

## ***Prevalence of Child Neglect among in-School Adolescents in Owo Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the prevalence of child neglect among in-school adolescents in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The population consisted of all adolescent students in Owo Local Government Area (LGA) of Ondo State. A sample of 400 respondents was selected from four secondary schools which were randomly selected using simple random sampling technique from the twelve secondary schools in the Local Government Area. The study was guided by one research question and two hypotheses, which were tested at 0.05 alpha level using t-test and ANOVA. The result indicated that there was high prevalence of child neglect among adolescents in Owo Local Government Area. The result also showed that there was no significant difference in child neglect experienced by adolescents on the bases of gender and age. Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that gender and age were not barriers to child neglect of adolescents in Owo LGA. It is therefore recommended, among others, that parents, teachers and the general public should be enlightened on the effect of child neglect on the overall wellbeing of the adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Child, neglect, in-school, adolescents, prevalence.

### **Introduction**

There seems to be an increase in the rate of child neglect among the adolescents in Nigeria. Many adolescents' growth and development tend to have been tremendously hindered due to neglect. This probably may have invariably affected them especially during their formative years. There tend to be considerable numbers of adolescents who could not attend to anything in life because they have been greatly neglected. This could affect them emotionally, socially and psychologically. Many of these adolescents are neglected and not given considerable recognition by their parents,

teachers, and significant people in their society. A large number of these youths are neglected, physically, verbally, sexually, and emotionally.

Neglect is the failure of parent to provide for the development of the child, where the parent is in the position to do so. Parents may fail to provide for the education, health care, feeding, shelter, emotional development and safe living conditions of a child. Neglect is quite different from circumstances of poverty in that neglect can occur only in cases where reasonable resources are available to the family or caregiver. Neglect can manifest in children in diverse ways such as non-compliance with health care recommendations, failure to seek appropriate health care, deprivation of food resulting in hunger and denying the child the atmosphere to thrive physically. Other causes of neglect could include the exposure to environmental dangers.

According to a data from US Department of Education (2005), between 2 – 3% of the population under the age of 18 years, experience some form of maltreatment each year. Akmatou (2010) researched into 28 developing countries which included Gambia, Ghana, Cameroon and other countries including Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. A total of 124,916 children of ages 2 – 14 years participated in the research project. A median of 83% and 43% of children in African region experienced psychological and several physical abuse respectively; while 56% and 9% in the countries respectively experienced other forms of abuse (Akmaatou, 2010). The World Health Organisation (1999) defined child abuse or maltreatment as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sex abuse or neglect or negligent treatment involving commercial or other forms of exploitation. This could result in actual or potential harm of the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility trust or power (Umobong, 2010).

Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a child's emotion and social life is being tampered with through yelling at children and bullying. This negative trait tends to affect children self-esteem and confidence (Azi & Saluhu, 2016). Children can face abuse in the school when senior bullies the junior students; teachers can also abuse students emotionally through passing uncomplimentary comments. At home, parents abuse their children when they refuse to provide them with basic needs e.g. food, clothing, shelter, education and health care. Child neglect could be a great harm to children physically, emotionally, sexually and it could even lead to untimely death. Chalk, Gibbons and Scarupa (2003) asserted that child abuse and neglect tend to negatively affect the child physically, psychologically and behaviourally. According to Azi and Saluhu (2016), the psychological effects mostly appear as high risk behaviours which could affect the abused or neglected child academically and emotionally.

There is empirical evidence that shows that emotional abuse especially among children exists in developed and developing countries. In America, the rate of emotional abuse is estimated to be 103 per 1000 among 2 – 17year old (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner & Hamby, 2005). In Nigeria, a study conducted by Okoza, Aluede and Ojugo (2011) among 1,537 secondary school students in Edo State, revealed prevalent and diverse dimensions of emotional abuse among participants. The male students were found to have suffered the following dimensions of emotional abuse, including isolation, ignoring and verbal assaulting than their female counterparts. While it was found that the senior students unlike the junior students suffered more from emotional abuse dimensions of dominating and terrorizing, the junior students experienced more emotional isolation than the senior students.

According to Mcley (2003), in Pennsylvania over 23,000 cases of suspected abuse were recorded out of which 5,000 reports were substantiated. Perera, Qustbye, Ariyananda and Lelwala (2009) reported that in Southern Sri-Lanka, out of a sample of 1,099 males and 1,290 females in late adolescents, 31.33% of males and 25.4% of females reported of being subjected to emotional abuse at least a few times in the 3 months preceding the survey. Therefore, this research seeks to ascertain the prevalence of child neglect among adolescents in Ondo State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Neglect is a very common behaviour that is often being displayed by parents, teachers and siblings. This negative behaviour tends to affect many adolescents adversely; such that some often experience poor adjustment and stability in every facet of their lives. It often makes some students to perform below expectation academically. There are some that often develop very low self-esteem and self-worth. Some often have difficulty relating and interacting with other people.

Therefore, there is the need to urgently address this trend that could be hampering the proper development of the adolescents. Parents, teachers and the people within the society must be aware of the negative effect of child neglect on the adolescents. It is on this backdrop that this research study investigates prevalence of child neglect among adolescents in secondary schools in Owo Local Government Area of Ondo State.

