

**ISSUES IN CHILD ABUSE IDENTIFICATION AND REPORTING IN NIGERIA: ROLE
OF THE NURSE IN OVERCOMING THESE**

BY

INITIATOR: DR. (MRS) CHINWEUBA ANTHONIA U.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: OKENWA JUSTINA U. (RN, RM, BNSc)

okenwajustina@gmail.com

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING SCIENCES

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, ENUGU CAMPUS

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of child abuse is a global pressing problem across the globe, especially in developing countries, including in Nigeria. Available evidence shows that from the last century that about 2,000 child deaths (ages 0-17) were recorded annually as a result of abuse and neglect in the United States, and an additional 160,000 cases resulted in serious injuries in 1990 alone (Daro & McCurdy, 1991). While adequate statistics might be lacking on the drivers and consequences of child abuse in Nigeria, the situation is likely to be worse due to problems inherent in socioeconomic and cultural relationships which serves as a foundation for child abuse. However tragic and sensational the problem of child abuse may be, the counts of deaths and serious injuries provide limited insight into the pervasive long-term social, behavioral, and

cognitive consequences of child abuse and neglect. Reports of child abuse or maltreatment alone also reveal little about the interactions among individuals, families, communities, and society that lead to such incidents.

Developed societies are making considerable effort to understand the menace and address it. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for developing countries like Nigeria. Nigeria has not yet recognized the complex origins or the profound consequences of child abuse. The services required for children who have been abused or neglected, including medical care, family counseling, foster care, and specialized education, are virtually non-existent, and where available are expensive. Such services are often limited to governmental effort, with the private sector and non-governmental organizations slowly catching up, and are often subsidized by governmental funds. Equally disturbing, research suggests that child abuse or maltreatment cases are highly related to social problems such as juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and violence, which require additional services and severely affect the quality of life for many Nigerian families. Providing global incidence of child abuse, the World Health Organization reported about a decade ago that there are more than 40 million children globally that are considered victims of child abuse annually ([Piltz and Wachtel, 2009](#)). In Nigeria, children face the menace of abuse ranging from physical injuries, abandonment, sexual abuse to child labour. In fact, child abuse is becoming alarming in the country, with government's efforts to combat the problem yielding little or no result.

Although child abuse is a common problem in Nigeria, effort at reporting and identifying it has received little attention. This is probably due to the emphasis placed on the more prevalent childhood problems of malnutrition and infection. Another possible reason is the general

assumption that in every African society, the extended family system always provides love, care and protection to all children. Yet, there are traditional child rearing practices which adversely affect some children, such as purposeful neglect or abandonment of severely handicapped children, and twins or triplets in some rural areas. With the alteration of society by rapid socioeconomic and political changes, various forms of child abuse have been identified, particularly in the urban areas. These may be considered the outcome of abnormal interactions of the child, parents/guardians and society. They include abandonment of normal infants by unmarried or very poor mothers in cities, increased child labour and exploitation of children from rural areas by urban elite families, as well as abuse of children in urban nuclear families by childminders. Preventive measures include provision of infrastructural facilities and employment opportunities in the rural areas in order to prevent drift of the young population to the cities. This would sustain the supportive role of the extended family system which is rapidly being eroded. Also, there have been some issues in identifying and reporting of menace in Nigeria which calls for frantic efforts to remedy the situation. There is need for more effective identification and reporting of child abuse issues, and greater awareness of the existence of child abuse in our society by stakeholders including professional nurses. In line with this urgent need, the paper seeks to address the following objectives:

- To explain the concept of child abuse
- To state the issues in child abuse identification and reporting in Nigeria
- To state the roles of nurses in overcoming those issues

Concept of Child Abuse

The child is the bedrock of any society and as such needs to be trained, adequately handled and protected. Children are the greatest assurance of the continuity of the human society. Without children today, there will be no society of humans tomorrow. Yet children are the most vulnerable members of the society. Onwe (2014) stated that Nigerian children are highly vulnerable to income gap or poverty, cultural values, religious incidence and unacceptable economic and social factors. This vulnerability usually exposes children to abuse. Olok-Ake (2000) described child abuse as all sorts of injustice, abnormality and inhuman treatment given to the young feeble ones by the adult generation. The African Network for the Protection and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) defined child abuse as the physical, emotional or sexual exploitation by parents, guardians or others.

