

CHILD ABUSE: TYPES, SPECIFIC ACTS AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES.

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ABSTRACT

Noticeable efforts have begun to emerge from Local, States and Federal Government levels on dealing with issues of child abuse. Perhaps this was as a result of numerous cases of child abuse reported in our daily newspapers. It may also be as a result of various efforts by Non-Governmental Organizations, Human Rights Activities and Community-Based Organization. As part of the contribution to the issue, this paper discusses the child abuse, types, specific acts and preventive strategies. In the paper, the concept of child abuse, definitions of terms and who is child were explained. Critically examined also, were background to the children's right, basic rights of the child and type of child abuse. Furthermore, emotional and psychological abuse and their effects were highlighted. Strategies to reduce emotional psychological abuse were clearly listed. One of the recommendations was that, community awareness of the importance of healthy parenting practices should be enhanced.

Introduction

In African traditional society the child is regarded as an integral member of the family. The importance attached to the child is so great that a woman is not considered as a bonafide member of a family until she gives birth to a child. If this is the situation, parents are therefore expected to bring up their children in such a way that they will not be subjected to various forms of child abuse. This paper will examine types and specific acts or forms of child abuse in our society as well as

suggest primary prevention strategies to deal with this problem. The focus is on emotional and psychological abuse.

Concept of Child Abuse

Cohen (2000) strongly argued that child abuse is closely related to the context of traditions as well as officials and unofficial child rearing practices differ across states and cultures. Things considered being acceptable and natural in one society may be viewed as abuse in the other. Therefore, careful and delicate approach to the issue of child abuse is essential.

According to Koiv (2000) it is not possible to say that the concept of child abuse of one person is more or less adequate than others. Parents children and different professionals (physicians, social workers, psychologists educationalists, lawyers and police officers) and every one dealing with the problem use different approach.

In view of these complexities in the conception of child abuse the definition of child abuse offered by Stein (1993) seems to be comprehensive and thus accepted for the purpose of this presentation. Stein (1993) defines child abuse as:

Any non-accidental injury or an act of omission by child parents, caretaker, or guardian which results in some injury or an imminent risk of serious harm or substantial risk of death, impairment of health, loss of impairment of function to the child (pp. 222 - 3).

Definition of Terms

Who is a child?

A child in this context refers to any human being below the age of 18 years. The Nigerian child can be viewed as a child legitimately born into the Nigerian society by Nigerian parents. Child abuse refers to any form of maltreatment including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, educational, medical and moral neglect of a minor under the care of adults.

Primary prevention is used as both the prevention of phenomenon before it occurs and the reduction of its incidence. In the context of child abuse, primary prevention is defined as any intervention designed for the purpose of preventing child abuse before it occurs.

The Background to Children's Rights

In attempt to improve the quality of life of children worldwide, enhance their dignity and protect their undeniable rights, the United Nations convention on the rights of the child was adopted by the general assembly on the 20th of November, 1980. A World summit for children was subsequently organized by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) from 29th to 30th September 1990 in New York. As a follow up to the convention, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) At it's Heads of State summit in Addis Ababa in 1990, adopted a charter on the rights and welfare of the Africans (including the Nigerian) child. In order to mobilize attention, the OAU accordingly proclaimed (in Abuja, 1991) the 1990's as the decade of the African child. June 16th of every year has been set aside as the day of the African child (OAU 1990, UNICEF 1995; FOS/UNICEF 1997).

Basic Rights of the Child

Childhood is an essential phase of human life and every child has basic fundamental rights. These rights which include the underlisted must be observed if child abuse is to be minimized or eradicated in the Nigerian society.

Every Child

- has the right to life and be allowed to survive and develop,
- is free to belong to any association or assembly according to the law.
- has the right to express opinions and freely communicate them on any issue subject to restriction under the law.
- entitled to protection from any act that interferes with his or her privacy, honor and reputation.
- is entitled to adequate rest, recreation (leisure and play) according to his or her age and culture.
- is entitled to receive compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education depending on individual ability.
- is entitled to good health from illness and proper medical attention for survival personal growth and development.
- must protected from indecent and inhuman treatment through sexual exploitation drug abuse, torture, maltreatment and neglect.
- no child should suffer because of nay ethnic origin, birth, color, sex, language, religion, political and social beliefs, status or disability.

Types of Child Abuse

Various types of child abuse include the following: physical, sexual, financial and emotional or psychological forms.

Physical abuse; is any act of violence on a child, this include slapping, kicking, choking, pulling hairs, punching, pinning against walls or floors and beating'

Sexual abuse, can be defined as any sexual encounter without consent; which includes, forcing unwanted sexual act, calling a sadistic name, sexual assault, taking unwanted sexual photographs, and forcing a child into prostitution (Lewit, 1994)

Financial abuse, can take many forms, i.e. denying a child access to funds and making the minor responsible for financial commitment. It can include denying a child access to needed fund, forcing one to beg or commit crimes for money and making one account for every kobo spent.

Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Many forms of child abuse are certainly cruel. Emotional abuse is the systematic tearing down of another human being. It is considered a pattern of behavior that seriously interferes with a child's positive development. Emotional abuse is perhaps the least understood of all abuses yet it is the most prevalent and destructive of all types.

When emotion attacks child's psyche and self concept, he/she sees himself/herself as unworthy of love and affection. Children who are constantly shamed, humiliated or rejected suffer at least as much, if not more than if they had been physically abused. An infant, who is deprived of basic emotional nurturing even though physically well cared for, can fail to thrive less. Severe forms of early emotional deprivation may produce babies who grow into anxious and insecure children, who are slow developers or who might have low self-esteem. McKay and Wolf, (1995) posited that , quite often, emotional and psychological abuses go unseen. Sometimes the victim does not recognize that he or she is being abused. Physical or sexual abuse is always accompanied by emotional stress

Types of Emotional and Psychological Abuse

There are many types of emotional/psychological abuses. In the abuses there are many behaviors that often remain unnoticed by others. They include:

1. **Rejection: Parents who lack** the ability to bond will often display rejecting behavior towards a child. They tell a child in a variety of ways that he or she is not wanted. They may also tell a child to leave, call him or her names and tell the child that he or she is worthless. Parents or guardians may not talk to but blame the child for the family's problems.
2. **Terrorizing:** Parents may single out one child to criticize and punish. They may ridicule him or her for displaying normal emotions and have expectations far beyond his or her normal abilities. The child may be threatened with mutilation, abandonment and even death.
3. **Isolating:** A parent who abused a child through isolation may not allow the child to engage in appropriate activities with his or her peers. The effect of isolation is that the child feels very lonely and is ultimately more dependent on the abuser.
4. **Ignoring:** Adults who have had few of their emotional needs not met are unable to respond to the needs of their children. They may not show attachment to the child or provide nurturance. They may not express affection or even recognize the child's presence. For example, refuse to notice or pay attention to the child.
5. **Corruption:** Some parents permit children to watch cruel behavior towards other people or animals, to use drugs or alcohol, watch adult sex acts, watch phonographic materials, witness or participate in criminal activities such as stealing and gambling(Hay and Jones, 1994).
6. **Verbal:** Verbal abuse can include: yelling at, making threats, insulting the minor or his/her family ,criticizing the child's interest, humiliating the child privately or publicly, withholding approval, appreciation or conversation, refusing to discuss issues which are important to the child and laughing or making fun of the child inappropriately.

All of these abusive behaviors prohibit normal and healthy interaction between adults and children.

Effects of Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Children endure many long term consequences or effects including delays in reaching developmental milestones, refusal to attend school and separation, anxiety disorders. Others include depressive and affective disorders, personality disorders, post traumatic stress disorder and panic attacks.

However emotional abuse can be very hard to diagnose. In some cases emotional abused child leaves hidden scars that manifest in numerous ways. These include insecurity, poor self-esteem, destructive behavior, angry acts such as cruelty to animals or younger children, withdrawal, poor development of basic skills, alcohol or drug abuse and difficulties in forming healthy relationship. Recent research has shown that a loving, caring and stimulating environment during the first 3 years of a child's life is important for proper brain development. This finding implies that children who receive maltreatment in the early years may actually have sub optimal brain development (Shore, 1997)

Strategies to Reduce Emotional and Psychological Abuse and Discussion

The following strategies might be used to reduce emotional and psychological abuse among children.

Parents should be on child development, child behavior and discipline. They should be provided with the enabling environment to meet personal needs and aspirations. Parents needs to prepare for their babies arrival to avoid unwanted pregnancies and children. A study of 2000 pregnant women in German found that the children of mothers who looked forward to having a family were much healthier emotionally and physically than the offspring of mothers who did not want their babies (Awake, 2003).

When a child makes comments or statements that relate to possible abuse it is important it's listen calmly and respectfully to what the child is saying. Creating of caring communities could provide an effective foundation for confronting the child abuse crisis. Family and community connections should be supported. Parents should be treated and compensated for making vital contributions to their children's growth and development. Based on the above discussion the following recommendations are suggested:

Recommendations

- All stakeholders in child care should respect the basic rights of the child.
- Setting should be provided where parents and children can gather interact, support and learn from each other.
- Community awareness of the importance of healthy parenting practices should be enhanced.
- The society should increase the value placed on children, discourage excessive use of corporal punishment and other forms of violence.
- Families with problems with problems of domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health should be identified and rehabilitated.

- New parents should be educated on developmental tasks of childhood including feeding, nutrition, discipline and safety.

In conclusion this paper has discussed the background, types, specific acts and effects of child abuse with emphasis on the emotional and psychological spheres. Strategies for reducing emotional and psychological abuse have been suggested. Federal, state and community agencies should support universal care for children. They should also provide for quality, affordable and accessible services for children's parents and guardians. Legislation should be made against all forms of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment with physical or mental injury should be enforced. The public should be sensitized to take on disciplinary measures which are consistent with human dignity

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