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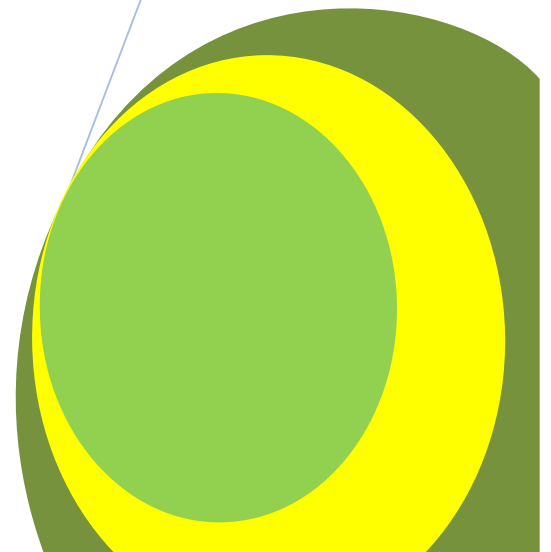
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The Effect of Child Abuse on Youths and their Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of Child Abuse on Youths and their Academic Performance in Bayelsa State. The study used descriptive survey as the design of the study. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select 52 schools out of 161 from which samples of 208 teachers and 1,139 students were drawn using the simple random sampling technique. Five (5) research questions and five (5) hypotheses were used for the study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test. A researcher's structured questionnaire was used to obtain data for the study. The questionnaire contained twenty five (25) items to elicit teachers and students response based on the study. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant difference between the students abused and those not abused in their reading habits, but not applicable in their subject mastery, classroom participation, pass grade in examinations and submission of assignment. Based on the prevalence of child abuse in our society, it was recommended that there should be public enlightenment programmes to combat ignorance and public awareness on the right to freedom from all forms of child abuse.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Youths and Academic Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, childhood is regarded as a period of sensitivity requiring special attention, care and protection. In the traditional African context, children were not allowed to listen to adults' conversations let alone, make comment or contributions. In the same vein, the school system was not an exception to this scenario. Teachers only permit children or students to make contributions when they deemed it necessary in the classroom. In 1959, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared the child Rights Act which was adopted by all member states. Expectedly, the Child Right Act addresses the rights of children and youths under 18 years of age and covers every other right of the children from health care to education, from exploitation and right to their own opinion. In the same vein, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that (80) million children aged 18 and below are engaged as labourers across the world and another two (2) million is involved in prostitution. The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) as a way out of this menace, adopted the convention on the rights of the child in 1989 and over 178 countries including Nigeria, have since expressed satisfaction by ratifying it. Child abuse according to Khartri, (2004) is the employment, use of persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in any sexual explicit conduct or the simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct. Meek, Heit and Page (1996), defined child abuse as maltreatment of a person under the age of eighteen. It can also be defined as intentional treatment of children by adults in a cruel or violent way involving maltreatment of children, sexual harassment, denial of education, child labour, intimidation and molestation, physical assault, neglect and child trafficking among others. African Network for Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) in Umobong (2010), defines child abuse as "the intentional, unintentional or well intentional acts which endanger the physical health, emotional and the educational welfare of children". Child abuse means different things to different people. Umobong in Wahab and Olubunmi (2015) believed that child abuse can be seen as any act of omission or commission, physical or psychological mistreatment or neglect of a child by parents, guardians, caregivers or other adults that may endanger the child's physical, psychological or emotional health and

development. In this definition, wrongfully, maltreating a child or selfishly making an unfair use of a child's services by adults who are responsible for the child constitutes child abuse. Thus, the adult may not be directly related to the child but a person in whose care the child is left can be an abuser. This may include the educators, healthcare workers, daycare workers or other responsible adults (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008).

As a matter of fact, it is generally agreed that children are the future generation, the leaders of tomorrow and the state representatives of the larger society. To blend into the macro society and effectively perform these duties, the rights of the youths cannot be over emphasized thus, denied. In recognition of the above socio-cultural and educational dimension of the child, the United Nations, European Union, African Union and UNICEF, have all joined efforts in advocating for protection of the right and well-being of children. Among other provisions, UNICEF and the National Policy on children, grant children the following rights:

- ❖ Protection against indecent and in-human treatment like abuse and neglect.
- ❖ Provision of a conducive environment to promote early stimulation to learning for the child.
- ❖ Entitlement of every child (male/female) to receive compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education.
- ❖ Promotion and encouragement of child friendly principles in all relevant institutions.