Despite the above effort, there is no generally accepted definition for the term 'child abuse'. The terms child abuse and child maltreatment are often used interchangeably, although some researchers make a distinction between them, treating child maltreatment as an [umbrella term](#) to cover neglect, exploitation, and [trafficking](#). However, it is generally referred to as the ill-treatment of a child by adults including parents, relative or non-relatives. Also called other terms such as child maltreatment and child victimization is [physical](#), [sexual](#), and/or [psychological](#) maltreatment or [neglect](#) of a child or children, especially by a parent or a caregiver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that may result in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with.

The literature is replete with various attempts at defining the meaning of child abuse. For example, Edu and Edu (1999) described child abuse as a willful maltreatment of a child.

Such maltreatment according to them, can include acts of commission (abuse) and omission (neglect). Other scholars have presented a narrow definition of child abuse as being limited to life-threatening physical violence, including severe beatings, burns and strangulation which are inflicted on children by adult members of the community. A broader definition however, lays emphasis on any treatment other than the most favourable care, and includes neglect, sexual or emotional abuse and exploitation. It was from this broad perspective that Alokun (2010) described child abuse to include any behavior which neglects the child's survival and developmental needs, causes physical or emotional injury, harassment or subjects the child to measures, situations and experiences which interfere with their healthy development towards adulthood (p. 240). However, the concept of child abuse is operationalized, it basically captures the flagrant abuse of children's God-given and constitution-guaranteed freedom, comfort and peace, by adults in the society.

In Nigeria, for example, the rights of citizens in Chapters 4, Section 30 and 40 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantee every citizen's basic and fundamental human rights. Furthermore, child abuse violates the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. From the above declarations and policy documents, the Nigerian child like every other child in the world has the right to live and such protects them from people trampling on their rights

This issue which is considered offensive to any genuine clear conscience, is becoming commonplace in many villages, towns and cities in Nigeria. Children in Nigeria are exposed vulnerably to engage in street/highway hawking, exploitative labour and domestic help, street begging, girl-child marriage, illiteracy and female genital mutilation. This is despite the effort by

the Nigerian government and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) to curtail the menace of child abuse in the country. However, child abuse has persisted due to certain issues with the identification and reporting of this menace in Nigeria. This might be attributed to the fact that in Nigeria, the constitution did not make any distinction between the rights of adults and children. Thus, children are expected to enjoy these rights. With the menace of child abuse in the country, children are being denied some of these rights. This is further exacerbated by the fact that different states and jurisdictions have developed their own definitions of what constitutes child abuse for the purposes of allowing child marriages due to religious or cultural grounds.

Types of Child Abuse

The World Health Organization distinguishes four types of child abuse or maltreatment: [physical abuse](#), [sexual abuse](#), [emotional \(or psychological\) abuse](#), and [neglect](#) (World Health Organization and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2006).

Physical abuse: Among professionals and the general public, people often do not agree on what behaviors constitute [physical abuse](#) of a child (Noh & Helen, 1994). Physical abuse often does not occur in isolation, but as part of a constellation of behaviors including authoritarian control, anxiety-provoking behavior, and a lack of parental warmth (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008). The WHO defines physical abuse as:

Intentional use of physical force against the child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing (WHO & ISPCAN, 2006).

Durrant and Ensom, (2012) posits that most physical abuse is physical punishment "in intent, form, and effect". Overlapping definitions of physical abuse and [physical punishment](#) of children highlight a subtle or non-existent distinction between abuse and punishment (Saunders & Goddard, 2010). For instance, [Paulo Sergio Pinheiro](#) writes in the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children:

Corporal punishment involves hitting ('smacking', 'slapping', 'spanking') children, with the hand or with an implement – whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices) (Pinheiro, 2006).

Most nations with child abuse laws deem the deliberate infliction of serious injuries, or actions that place the child at obvious risk of serious injury or death to constitute instances of child abuse. Bruises, scratches, burns, broken bones, lacerations — as well as repeated "mishaps," and rough treatment that could cause physical injuries are indicators of physical abuse. (Theoklitou, Kabitsis & Kabitsi, 2012). Multiple injuries or fractures at different stages of healing can raise suspicion of abuse.

