

Child Abuse and Academic Performance of Students in Mathematics in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research was carried out to investigate child abuse and academic performance of student in mathematics in Calabar metropolis, Cross River State. A sample of two hundred (200) students was randomly selected for the study. The instruments used for the study were questionnaire and Mathematics Achievement Test. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics. The results indicated that physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse significantly relate with students' academic performance. The study recommends that government should embark on public enlightenment campaign to educate the masses on the menace of child abuse.

Keywords: child, abuse, academic, performance, student

Introduction

Education is a crucial sector in any nation as it plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. Dauda (2010) holds the view that government's investment and total expenditure on education are the only outlay that remains significantly associated with growth. In the same vein, Umo (2007) holds that the development of any nation is traceable to its level of stock of human capital which normally entails education and health. This explains why the state of education in Nigeria continues to be a national discourse at all levels. Dike (2003) argues that education in Nigeria is not offering the much needed, help to civic, health, social, political and economic advancement in the country. The deteriorating and declining quality of

education in Nigeria has impacted negatively on the nation's moral, civic, cultural and economic sustainability.

In view of the Federal Government of Nigeria's introduction of the Universal Basic Education whereby education is free and compulsory for all citizens at least to the secondary level of education, it is important to utilize the value of science. The bedrock of all science related courses is usually said to be Mathematics. It is the foundation of all technological advancement of every nation. Being aware of this, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through her National Policy on Education, maintains the compulsory nature of Mathematics in all levels of education, up to tertiary level; though as a general course at the tertiary level. Owing to this, governments at all levels are making serious efforts to provide high quality Mathematics education. It is worthy of note that recognizable attempts, by various stakeholders, have been made to enhance teaching and learning of Mathematics. Students' poor academic performance in Mathematics is not only a problem to the students or their families, but also to the entire society, whose peace, development and progress depend on the success of schools in ensuring that students acquire the type of education that would make them imbibe moral standards and contribute maximally to the growth of the society. When students cannot perform maximally in schools, it is believed that they have not acquired effective learning in all the domains of educational objectives, and which is a pointer to their poor functioning as useful members of the society.

The level at which students are disciplined, the level at which they can apply learnt skills in solving their immediate problems and their anticipated level of functionality in the society tend to be measured by the level of their academic performance in schools. Students' poor academic performance spells out poor quality of education delivery at any level, as well as spells out doom for the students whose life may become uncertain and full of anticipated misery (Olufemi et al., 2018). This implies that students' academic performance in Mathematics may be a predictor of societal peace, progress and development in Nigeria. Thus measures must be put in place to ensure that Mathematics students attain high performance level in schools. The ecological model proposes that child abuse will best be understood if it is analyzed multi-dimensionally with emphasis on the individual family, social environment and cultural milieu, as well as the dynamic interaction between these levels. This model appears appropriate for the study of child abuse in Nigeria, and its application is advocated as a vehicle for improving the quality of children being abused.

All children are born to grow, to develop, to live and to articulate their needs and feelings for their self-protection. Although growing up can be difficult, many children and young people receive the love and care they need to develop into healthy happy young adults. For their development, children need the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them and honestly help them to become well-adjusted in the world. But some children are hurt, neglected and used by adults or other children. Younger children may not be aware that what is happening to them is abuse. Abuse can mean different things to different children and can happen once or many times during childhood.

Furthermore, it should be recognized that the child occupies a unique and privileged position in the African society, and that for the full and harmonious development of his

personality, the child should grow up in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. It should also be recognized that the child requires special care with regard to physical health, mental and social development; he also needs legal protection in condition of freedom, dignity and security.

Nwagbara (2005) defined physical abuse as the infliction of noticeable injuries and pain on the child. Physical abuse manifests in form of bruises and wounds on the body of the child which may result from beating and flogging or other source. Physical abuse also involves either committing actual bodily harm or failing to prevent such harm from occurring. This may include beatings, pulling of hair and burning. Indicators of physical abuse include fear of being touched, fear of being examined, chronic running away, self-destructive tendencies, aggressiveness towards others, bald patches, fear of medical help or examination.

Ekpe (1998) said that any child who is physically abused, for instance a child who is being bullied in school by his teacher, would not like going to school again and this will affect his academic performance. Nzewi (2006) said that because of the mother infant separations and the other conditions of deprivation on institutional care, institutionalized infants would exhibit a delay in the achievement of his/her academics. It was further said that institutionalized infants will be below the normal range for weight as well as being more susceptible to greater frequencies of infections. Steele (2000) said when a child is abused physically, he would exhibit a delay in his academic achievement, stop going to school at that particular time which will later affect his/her academic performance.

