

**PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A HIGHER INSTITUTION AT OGUN STATE, NIGERIA**Chiamaka Ogechi Anyasor\*<sup>1</sup> and Aishat Folayemi Adeniran<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Mental Health and Psychiatry, School of Nursing, Babcock University, Ogun State Nigeria.<sup>2</sup>School of Nursing, Babcock University.**\*Corresponding Author: Chiamaka Ogechi Anyasor**

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**ABSTRACT**

Child sexual abuse continues to pose numerous public health problems. This study aims to assess the perceived effect of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing and academic performance. Study adopted a descriptive survey design. A total number of 411 participants were recruited using convenience sampling technique. Questionnaire with close-ended questions was used to collect information from the respondents. Data was analysed using SPSS. Majority of the participants were of the opinion that sexual abuse predisposes people to posttraumatic stress disorder (97.7%) and depression (95.5%). Additionally, 94.3% agreed that sexual abuse causes loss of concentration in class; eighty-five percent agreed that sexual abuse could cause victims to have low grades in their class assessment while sixty-four percent agreed that it makes victims drop out of school. Poverty was identified as one of the factors that predisposed individuals to sexual abuse (55.5%). Lack of adequate information on effect of sexual abuse was identified. There is need for intensified programmes on sexual abuse in order to sensitize the public on its implications on emotional wellbeing and academic performance.

**KEYWORDS:** Child sexual abuse, Psychological wellbeing, Academic performance, Undergraduate Students.**INTRODUCTION**

Child sexual abuse remains a significant public health concern.<sup>[1]</sup> Its consequences are devastating as sexually abused victim's show many internalized and externalized behavioural, emotional and cognitive problems during childhood and adulthood.<sup>[1-2]</sup> Child sexual abuse has been defined as "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared or else violate the laws or social taboos of the society".<sup>[3]</sup> Sexual abuse includes inappropriate sexual solicitation, touching or fondling of the genitals and exposing a child to various forms of sexual intercourse as well as attempted penetration.<sup>[4]</sup> Most times, this action is usually forceful and done by adult or other children who are in a position of responsibility, trust or higher power over their victim.<sup>[3-4]</sup>

Although sexual abuse has been observed to exist more in homes and schools,<sup>[5]</sup> work and religious places,<sup>[6]</sup> it is more prevalent in families affected by complex socio-economic factors including unemployment and poverty.<sup>[7]</sup> Some parents and caregivers lack the resources needed to provide basic needs for their children and wards.<sup>[8]</sup> Sometimes, this leads to neglect and child labour and consequently makes the child

vulnerable to sexual exploitation.<sup>[7]</sup> More so, low educational attainment of parents and caregivers has been linked with less understanding of issues associated with parenting.<sup>[8]</sup>

Other risk factors which could predispose children to being sexually abused includes living in a dysfunctional home, domestic violence and assault as well as single parenting,<sup>[9]</sup> inappropriate relationships and child trafficking,<sup>[10]</sup> use of social media including internet and web forum without parental guide and supervision,<sup>[11]</sup> and certain cultural practices such as child marriage, use of daughter or wife for sexual entertainment of guest, culturally accepted child sex, and beliefs which posit that sexual contact with virgin cures impotence and other disease like Human Immune Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS).<sup>[12]</sup>

Many national surveys have demonstrated that sexual abuse is widespread. The World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002 estimated that approximately 150 million girls were sexually abused.<sup>[13]</sup> Also UNICEF in 2014 estimated that globally, approximately one out of three girls and two out of seven boys are victims of sexual abuse.<sup>[14]</sup> Additionally in United States, 15% to 25% of women and 5% to 15% of men are reported to be

sexually abused at their tender age.<sup>[15]</sup> In Africa, the prevalence rate of child sexual abuse was identified to be 34.4%.<sup>[16]</sup> Although most perpetrators of sexual abuse are men who are also known to their victims,<sup>[4]</sup> it was observed that approximately 30% of the perpetrators are relatives of the victim, 60% are other acquaintances while 10% are strangers; nevertheless in over one-third of the case, a minor is involved.<sup>[15]</sup>

In Nigeria, there still remains dearth in number of published studies that assessed prevalence of sexual abuse either regionally or nationally. Perhaps this could be related to the fact that many of these cases are not reported. The reason for non-reporting of sexual abuse cases has been described as complex and multi-faceted and includes factors such as the age of the abused child at the time of the event, relationship between the perpetrator and the abused, the gender of the abused, the severity of the abuse, developmental and cognitive variables related to the abused, and the likely consequences of the disclosure.<sup>[4]</sup> These Consequences include fear of more abuse and injury, fear of vengeance or mockery, stigmatization and lack of confidence in investigators, police and health workers.<sup>[4]</sup> Regardless, in 2008, the National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) reported that over 25% of adolescents experienced their first sexual abuse by the age of 15 years.<sup>[15]</sup> Also a retrospective study conducted in Suleja, Niger State, Nigeria has identified a high (94.1%) incidence rate in reported cases of child sexual abuse with an average age of 9 years being abused.<sup>[4]</sup>