Often, physical abuse as a child can lead to physical and mental difficulties in the future, including re-victimization, personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, substance abuse, and aggression (Alice, 2016). Physical abuse in childhood has also been linked to homelessness in adulthood (Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect for Adult Survivors, 2014).

Sexual Abuse: Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2008).

Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed toward the physical gratification or the financial profit of the person committing the act(Theoklitou, 2012) Forms of CSA include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities (regardless of the outcome), [indecent exposure](#) of the [genitals](#) to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual [sexual contact](#) with a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, or using a child to produce child pornography(U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2008).Selling the sexual services of children may be viewed and treated as child abuse rather than simple incarceration (Brown, 2011).

Effects of child sexual abuse on the victim(s) include [guilt](#) and [self-blame](#), [flashbacks](#), [nightmares](#), [insomnia](#), fear of things associated with the abuse (including objects, smells, places, doctor's visits, etc.), [self-esteem](#) difficulties, [sexual dysfunction](#), [chronic pain](#), [addiction](#), [self-injury](#), [suicidal ideation](#), somatic complaints, [depression](#),post-traumatic stress disorder,[anxiety](#) other mental illnesses including [borderline personality disorder](#)(Roosa, Reinholtz,& Angelini, 1999) and [dissociative identity disorder](#),(Philip, 1994) propensity to [re-victimization](#) in adulthood,(Messman-moore and Long, 2000)bulimia nervosa,(Hornor, 2010) and physical injury to the child, among other problems.(Dinwiddie, Heath, Dunne,2000) Children who are victims are also at an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections due to their immature immune systems and a high potential for mucosal tears during forced sexual contact.(Thornton, 2015) Sexual victimization at a young age has been correlated with several risk factors for contracting HIV including decreased knowledge of sexual topics, increased prevalence of HIV, engagement in risky sexual practices, condom avoidance, lower knowledge of safe sex practices, frequent changing of sexual partners, and more years of sexual activity.(Thornton, 2015)

Statistics from the United States indicates that approximately 15% to 25% of women and 5% to 15% of men were sexually abused when they were children (Whealin, 2016) Most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims; approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, uncles or cousins; around 60% are other acquaintances such as friends of the family, babysitters, or neighbours; strangers are the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases. In over one-third of cases, the perpetrator is also a minor.(Finkelhor, 2009).

Psychological abuse

There are multiple definitions of child psychological abuse. Specifically in 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) added Child Psychological Abuse to the DSM-5, describing it as "nonaccidental verbal or symbolic acts by a child's parent or caregiver that result, or have reasonable potential to result, in significant psychological harm to the child. (Donald, 2014). In 1995, APSAC defined it as: spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting, corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness, or neglect" or "A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value in meeting another's needs (John, 2011)

Other authorities have defined it as the production of psychological and social defects in the growth of a child as a result of behavior such as loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism, and denigration of the child's personality.(Theoklitou, 2012) Other examples include name-calling, ridicule, degradation, destruction of personal belongings, [torture or killing of a pet](#), excessive [criticism](#), inappropriate or excessive demands, withholding

communication, and routine labeling or [humiliation](#).(National Center for Victims of Crime, 2011)In 2014, the APA stated that:

- "Childhood psychological abuse [is] as harmful as sexual or physical abuse."
- Psychological maltreatment is "the most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse and neglect."
- "Given the prevalence of childhood psychological abuse and the severity of harm to young victims, it should be at the forefront of mental health and social service training(American Psychological Association, 2015)"

Corroborating this position, Jeremy (2015) provided evidence that victims of emotional abuse may react by distancing themselves from the abuser, internalizing the abusive words, or fighting back by [insulting](#) the abuser. Emotional abuse can result in abnormal or disrupted [attachment development](#), a tendency for victims to blame themselves (self-blame) for the abuse, [learned helplessness](#), and overly passive behavior (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2011).