### **Research questions**

**Research question 1:** What is the level of prevalence of child neglect in Owo Local Government?

## **Hypotheses**

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of gender.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of age.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a survey research design in which questionnaire was adopted to obtain the respondents' opinion on the prevalence of child neglect among adolescents in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of all the secondary school students in Owo Local Government Area of Ondo State. Four secondary schools were randomly selected from twelve public secondary schools in the Local Government Area. Simple random sampling technique was used to select one hundred respondents in each of the four schools, thus a total of 400 respondents were used for this research study. An Instrument titled Child Neglect Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study; the instrument was divided into sections A and B. Section A sought for information on the respondents' demographic data such as gender, age, school type and class level. Section B consisted of twelve items dealing with prevalence of child neglect. The respondents were to respond to each of the items choosing an option from the four-point Likert Scale response format which includes – Very Much True of Me (VMTM) 4, Generally True of Me (GTM) 3, Rarely True of Me (RTM) 2, Never True of Me (NTM) 1. The respondents were to respond to each of the items with a four- point Likert scale response of 4 – 1.

Face and content validity were established by experts in Test and Measurement from Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State. The reliability was established by administering the questionnaire twice on the same set of students who were not part of the original respondents at an interval of two weeks. The two results were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient; the result obtained was 0.76 which was considered appropriate for this research study. The data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics such as the mean, range, frequency, simple percentage and standard deviation to answer the research question; while inferential statistics which include t-test and ANOVA were used to test the two hypotheses.

## **Presentation of results**

**Research question 1:** What is the level of prevalence of child neglect in Owo Local Government?

To answer this question, items in this section of the questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation. Since the section of the questionnaire for this contains 12 items, the minimum and maximum obtainable scores are 12 and 48. The calculated mean and standard deviation of the 400 respondents to the 12 items are 19 and 5 respectively. One standard deviation was added and subtracted from the mean to arrive at moderate prevalence level of child neglect (i.e.  $19 \pm 5 = 14$  to  $24$ ). Scores falling below 14 and above 24 (i.e.  $12 - 13$ ;  $25 - 48$ ) were classified as low and high prevalence level of child neglect respectively. Details are shown on table 1.

**Table 1:** Descriptive analysis showing the prevalence of child neglect among adolescents

Level	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	12 – 13	132	33%
Moderate	14 – 24	182	45.3%
High	25 – 48	86	21.5%

From table 1, 132 (33%) of the adolescents perceived prevalence of child neglect to be low, 182 (45.3%) of the adolescents perceived it to be moderate, while 86 (21.5%) perceived it to be high. It can be concluded therefore, that prevalence of child neglect among adolescents in Owo Local Government Area of Ondo State moderate.

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of gender

To test this hypothesis, the items on the questionnaire were subjected to t-test statistics. The result is shown in table 2.

**Table 2:** Difference on child neglect on the basis of gender

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t cal	Sig
Males	188	17.7	7.6	398	1.59	0.115
Females	212	16.9	6.9			

From table 2 the value of t-cal is 1.159 and p-value is 0.115. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis is upheld. This shows that there is no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of gender.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of age.

To test this hypothesis, data collected from the questionnaire were subjected to one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The result is shown in table 3.

**Table 3:** ANOVA table showing the influence of child neglect among adolescents

Sources	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F cal	Sig
Between Groups	3.5.69	2	17.84		
Within Groups	26508.22	397	66.71	.267	.766
Total	26543.910	399			

From table 3, the value of F-cal is 0.267 while P-value is 0.755. Since P-value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis is upheld. It shows that there is no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of age.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The result on the research question on prevalence of child neglect indicated that it is a common issue among the adolescents in Owo Local Government area of Ondo State. Many children and adolescents seem to be left alone to fend and take care of themselves. This may probably be due to the fact that some children are made to hawk and fend for themselves without which their parents and guardians are not ready to take care of them. Some parents even leave the care of their younger children to the older children; thus, these ones are made to become mature and responsible very early in life. All these challenges tend to have some drastic and adverse effect on the health of these adolescents while some often have difficulties in coping with their academic pursuit. The result is in line with the findings of Okoza, Aluede and Ojugo (2011) that equally found prevalent and diverse dimension of emotional abuse among the participants of 1,537 secondary school students in Edo State. It is also in line with the result obtained in Pennsylvania where over 23,000 cases of suspected abuse were recorded out of which 5,000 reports were substantiated (Mcley, 2003).

The hypothesis on difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of gender, also indicated that there was no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of gender. That is both the male and female adolescents have similar perceptions on child neglect. This result is contrary with the findings of Perera, Qustbye, Ariyananda and Lelwala (2009) that observed that in

Southern Sri-Lanka, out of a sample of 1,099 males and 1,290 females in late adolescents, 31.3% of males and 25.4% of females reported of being maltreated at least a few times in 3 months preceding the survey.

The second hypothesis equally indicated that there was no significant difference in child neglect as perceived by adolescents on the basis of age. The findings show that the perceptions of adolescents on the issue of child neglect is not influenced by their ages. This also supported Finkelhor, Ovmrod, Turner and Hamby (2005) report that in America the rate of neglect and emotional abuse is estimated to be 103 per 1000 among 2 – 17 years old.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that there is the prevalence of child neglect which tends to adversely affect the overall development of many adolescents. More so, male and female adolescents have similar perception on child neglect irrespective of their gender and age.

### **Recommendations**

Therefore, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) There should be enlightenment programmes for parents so as to create awareness on the effects of child neglect on adolescents.
- 2) Teachers must be properly trained to avoid the issue of child neglect especially when they are training up these young children. The effects on these children could be overwhelming on their overall development.
- 3) The general public should be educated to know the adverse effect that this problem could constitute to the overall well-being of these adolescents.
- 4) Adolescents that have been neglected or maltreated should be identified so that they could be properly helped and assisted to live normal and adequate life. This is to enable them to overcome the effect of this negative upbringing so as to live a normal and proper life.

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