Sexual abuse poses numerous effects on a child. Apart from the emotional problems (such as feelings of discomfort, guilt and shame) experienced, the child could become less attentive in class and may eventually withdraw from school activities for the fear of being exposed.<sup>[15]</sup> In addition, the victim is at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).<sup>[4]</sup> Moreover there could be unwanted pregnancy for girls<sup>[4]</sup> and anger or hostility for boys.<sup>[15]</sup> Victims may also suffer from a wide range of psychological trauma such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is characterised by nightmares, unexplained physical problems and lack of sleep;<sup>[17-18]</sup> impaired relationships, low self-esteem, fear, tension, anxiety, major depression<sup>[18]</sup> and eventually becomes suicidal.<sup>[14-15]</sup>

Hence this study was designed to evaluate the perceived effect of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing and academic performance among University students in Abeokuta, Southwestern Nigeria. Data obtained would be used to form a basis to better inform the populace on the effect of sexual abuse.

## METHODS

### Research design

Study utilized a descriptive survey design to evaluate the perceived effect which sexual abuse could have on

psychological wellbeing and academic performance among undergraduate students in a higher institution.

### Sample size and sampling technique

Sample size was determined using Cochran's formula after which 10% of the calculated size was included to account for attrition. A total number of 411 participants were needed for the study. Due to limited resources available to the researchers, participants were conveniently sampled until the needed number of participants was achieved.

### Instrument for data collection

A self-structured questionnaire which was based on extensive and thorough review of available literature on sexual abuse was designed. The questionnaire was sectioned into five parts to include demographic characteristics of the respondent, perception of sexual abuse, forms of sexual abuse, factors responsible for sexual abuse, perceived effects of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing and academic performance. The study objectives was explained to the participants and written consent obtained from each participant. Participants below 16 years were excluded because the approved age for university admission in Nigeria is 16 years and above. Instructions on how to complete the questionnaire was explicitly explained to the participants. Completely filled questionnaires were retrieved on the same day.

### Statistical Analysis

Participant's responses were coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0 version. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data. Inferential statistics of Chi-square was used to test for hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance using 95% confidence interval. Data was presented using tables and percentages.

### Ethical consideration

Ethical approval was obtained was obtained from Babcock University Health Research Ethics Committee (BUHREC169/17). Also a letter of introduction duly signed by the Dean, School of Nursing, Babcock University was presented to the Director of Students Affairs and permission was obtained.

## RESULT

### Participant characteristics

411 questionnaires were distributed, however 402 (97.8%) completely filled questionnaires were analysed. 273 (67.9%) were female while 129 (32.1%) were males. 169 (42%) are within the age range of 21-25 years which was observed to have the highest frequency (Table 1).

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (n=402).**

Variables	Frequency (n= 402)	Percentages (%)
Gender: Male	129	32.1%
Female	273	67.9%
Age: 16-20 years	116	28.9%
21-25 years	169	42.0%
26-30 years	80	19.9%
31 and above	37	9.2%
Marital status: Single	381	94.8%
Married	21	5.2%
Ethnicity: Yoruba	324	80.6%
Hausa	9	2.2%
Igbo	41	10.2%
Others	28	7.0%
Level of study: 100	136	33.8%
200	123	30.6%
300	63	15.7%
400	54	13.4%
500	26	6.5%
Lives with: Mother	52	12.9%
Father	110	27.4%
Both parents	177	44.0%
Relative	42	10.5%
Spouse	21	5.2%

**Perception of sexual abuse**

Forty-nine percent perceived sexual abuse as a non-consensual sexual contact. Majority of the respondents 312 (77.6%) believed men are common perpetrators of sexual abuse. 76.9% perceived female gender as the most

vulnerable group. However, 311 (77.4%) believed that sexual abuse cannot be eradicated from the society. All the respondents 402 (100%) agreed that Sexual abuse occurs across socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic groups (Table 2).

**Table 2: Perception of sexual abuse.**

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What do you understand by sexual abuse?		
Non consensual sex contact	197	49.0%
Consensual sex contact	26	6.5%
Rape	179	44.6%
Total	402	100.0%
Who are the common perpetrators?		
Male	312	77.6%
Female	28	7.0%
Both sex	62	15.4%
Total	402	100.0%
Which sex is more vulnerable?		
Male	53	13.2%
Female	309	76.9%
Both sex	40	10.0%
Total	402	100.0%
Do you think sexual abuse can be totally eradicated in this society?		
Yes	91	22.6%
No	311	77.4%
Total	402	100.0%
Which age group is affected most?:		
Children	28	7.0%
Teenager	4	1.0%
Adult	200	49.8%
All of the above	170	42.2%
Total	402	100.0%

Sexually abused victim experience a sense of guilt and shame:		
Yes	368	91.5%
No	34	8.5%
Total	402	100.0%
Sexual abuse cases are always reported:		
Yes	67	16.7%
No	335	83.3%
Total	402	100.0%
Sexual abuse occurs across socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic groups:		
Yes	402	100.0%

**Forms of sexual abuse**

365 (90.8%) perceived showing pornographic movies to a child as well as fondling and caressing without consent

328 (81.6%) as forms of sexual abuse. However, more than half of the respondents 225 (56%) perceived rape as the most common form of all sexual abuse (Table 3).