Neglect: Child neglect is the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child, to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety or well-being may be threatened with harm. Neglect is also a lack of attention from the people surrounding a child, and the non-provision of the relevant and adequate necessities for the child's survival, which would be a lack of attention, love, and nurturing.(Theoklitou, 2012)

Some observable signs of child neglect include: the child is frequently absent from school, begs or steals food or money, lacks needed medical and dental care, is consistently dirty, or lacks

sufficient clothing for the weather.("Chronic Neglect", 2012). The 2010 Child Maltreatment Report (NCANDS), states, "as in prior years, neglect was the most common form of maltreatment". (["Child Maltreatment 2010: Summary of Key Findings"](#), 2012)

Neglectful acts can be divided into six sub-categories: (["What is Child Abuse and Neglect?"](#), 2015)

- Supervisory neglect: characterized by the absence of a parent or guardian which can lead to physical harm, sexual abuse or criminal behavior;
- Physical neglect: characterized by the failure to provide the basic physical necessities, such as a safe and clean home;
- Medical neglect: characterized by the lack of providing medical care;
- Emotional neglect: characterized by a lack of nurturance, encouragement and support;
- Educational neglect: characterized by the caregivers lack to provide an education and additional resources to actively participate in the school system; and
- Abandonment: when the parent or guardian leaves a child alone for a long period of time without a babysitter.

Neglected children may experience delays in physical and psychosocial development, possibly resulting in [psychopathology](#) and impaired [neuropsychological](#) functions including [executive function](#), [attention](#), processing speed, language, memory and [social skills](#). Researchers investigating maltreated children have repeatedly found that neglected children in foster and adoptive populations manifest different emotional and behavioral reactions to regain lost or secure relationships and are frequently reported to have disorganized attachments and a need to control their environment. Such children are not likely to view caregivers as being a source of safety, and instead typically show an increase in aggressive and hyperactive behaviors which

may disrupt healthy or secure attachment with their adopted parents. These children have apparently learned to adapt to an abusive and inconsistent caregiver by becoming cautiously self-reliant, and are often described as glib, manipulative and disingenuous in their interactions with others as they move through childhood.(Golden & Prater, 2009) Children who are victims of neglect have a more difficult time forming and maintaining relationships, such as romantic or friendship, later in life due to the lack of attachment they had in their earlier stages of life.

FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE IN NIGERIA:

Child abuse in Nigeria appears in various forms. According to Ebigbo (2003), found that child abandonment, sexual abuse, child neglect, vagrancy, kidnapping and hawking were the most seen forms of child abuse” (p. 2). This paper discusses the following forms of child abuse in Nigeria: child labour, child abandonment, vagrancy, sexual abuse, child marriage, child trafficking and female genital mutilation. These are the common and dangerous forms of child abuse in Nigeria today.

Child abuse includes any behavior which neglects the child’s survival and development needs, causes physical or emotional injury, or subjects the child to measures, situations and experiences which interfere with his healthy development. Children in Nigeria are exposed vulnerably to engage in street/highway hawking, exploitative labour and domestic help, street begging, girl-child marriage, illiteracy and female genital mutilation.

- 1) Child Labour: The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defined child labour as “work that is mentally, physically and socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and deprives them opportunities for schooling and development”. According to Adedapo (2004)child labour in Nigeria is the employment of

children under the age of eighteen in the manner that restricts or prevents them from basic education and development. Child labour remains a major source of concern in Nigeria. The high level of diverse and tedious jobs that children execute in dangerous circumstances is particularly worrisome. These jobs include being street vendors, beggars, car washers or watchers and shoe shiners. Others work as apprentice mechanics, hair dressers and bus conductors, while a large number work as domestic servants. It is worrisome that young girls and boys are sent from rural areas to families in the cities to serve as house-maids and house-boys. Children who work as house-helps may also be required either by their parents or by the families they serve to sell items of food, clothing and general merchandise on the streets. In most cases, they are part-time street traders and subject to many of the damaging facets of street life such as kidnapping, drug abuse and prostitution.