In this present day, children in Bayelsa are abused, abandoned, discarded without any fault of theirs. The world around them is most devoid of every trace of filial love and robs them of all the appurtenances of good living, which their privileged counterparts often take for granted. The resultant effect on abused children are depression from shame, poor sleep patterns of health problem, psychosocial dysfunctions, low self-esteem, food insecurity, parental depression, severe brain damage, extremely violent behavior, attention disorder, poor peer relations (Kurtz, Gauctin, Wodciarski, Houting, 1993).

The importance of this study cannot be over emphasized as the impact of child abuse is far greater than its immediate visible effects. The abused children experiences can shape their development negatively with dire consequences of adult life. These negative consequences will affect not just the child and the family but the society as a whole. Children are not only the most vulnerable class of people but the most important as they represent the future of the families, society, community in particular and the world in general. Judging from the categories and impact of child abuse, the paper focuses attentions on the extent to which the above indices of child abuse affects the academic performance of youths in Bayelsa State as regards their reading habits, subject mastery, classroom participation, pass grades in examination and submission of assignment regularly. Therefore, the effect of child abuse on the academic performance of adults Bayelsa State as a study is the main target of this paper.

BASIC TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

There are various forms of child abuse that are commonly recognized and broadly categorized into five perspectives namely: physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child neglect and educational abuse.

Physical Abuse and Students Academic Performance

Marshuk Salu (2003), summarily defined "physical abuse as characterized by physical injury, such as bruises and fractures that result from punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting with a hard stick, strap or other object and burning. Some cultural practices are generally not defined as physical abuse, but may result in hurting children physically. For example, "coing" or caogio- this is a practice to treat illness by rubbing the body forcefully with a coin or other hard object.

In a study carried out by (Kurtz, Gaudin, Wodarski, and Howing, 1993; and Echenrode and Deal, 1993) shows that physically abused children displayed significant school problems. Their academic performance was poor in all academic subjects, but especially in mathematics and language.

Psychological/Emotional Abuse and Students' Academic Performance

Psychological/Emotional Abuse is assumed to be present in all other forms of abuse. It consists of any attitude or behavior which interferes with a child's mental health or social development, such as yelling, screaming, name calling, shaming, negative comparisons to others, telling children they are "bad" or "no good". Another aspect of emotional abuse is the failure to provide the affection and support necessary for the development of a child's wellbeing, such as ignoring, withdrawal of attention, lack of praise, and lack of positive reinforcement.

The National Clearing-House on Child-Abuse and Neglect Information (2006), defines emotional abuse as "acts or omissions by parents or other caregivers that have caused or could cause serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders". Khartri (2004) noted that psychological or emotional abuse can be seen as any

attitude, behavior or failure to act on the part of a caregiver, which interferes with a child's mental health, social development of sense of self-worth.

Sexual Abuse and Students Academic Performance

Judging from Jill (2003), child sexual abuse generally refers to sexual acts, sexually motivated behaviours involving children or sexual exploitation of children. Sexual abuse includes a wide range of behaviours such as:

- ❖ Oral and or genital penile penetration.
- ❖ Anal or genital digital or other penetration.
- ❖ Genital contact with no intrusion.
- ❖ Indecent exposure
- ❖ Inadequate or inappropriate supervision of child's voluntary sexual activities.
- ❖ Use of a child in prostitution, pornography, internet crime or other sexually exploitative activities.

According to Pitzer(2010), Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is any form of sexual activity with a child or adolescent in which consent is not or cannot be provided (e.g. significant disparity in age, development or size). The sexual activity often includes; physical contact (e.g. penetration, touching) and may also reflect non-contact sexual acts (e.g. exposure to pornography). Examples of sexual abuse include; founding, penetration, pornography, exhibitionism child prostitution and forced observation of sexual act".

