study showed that the term sexual abuse was heard by the majority of the respondents. Findings also showed that sexual abuse is an act involving unwanted sexual activity with perpetrators using force, making threats, or taking advantage of victims, especially those under the age of 18, without their consent. In addition, it was established that sexual abuse of female minors is prevalent in Awka South L.G.A. of Anambra State. However, the observations from the study were in corroboration with the view of Dada (2016), who stressed that a day hardly passes without hearing of news from the Nigerian media (Printed and Electronic) that a child has been sexually abused somewhere.

Furthermore, it was observed in the study that there are various factors influencing the prevalence of sexual abuse of female minors, including sexual perversity, inadequate housing, cultural beliefs, and poor parental upbringing. Also, the qualitative data from the in-depth interview conducted stressed that the above-listed factors, as well as low self-esteem and a level of promiscuity, are the factors influencing the prevalence of sexual abuse among female minors. These findings are in agreement with the view of Banda

(2017), who observed that there are various factors influencing the prevalence of sexual abuse among female minors, and they include sexual perversity, beliefs that having sex with minors cures HIV and AIDS, and a lack of parental care. In addition, it was further observed that the major factor influencing the lack of reporting of sexual abuse cases is fear of the unknown. More so, it was observed in the study that there are forms of sexual abuse of female minors, and the major form of sexual abuse of female minors is physical sexual contact with children who are female. This finding is also in line with Banda's (2017) assertion that the various forms of sexual abuse include pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities, indecent exposure of adult genitals, and physical sexual contact with a child, and using a child to produce child pornography.

Observations from the study revealed that there are various effects of sexual abuse of female minors, including gynecological disorders, unwanted pregnancy, memory loss, and unconditional fear. In addition, the information extracted from the qualitative data through the in-depth interview also identified gynecological problems such as VVF and other psychological disorders as the effects of sexual abuse of female minors. These findings are in agreement with the views of Milambo (2015), who stressed that the effects of sexual abuse on female minors are profound; some have short-term effects while others have long-term effects. The short-term effects include altering the brain, aggression, school problems, hyperactivity, and regressive behaviours. The long-term effects include post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive distortions, emotional distress, an impaired sense of self, avoidance, interpersonal difficulties, etc. In addition, it was observed in the study that there are measures that will help to manage the incidence of sexual abuse of female children, including the enactment of policies that will protect minors, public enlightenment, stiffer punishment of perpetrators, and promotion of gender equality. However, this observation corroborated the idea of Ezech et al. (2013), who posited that for sexual abuse to be controlled, there should be sexuality education activities that should be implored to dispel and reverse ingrained norms of gender double standards, power imbalances, and male entitlement to sex, and reinforce life and negotiation skill activities that strengthen young people's ability to protect themselves from sexual advances and to take appropriate action should such incidents occur.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Children are the future of any nation and the leaders of tomorrow. The way they are treated reflects the level of development of a particular country. It is apparent from the findings so far that if no adequate measure is taken to stem the tide of sexual molestation of minors, then our society will be in a precarious state.

Sexual abuse of female minors is one of the heinous and abhorrent crimes in every society and in order to fight and eliminate sexual abuse as a social illness, the following are recommended: (a) The government should ensure that stiffer penalties are taken against perpetrators of sexual abuse including jail sentences in order to discourage or deter potential perpetrators from committing the same offence. Moreover, by-laws need to be put in place at the local level to prevent sexual abuse of female minors. (b) There is need to encourage and promote sexual education in society to help the young ones get the

necessary knowledge and skills to deal with sexual abuse, early sex, teen/early pregnancies, STIs and HIV/AIDS. (c) The vulnerable should be taken care of. To put an end to sexual abuse of female minors, the female minors who are considered vulnerable should be careful of where they go, who they move with and what they do. Anytime they identify potential harm, they should speak out and raise alarm. (d) There is need to integrate good traditions and customs in the current curricular at both primary and secondary education levels. This will help the adolescents especially the female ones to know the right societal values and norms that will guide their activity all through in life.

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