In the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria, children may attend morning or afternoon school and hawk goods out of school hours, though there are some children who trade on the streets the whole day. The children's income helps their families or house-madams financially or pay for school fees at times of their children against the social contract they had with the parents from village to train the child. It is a fact of common knowledge that at the public highways leading into and out of the major cities in Nigeria, children are actively involved in hawking to the extent of even obstructing traffic and constituting a cog to the free flow of same. It is the same Nigerian child that hawks at ministries, social welfare departments, police stations and even the court premises, and nobody seems to show concern. It is quite convincing that no child desired to be involved in exploitative labour, but where as in our economy, there is depression and hardship, a child would

voluntarily accept a job that is labour intensive and exploitative just to source money for his school fees, future trade or assist the poor parents.

- 2) **Child Abandonment:** There have been increased cases of abandonment of normal infants by unmarried or very poor mothers in our society. An online media, News NAIJ.com captured some cases of child abandonment thus: On January 27, 2015, a baby was found inside a plastic bag in the Abule Egba suburb, Lagos. The baby was approximately 3 months old. Also in December 2013, a 23 year old woman who allegedly dumped her new born baby in Dutse, Jigawa state was arrested by the police operatives. In 2014, a sales girl at Alaba Rago market in Ojo area of Lagos State gave birth in the toilet and then tried to flush the baby. However, the baby got stuck in it. When he was released, he died (www.naija.com).
- 3) **Vagrancy:** A vagrant is a person without a settled home. Vagrant children are usually found in the streets of our cities. They live or work on the streets deprived of family care and protection. These children, usually wretched and ragged, are forced to the streets as a result of abuse and exploitation by people responsible for them. The National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria(2015) identified four forms of street children in Nigeria to include:
 - i. The Almajiri, who are a fallout of the abuse of the Tsangaya system of Islamic education.
 - ii. The child hawkers who are forced to the street by their families, to help in bringing in money to support the family, or as a result of being trafficked and used for child labour.

- iii. The child beggars, who are out on the streets on their own or who accompany disabled adults.
- iv. The 'area boys' seen in Nigeria's largest city (Lagos). They are delinquent youths who roam the streets and markets extorting money from unsuspecting members of the public.

4. Sexual Abuse: Child sexual abuse can be described as a form of child abuse in which an adult uses a child for sexual stimulations. According to Theoklitou (2012) child sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed towards the physical gratification or financial profit of the person committing the act. Martin (1993) listed some forms of child sexual abuse to include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities, indecent exposure of the genitals to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual sexual contact with a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, or using a child to produce child pornography. NAN (2015) reported that child sexual abuse occurs all over the world but its phenomenal growth over the years in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. The National Statistics Office (2008) in its

National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) report in 2008 stated that over 25% of adolescents in Nigeria often experience the first sexual abuse at the age of 15.

- 5. Girl Child Marriage: Child marriage is the marriage whereby minors are given in the matrimony. Child marriage is common in many parts of the world, especially in parts of Asia and Africa including Nigeria. Such marriages are typically arranged and often forced; as young children are generally not capable of giving valid consent to enter into

marriage. Marriages under the age of majority have a great potential to constitute a form of child abuse.

Onwe (2014) observed that child marriage in Nigeria is more among the northerners with minimal practice in southern part of the country. The girl- child marriage poses life threatening risk like Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), and associated pregnancy related complications. The tradition of early marriage is very difficult to change and has led to abusive practices which are condoned by parents. According to Okolo (1989) the practice has made girls engage in street hawking to assist the mother to buy household goods for them when they marry. In some cases you may see a girl-child betrothed to a man who is of the age of her father. The child whose rights are violated or abused may not even be disturbed since she takes it as a normal way of life or the culture of her people.

6. **Child Trafficking:** This is the recruitment transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. David (2005)[16] observed that children are trafficked for several purposes such as commercial sexual exploitation, bonded labour, camel jockeying, child domestic labour, drug couriering, child soldiering, illegal adoption and begging. It is difficult to obtain reliable estimate of the number of children trafficked each year, primarily due to the criminal nature of the practice. But the International Labour Organization in 2002 estimated that over 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. In Nigeria, child trafficking has been on the increase in the recent times.