Child Neglect and Student Academic Performance:

Umobong (2010) saw child neglect as a failure to provide basic needed care for the child such as shelter, food, clothing, education, supervision, medical care and other basic necessities needed for the child's physical, intellectual and emotional development. It is a situation where the guardians or parents fail to perform some tasks that are necessary for the well-being of the child, which invariably can lead to the child health and safety being endangered. Child neglect according to Jill (2003) is "the most common form of child maltreatment or abuse is generally characterized by omissions in care resulting in significant harm or risk. Neglect is frequently defined in terms of a failure to provide for the child's food, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care". The neglected group of children appeared to display the most severe problems in a number of studies (Eckenrode, Liard, & Daris, 1993). They are the least successful in cognitive tasks when compared with the other types of maltreated children. They are also more fearful, inattentive and apathetic and they had difficulty in concentration on cognitive tasks. Socially, they demonstrated inappropriate behaviors and are not accepted by their classmates. A majority of these neglected children were referred for special education (learning disabilities, social-emotional behavioral difficulties). Teachers reported that these children were performing below grade level and that their rate of school absenteeism was nearly five times that of the comparison with neglected students. Neglect appears to have a long-term impact on academic achievement than other forms of maltreatment.

Educational Abuse and Students' Academic Performance

The National survey of child and Adolescent Wellbeing (NSCAW 2005), found that children placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect tend to score lower than the general population on measures of cognitive capacity, language development and academic achievement (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Cognitive implications of child abuse include; difficulties in learning and in school performance. Many studies have consistently stressed that abused, maltreated or neglected children on the average score lower on cognitive measures and demonstrate lower school achievement when compared with their non-abused peers of similar socio-economic backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the effect of child abuse on the academic performance of youths in secondary schools in Bayelsa State. However, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To ascertain if there is any difference between abused and non-abused students in their reading habits.
2. To find out if there is any difference between abused and non-abused students in their mastery of subject.
3. To examine if there is any difference between abused and non-abused students in their classroom participation.
4. To ascertain if there is any difference between abused and non-abused students in their pass grade in examination.

5. To find out whether there is any difference between abused and non-abused students in their submission of assignments.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are posed to guide the study.

- H0¹ There is no significant difference between abused and non-abused students in their reading habits in secondary schools in Bayelsa State.
- H0² There is no significant difference between abused and non-abused students in their subject mastery.
- H0³ There is no significant difference between abused and non-abused students in their classroom participation.
- H0⁴ There is no significant difference between abused and non-abused students in their pass grade in examinations
- H0⁵ There is no significant difference between abused and non-abused students in their submission of assignments.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study will contribute to existing literature with regards to the effect of child abuse on youth's academic performance. It proffers useful suggestions to make amends, in terms of behavioural change on the part of stakeholders of youths to shows utmost love and care.

METHODOLOGY

The design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey design. The rationale for this design was largely due to the fact that the manifestation of the variables study have already taken place. The target population of this study consist of teachers and students in Bayelsa State.

These are drawn from the eight (8) Local Government Areas in Bayelsa State: Brass, Ekeremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Nembe, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa respectively. The sample size for this study is made up of two hundred and eight (208) teachers and one thousand one hundred & thirty-nine (1,139) SS2 students, both totaling one thousand, three hundred and forty seven (1,347). This sample was drawn from fifty two (52) schools out of the one hundred and sixty-one (161) secondary schools in the state. The sampling procedure adopted in this study is the stratified random sampling technique.

The preference for this sampling technique is informed by its highly representative nature in selection of research elements across the different strata of the population where they are drawn.

The instrument used for this study is a researcher's designed questionnaire that carried twenty five (25) items. Two research assistant were used in the collection of data for analysis. The instrument was directed towards eliciting information from research subjects on the variables that are investigated in the study.

The teachers assessed students' academic performance. The areas of assessment by the teachers are to determine the extent to which students demonstrate knowledge in reading habits, subject mastery, classroom participation, pass grade in exams and submission of assignments. While the students' child abuse questionnaire consists of items demanding the respondent's assessment of the various ways child abuse has affected youths. A total of two hundred and eight (208) copies of the Teachers Perception of Students Academic Performance Questionnaire (TPSAPQ) were distributed to the teachers of the sample while one thousand one hundred and thirty-nine (1139) copies of the students' child abuse questionnaire (SCAQ) were distributed to the sampled students for the study. The number returned was 1115. About 115 were rejected for incomplete responses. The total number used for analysis became 1000. While t-test analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

The reliability of the instruments was determined through the test-retest method. Both instruments were administered to respondents within the population of study. After two weeks of the first administration, a second administration of the same test was made.