Many children in this 21st Century are still physically abused. Hundreds of thousands of children are physically abused each year by someone close to them. Physical abuse may include burning with hot object or fire, hitting a child with a dangerous object, beating, kicking, punching, throwing a child against the wall, severe physical punishment, choking, pulling the hair, scalding water, among others. Horrible stories are told of how children are burnt to death purposely; there is also an example of a situation where two children were push against the wall, with severe physical punishment, choking, pull punishment, among others. Some parents and caregivers use these measures as child rearing or control practice.

George (2004) observed that Nigerian parents approve of spanking and slapping of their children as correction measure not as an abuse. Some children, according to Blunder (1998), with mild or transitory physical problems may experience no academic deficiencies at all. Most often these high achieving physically disabled children have intellectual abilities, even if they cannot move freely they can be provided with learning materials where they are seated. This can enhance their performance. Papalia and Olds (1998) state that some students who have serious and even chronic health problems still manage to achieve at high level. Taylor and Walker (1999) indicated that the problem the physically impaired person may have may be in school environment and not in intellectual achievement. These children may have difficulty in balance posture, tactile discrimination, motor planning, coordination, and eye co-ordination.

Sexual abuse is the type of abuse that has to do with exploiting a child sexually through rape, incest and so on. Kyriacou and Zhu (2008) said that sexual abuse involves sexual acts being committed on or in the presence of the students, most often by adult relative and less often by an adult siblings or unrelated adults. This may include sexual intercourse, masturbation and taking indecent photographs. Indicators of sexual abuse include self-harm, becoming easily upset, emotional withdrawal, sexual acts towards other students.

Sexual abuse is often difficult to identify because of the complex nature of the circumstances. The students may often be very confused about whether they have in some way consented to the activity. They are often in a situation where the abuser has power over them and has intimidated them into accepting the abuse and keeping it a secret. In the case of secondary school years, they may also be quite confused about what is normal and acceptable behaviours and this may cause their poor academic performance. Kyriacou (2003) in a survey found that 13% of the 213 respondents reported that they had been sexually abused in childhood. Such studies attempting to estimate the incidence of sexual abuse, however, are hampered by the fact that it is hard to obtain a representative sample of respondents and to decide whether a simple minor incident should count equally alongside with persistent abuse in cases of sexual abuse; the victim are females in about 70% of the cases, and most of the girls are abused by family members while most boys are not, although in almost all cases, the abuser is known to the victim and this has a negative implication in academic performance.

Performance in school is affected, especially when the abuse is school-related. Some male teachers are very weak and can abuse children under their care. Any resistance from the students or student will result in failure of the child even if she is an intelligent child. Emotional abuse is another form of child abuse and an effect of the physical abuse. The issue about this form of abuse is that it is usually difficult to detect; but it causes even more deep-seated and long range damage to a child. It is important to note that other forms of abuse can damage the emotion of the child. However, direct sources of emotional abuse include deprivation of good medicare, use of harsh and derogatory language on the child as well as the display of hostile and negative attitudes towards the child.

A study of 271 secondary school students aged 13-14 years in Poland sought to explain psychologically abusive behaviour by teachers and how students attempted to cope with these teachers. Abusers' behaviours included threats (such as threat to contact parents), mockery (such as personal attacks, criticizing the student's appearance). Green (2004) said they are characterized by buildup frustration, anger, hostility, inner conflict. The anti-social behaviour is therefore often unpredictable and triggered by relatively remote minor incidents in a prevailing situation. They exasperate teachers and parents with repetitions of unapproved behavior.

Keoph and Donion (2002) reported that emotionally abused children also get into a vicious cycle by injuring others in school, showing lack of concentration, restlessness, lack of flexibility in thinking and poor school performance. Emotionally abused children have varied repercussions for families and the society. They also end up as street children. The common picture of street children depicts adolescents who hawk for their adult caretakers, school sponsor, foster parents or seek jobs. They have their own experiences of emotional abuse mixed with physical abuse and neglect. But there is also another

visible yet neglected group of street children. Their main feature is the fact that they belong to the adults or parents or the homes in which they reside. These are often adolescents. The members of this group embark on endless all-day work. They can commit crimes like breaking into premises, stealing expensive objects from their own homes and selling them.