Information provided by the immigration authorities also indicated that children between the ages of seven and sixteen have been transported to Gabon and Cameroon, from various points in the states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers and Imo. Between March 1994 and January

1997, at least 400 children were rescued in Akwa Ibom State, which is one of the main departure points for Gabon (The Guardian, August 9, 1998).

7. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Female Genital Mutilation is defined by the World Health Organization (W.H.O)2014 as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers who often play other central roles in communities such as attending childbirths. Female Genital Mutilation is recognized internationally as a violation of the human right of girls and women. W.H.O (2014) stated that, Female Genital Mutilation has no benefits, and it harms girls and women. The practice is therefore a form of child abuse and should not be tolerated in this modern era. Consequences of this practice include shock due to severe bleeding, intense pain due to the traditional methods usually used, risk of HIV/AIDS and death in some cases.

CAUSES OF CHILD ABUSE IN NIGERIA

Child abuse is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes. Understanding the causes of child abuse is critical to addressing the problem. Some causes of child abuse identified by Okebukola (2012) include: unwanted pregnancy, poverty, broken homes, and busy parents.

1. Unwanted Pregnancy: This refers to the sum of mis-timed and unwanted pregnancies. Pre-marital pregnancy has attained terrifying dimension such that it has become a social problem facing the Nigerian society. Its problems, most prevalent of which is the resultant population increase, has undoubtedly continued to place unbearable burden on the individual, the family, the community and the entire society. According to Aigbe and Zannu (2012) over 900,000 births to adolescents occur annually and 150 out of every

1000 women who gave birth in Nigeria are 19 years old or under. These young people who may not be prepared for the challenging task of being parents end up producing children who are often denied quality education and other social opportunities of legitimate inheritance. The children usually grow up without the needed care and support they deserve to develop appropriately. Children who find themselves in such situations may be forced to take child labour as a means of survival. Also, some of these young girls end up abandoning their innocent children on the streets.

2. Poverty: Poverty as a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompasses such issues as inadequate income, nutrition and education. It is characterized by vulnerability and exposure to risk, low life expectancy, low purchasing power, insufficient access to social and economic services. A major cause of child abuse can be traced to poverty. Hence, LesaBethea (1999)observed that poverty is the most frequently and persistently noted factor for child abuse.

Majority of families where child abuse occurs live in poverty. Drucker (1997) cited by Odu and Alokun (2011)concluded in his research that although child abuse occurs across socioeconomic spectrum, evidence shows that child abuse is more likely to occur in poor families. Some girls who are mostly from poor families go as far as producing babies and selling them in order to make money. This has led to the increase of illegal maternity homes popularly known as “Baby Factories” or “Baby Farms”, where children are born and sold to prospective buyers. Also in recent times children are seen engaged in petty trading and street begging; while some hawk for their parents and guardians when they should be laying solid foundation for their future. There are also cases of child

prostitution to get money. Poverty is therefore a major factor that drives child abuse in Nigeria.

3. Broken Homes: When any marriage stands on the brink of collapse, attention is usually given to the differences of the couple. This is sometimes at the expense of the total wellbeing of the children of the marriage. The divorce of a child's parents can lead to child abuse due to diminished parental care. Alokun (2010) observed that children are safer living with their biological married parents than in other family configurations. Breakdown of marriages or death of one or both parents can therefore lead to the abuse of children. This is due to the fact that there are little or no safety nets for such victims who are usually abandoned to their fate.
4. Search for greener pasture by Parents: The children may become neglected or abused when the parents are too busy to find and spare time with the children and supervise them. Such parents leave their children at home and search for greener pasture. Ebigbo (2002) noted that this occurs most commonly in homes in which all material needs and more have been provided. The ever busy parents discover too late that the children have found alternative pursuits often involving crimes and drugs.

EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN COMBATING CHILD ABUSE IN NIGERIA:

ObiKeguna (2008) observed that in Nigeria, no attention was given to child abuse until very recent times. According to her, the first professional efforts to harmonize professional contributions and enlighten the public, culminated in all African International Workshop on "Child Labour in Africa" which was organized by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection of Child Abuse and Neglect in Africa (ANPPCAN) in April 1986. ANPPCAN was formed by a number of African delegates to look into child abuse/neglect as it pertains to Africa.