Test of Hypotheses

The study formulated five hypotheses to be verified.

The results of the analysis of data presented in tables 1 to 5 are used to verify the five hypotheses respectively.

Test of Hypotheses 1:

Hypotheses 1 (H_0^1): There is no significant difference between students abused and those not abused, in their reading habits.

Table 1: t-test analysis of the difference between the students abused and their non-abused counterparts in their reading habits

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-calc	t-critical	Decision at $P < 0.5$
Abused Students	640	10.53	1.35	998	2.445	1.960	*
Non Abused Students	360	9.92	0.91				

*= significant at $P < 0.5$ level: $N=1000$

The data presented in table 1 shows that, the calculated t-value of 2.445 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level with 998 degrees of freedom. Hence the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between the students abused and those not abused in their reading habits is rejected. The alternative hypothesis which states that, there is a significant difference between the students abused and those not abused in their reading habits is upheld.

Test of Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2 (H_0^2): There is no significant difference between the students abused and those not abused in their subject mastery.

Table 2 t-test analysis of the difference between the students' abused and those not abused in their subject mastery

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-calc	t-critical	Decision at $P < 0.5$
Abused Students	640	10.55	3.01	998	-0.279	1.960	N S
Non Abused Students	360	10.72	3.03				

NS= Not significant at $P < 0.05$ alpha level; $N = 1000$

The data presented in table 2 indicated that, the calculated t-value of -0.279 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level with 998 degrees of freedom. Hence the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between the students abused and those not abused in their subject mastery cannot be rejected.

Test of Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 (H_0^3): There is no significant difference between students' abused and those not abused in their classroom participation.

Table 3: t-test analysis of the difference between students' abused and those not abused in their classroom participation

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-calc	t-critical	Decision at $P < 0.5$
Abused Students	640	9.91	1.31	998	-0.911	1.960	N S
Non Abused Students	360	10.17	1.48				

NS = Not significant at $P < 0.05$ alpha level: $N=1000$

The data presented in Table 3 reveals that, the calculated t-value of -0.911 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level with 998 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between the students' abused and those not abused in their classroom participation is retained.

Test of Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 (H_0^4): There is no significant difference between students' abused and those abused in their pass grade in examination.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the difference between students' abused and those not abused in their pass grades in exams

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-calc	t-critical	Decision at P<0.5
Abused Students	640	13.13	1.48	998	1.683	1.960	N S
Non Abused Students	360	12.58	1.66				

NS = Not significant at $p < 0.05$ alpha level; N = 1000

The data presented in Table 4 indicates that, the calculated t-value of 1.683 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level with 998 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between students abused and those not abused in their pass grade in exams cannot be rejected.

Test of Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 (H_0^5): There is no significant between students' abused and those not abused in their submission of assignment.

Table 5: t-test analysis of the difference between students abused and those not abused in their submission of assignment

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-calc	t-critical	Decision at P<0.5
Abused Students	640	13.53	1.15	998	1.651	1.960	N S
Non Abused Students	360	13.36	1.42				

NS = Not significant at $P < 0.05$ alpha level; N=1000

The data presented on table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.651 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level with 998 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference between students abused and those not abused in their submission of assignment is retained.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the effect of child abuse on youths' academic performance in secondary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Based on the results of the study the following conclusions were made:

1. There is no significant difference between students abused and those not abused with regards to subject mastery, classroom participation, pass grade in exams and in their submission of assignment.
2. Some of the results of the study contradicted some findings of previous works.
3. The discovery of these findings has overtaken some of the presuppositions put forward in both the background to the study and statement of the problem. It could therefore be generally concluded that students abused could perform effectively as their non-abused counterparts with regards to subject mastery, classroom participation, pass grade in exams and submission of assignment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be public enlightenment programmes to combat ignorance and public awareness of the rights to freedom from all forms of child abuse.
2. A child should not be disciplined when the adult's anger is out of control.
3. Intense awareness should be created among teachers and school managers using seminars, workshops and training programmes about what constitutes child abuse.
4. However, for all types of abuse, there should be a compelling intervention by school personnel to try to prevent further maltreatment and to assist the child victims with their learning difficulties.

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