Emotional abuse also involves the need for love which is a very important aspect in child rearing. These are often adolescents who need love, warmth, affection and protection. Children who are deprived of these have difficulty in development. Parents or caregivers can abuse their children by threatening them, locking them up alone, insulting them and frequently reminding them of some mental or physical defeat. The infant experiences his first pleasure of human relationship as parents express their feeling of love and warmth on the child; without these the child becomes emotionally disturbed.

Teachers too sometimes have a hand in making children having emotional problems. To this, they fail to provide challenging materials for them to learn. This may result in frustration and boredom, which in turn leads to behaviour regarded by the teacher as antisocial. Some gifted and talented children who want their academic activities to move at the speed of light can put up such behaviours if the teacher is unable to meet their demands. The problem is that most teachers fails to understand these children.

Research questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the research:

- 1) To what extent does physical abuse relate to students' academic performance in secondary schools?
- 2) To what extent does emotional abuse relate to students' academic performance?
- 3) How does sexual abuse relate to students' academic performance in secondary schools?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between physical abuse and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

Ho3: Emotional abuse does not significantly relate to students' academic performance in secondary schools.

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study. This research design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to make inference and generalization of the population by selecting and studying the sample for study. The area of study is Calabar metropolis and the population of this study is made up of all the secondary school students in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State. A sample of two hundred (200) students was randomly selected for the study. The selection was done through simple random sampling technique. This was to give equal and independent opportunity to all the members of the population to be selected for the study. The main instruments used for data collection were

a questionnaire and Mathematics achievement test designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was designed to collect the respondents' personal data such as sex, age, class, among others. Section B is a twelve (12) items four points Likert-type scale designed to measure the three forms of child abuse being investigated. Each item requires the respondent to indicate the frequency of his/her various acts under strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. After the rating by the respondents, the researchers collected 200 copies of the questionnaire which were correctly filled in by the respondents. Mathematics Achievement Test was used in measuring academic performance of the respondents. The generated data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between physical abuse and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

The independent variable involved in this hypothesis is physical abuse, while the dependent variable is academic performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between physical abuse and students' academic performance (N=200)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Physical abuse	3218	6297			74713	0.57*
Academic performance	3092	5463				

*Significant at .05 level, critical r = .138, df = 198

The result in table 1 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.57 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore means that physical abuse has a significant relationship with students' academic performance.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and students' academic performance in secondary schools.

The independent variable involved in this hypothesis is sexual abuse, while the dependent variable is academic performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between sexual abuse and students' academic performance (N=200)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Sexual abuse	3376	6375				
					73926	0.47*
Academic performance	3092	5463				

*Significant at .05 level, critical r = .138, df = 198

The result in table 2 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.47 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore means that sexual abuse have a significant relationship with students' academic performance.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between emotional abuse and academic performance of secondary schools students.

The independent variable involved in this hypothesis is emotional abuse; while the dependent variable is academic performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between emotional abuse and students' academic performance (N=200)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Emotional abuse	3176	6154				
					74647	0.59*
Academic performance	3092	5463				

*Significant at .05 level, critical r = .138, df = 198

The result in table 3 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.59 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore means that emotional abuse has a significant relationship with students' academic performance.

Discussion of the findings

The result from the first hypothesis revealed that physical abuse significantly relates to students' academic performance. The findings of this hypothesis are in line with the view of Steele (2000) who observed that when a child is abused physically by making cuts on the child's body, there is a tendency that the child will run out of the house and will stop going to school at that particular time which will later affect his/her academic performance.

The result from hypothesis two indicated that sexual abuse significantly relates to students' academic performance. The findings of this hypothesis is in agreement with the

view of Henman (2001) who ascertained that cultural dominance of men over women and children also gives permission for men to sexually abuse children and women. Izevbigie (1997) also found that a child who is sexually abused suffers emotional shut down, low self-esteem and feeling of powerlessness.

The result of the third hypothesis showed that emotional abuse significantly relates to students' academic performance. There are emotionally abused parents or caregivers who abused their children by locking them up alone, insulting them, threatening them and frequently reminding them of some mental defeat

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that child abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, significantly relates with students' academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should embark on public enlightenment campaign to educate the public on the effect of child abuse.
2. Government and non-governmental agencies should create awareness campaign exercise to discourage parents from leasing out their children.

Government should make education free at the primary and secondary school levels to enable children from poor family to go to school.

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