It is noteworthy that the Nigerian Government has made frantic efforts to deal with the problem of child abuse in recent times. One of such efforts is the ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC). On 20th November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly Adopted the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), while the Organization of the African Union Assembly of Heads of States of government adopted the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC) in July 1990. Nigeria has signed both international instruments and had ratified them in 1991 and 2000 respectively. Since the ratification of these international instruments, Nigeria has instituted various legislative and institutional measures at both Federal and State levels, aimed at addressing various forms of child abuse. Some recently enacted legislation include:

a. The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003.

b. Trafficking in Person (prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015, which replaced the Trafficking in Persons (prohibition) Law Administration Act 2003 (as amended in 2005)

c. Ebonyi state Law No.010 (2001) on the Abolition of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Children and Women.

d. Edo State Female Genital Mutilation (prohibition) Law 2002.

e. Cross River State Girl Child Marriages and Female Circumcision (prohibition) Law 2000.

These legislations prohibited different forms of child abuse in Nigeria. For instance sections 21-40 of the Child Rights Act 2003 provide for the protection of the rights of the child through the prohibition of:

1. Child marriage
2. Child betrothal
3. Infliction of tattoos and skin marks
4. Exposure to use, production and trafficking of drugs and other psychotropic substances
5. Use of children in any criminal activity
6. Abduction and unlawful removal and transfer of a child from lawful custody
7. Forced, exploitative or hazardous child labour including employment of the children as domestic helps outside their own home or family environment.

Under the Child Rights Act 2003, the age of legal majority for all purposes irrespective of gender has been fixed at eighteen (18) years, including the issue of consent to marriage or sexual activity. The Act prohibits marriage by any person below the age of eighteen (18) years.

The Government of Nigeria has also evolved some Institutions charged with child protection issues including protection against child abuse. These include:

- a. National and State Child Right Implementation Committee.
- b. Child Development Departments in the Federal and State ministries of Women Affairs.
- c. National Council of Child Rights Advocates of Nigeria (NACCRAN) as the Umbrella NGO involved in child rights advocacy.
- d. Nigerian Children's Parliament.

e.National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP).

These institutions of Government have made efforts in addressing issues of child abuse in the country. For instance, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in a Press Release on 28th July 2015 announced that it recently uncovered child abuse cases during school sensitization campaign in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. According to the Press Release, evidence of the abuses were clearly seen from one school to another as some of the children have fresh physical marks and swollen heads reportedly inflicted on them by their guardians who use objects such as pressing irons, wooden spoons, electric irons and pounding pestle as corrective tools. The agency promised to step up its activities against human trafficking issues and child related abuses ([www.naptip.gov.ng/...](http://www.naptip.gov.ng/)).

However, it has been observed that these efforts of government, especially the Child Rights Act have not yielded the desired result (Ezeamalu 2014& UNICEF Nigeria, 2015). For instance, out of the 36 states of the country, only 26 States have passed the Child Rights Act for onward enforcement (Amalu, 2010).In almost all the states, children of school age are still out of school. In places like Akwa Ibom, children are still branded witches and wizards beaten and starved. In virtually all the states of the Federation there is a record of one instance of child abuse or the other.

ISSUES IN CHILD ABUSE IDENTIFICATION AND REPORTING IN NIGERIA.

- 1) Poor economic status resulting in lack of training and educational courses on child abuse identification and reporting.

- 2) The lack of computerization and staff shortages makes the assessment of dates and reasons for children's previous attendances to the healthcare institution more difficult thereby making identification and reporting of child abuse cases difficult.
- 3) Some child abuse cases are being performed by people who should have been in the position to protect the child from abuse or easily report the case when it occurs. For instance, when a child is being physically abused by his/her parent or sexually abused by his/her uncle.
- 4) The peoples' perceptions can be influenced by some cultural and religious issues.
- 5) Nature and sensitivity of child abuse: Some people may not like to report some sensitive cases like sexual abuse so that they would not be stigmatized.
- 6) The absence of assertive law, clear regulations and accreditations to deal with child abuse cases participated in reducing the identification and reporting of child abuse and also formed the main barrier to adequate service delivery.
- 7) Lack of consent: Patients' families may not want the episode to be recorded thereby refusing to give consent for the case to be reported.
- 8) Fear of disruption in friendship or/and family relationships if an abused case is being reported.
- 9) Ignorance: Parents or even the abused child may give a variety of explanations for why they did not tell anyone or make an official report, including not realizing that what was happening was wrong.
- 10) Lack of time for identification of the abuse and child abuse not being considered a medical problem.

- 11) Lack of interest, level of educational characteristics and training in the area of child abuse identification and reporting.

Several studies indicated that nurses' willingness to identify and report child abuse is affected by cultural norms ([Feng and Levine, 2005](#); [Gilbert et al., 2009](#)). According to a study by Halileh and Abdullah (2009), it was found that the main challenges to effective child protection services were sociocultural issues, training and funding.

Roles of Nurses in Overcoming the Issues in Child Abuse Identification and Reporting

- 1) To advocate for the establishment of a clear and structured child protection policies which would help Nurses to report and deal with abuse cases and improve the effectiveness of reporting as well as caring for such cases.
- 2) To work in collaboration with communities, different agencies, private and governmental institutions to be easily informed about child abuse and to take proper actions for their protection.
- 3) To advocate for the enactment of clear laws and regulations to assign accountability and responsibility to the total populace in child abuse cases. There is a need for a specific law that protects children from being exposed to violence.
- 4) To properly health educate the communities and general public on the issues concerning child abuse, its consequences and their roles in helping to control the menace.
- 5) Follow up: Nurses can embark on the sole purpose of following up children treated even to the level of checking them up in their homes.

- 6) Nurses can advocate for continuous child abuse salvage platforms all over the internet and radio play stations. The use of ICT for child abuse salvage awareness could be of great help.

Summary

Child abuse has adversely affected the development of many children in Nigeria. This paper has explained the concept of child abuse, issues in child abuse identification and reporting in Nigeria and also stated the Nurses' role in overcoming these issues. The types of child abuse were discussed which include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse and neglect while the forms of child abuse in Nigeria identified are child labour, child abandonment, vagrancy, sexual abuse, child marriage, child trafficking and Female Genital Mutilation. Causes of child abuse include unwanted pregnancy, poverty, broken homes and busy parents. The government has tried to tackle the problem of child abuse through legislations. Religious bodies have also made frantic efforts in controlling child abuse through advocacy, teaching and caring for abused children. The fight against child abuse requires the contribution of all and sundry.

Conclusion

The presence of a well-organized system to deal with this phenomenon is crucial. Protecting children from being abused is not the responsibility of a single agency or a governmental institution. Therefore, all governmental and private institutions in addition to the whole community should collaborate to protect children from being abused. Despite the importance of this collaboration, it is important to restrict this phenomenon by producing clear laws and

regulations to assign accountability and responsibility in child abuse cases. Subsequently, governments should prepare clear policies that define theoretical and practical meanings of child abuse and the chain of responsibility in these incidences. The presence of clear, concise and structured child protection policy helps nurses to report and deal with abuse cases and improves the effectiveness of reporting as well as caring for such cases ([Chihak, 2009](#)).

Recommendations:

- 1) Nurses should encourage members of the public to be alert and diligent, and do all they can to protect children from child abuse.
- 2) Nurses should teach the community members to be aware of child abuse and to alert law enforcement agents and community leaders if they discover a child in danger.
- 3) Nurses in collaboration with religious bodies should intensify effort in teaching moral values to the younger generation so as to stop cases of teenage pregnancies and child abandonment.
- 4) Nurses should develop more robust strategies for caring for abused children.
- 5) Nurses and government agencies should establish functional help lines and instruct members of the public to call immediately they learn of any case of child abuse.
- 6) Parents should be sensitized to give birth to the number of children they can cater for.
- 7) Nurses should collaborate with government agencies for effective implementation of rehabilitation programmes for abused children.
- 8) The governmentt should ensure that the Child Rights Act is implemented.
- 9) There is the need for sanctioning to members of the public who are involved in child abuse; and the need for nurses to collaborate with government agencies for effective identification and reporting of cases of child abuse.

It is believed that if such measures are taken the problem of child abuse in Nigeria will be properly addressed.

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