**Table 3: Forms of sexual abuse.**

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Showing pornography to a child is a form of sexual abuse		
Yes	365	90.8%
No	37	9.2%
Fondling and caressing without consent is a form of sexual abuse		
Yes	328	81.6%
No	74	18.4%
Which of these is the commonest of all forms of sexual abuse		
Child sexual abuse	82	20.4%
Sexual harassment	95	23.6%
Rape	225	56.0%

**Factors that predisposes one to sexual abuse**

Respondents agreed that the following factors could predispose a child to sexual abuse: socio-economic factor like poverty (55.5%), disrupted or broken home (59.7%), inappropriate relationships (61.9%), parents leaving their

care of their children to house helps and neighbours (48.5%), internet and web forum without parental guide and supervision (59.2%) and cultural practices such as child marriage and using one's daughter to entertain guests (59%) (Table 4).

**Table 4: Factors that could predispose a child to sexual abuse.**

Variables	Strongly Agree F %		Agree F %		Disagree F %		Strongly Disagree F %		Undecided F %	
Socio-economic factor such as poverty	26	6.5	223	55.5	63	15.7	62	15.4	28	7
Disrupted/ broken home	93	23.1	240	59.7	35	8.7	34	8.5	0	0
Inappropriate relationships	63	15.7	249	61.9	28	7	62	15.4	0	0
Parents leaving the care of their children or wards to house helps and neighbours	173	43	195	48.5	34	8.5	0	0	0	0
Children whose parents abuse substance	89	22.1	214	53.2	9	2.2	62	15.4	28	7
Use of social media, internet and web-forum without parental supervision	37	9.2	238	59.2	65	16.2	34	8.5	28	7
Cultural practices like child marriage and Use of daughter to entertain guest.	119	29.6	237	59	12	3	7	1.7	27	6.7

F= Frequency.

**Perceived effect of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing**

226 (56.2%) strongly agreed that sexual abuse predisposes people to post traumatic stress disorder. 95.5% also perceived that sexual abuse causes depression or emotional imbalance. The analysis also revealed that the students perceived that sexual abuse can lead to unwanted pregnancy (96.2%), stigmatization

(100%), and sexually transmitted diseases (94.3%) including HIV (Table 5). A significant relationship was observed between respondents age and perceived effect of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing ( $p=0.000$ ).

**Table 5: Perceived effect of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing.**

Effects of sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Undecided	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Post-traumatic stress disorder	226	56.2	197	41.5	9	2.2	0	0	0	0
Depression	117	29.1	267	66.4	8	2	3	0.7	7	1.7
Attempted suicide or self-harm	136	33.8	238	59.2	0	0	28	7	0	0
Unwanted pregnancy	202	50.2	185	46	0	0	0	0	15	3.7
Difficulty in keeping a relationship	126	31.3	241	60	7	71.7	0	0	28	7
Stigmatization	100	24.9	302	75.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Individual can contact HIV or sexually transmitted diseases	174	43.3	205	51	8	2	11	2.7	4	1
Shame and guilt.	188	46.8	186	46.3	0	0	0	0	28	7

*F= Frequency.*

#### Perceived effects of sexual abuse on academic performance

Out of 402 data analysed, 194 (48.5%) strongly agreed that sexual abuse causes loss of concentration in class

while 206 (51.2%) agreed that victims have low grades in their classroom assessment. 260 (64.7%) agreed that victims withdrawn from class activities and 158 (39.3%) agreed that victims drop out of school (Table 6).

**Table 6: perceived effects of sexual abuse on academic performance.**

Effects of sexual abuse on academic performance	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Undecided	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Sexual abuse causes loss of concentration in class	195	48.5	184	45.8	13	3.2	10	2.5	0	0
Sexually abused victims have low grade in class assessment	146	33.8	206	51.2	22	5.5	10	2.5	28	7
Sexually abused victims are withdrawn from class activities	85	21.1	260	64.7	20	5	4	1	33	8.2
Sexually abused victim drops out of school	113	28.1	158	39.3	68	16.9	10	2.5	53	13.2

*F= Frequency.*

#### DISCUSSION

Sexual abuse has been identified to occur across all socio-economic, cultural and ethnic groups, posing as numerous threats to the health and psychological wellbeing of the general populace.<sup>[4]</sup> In this study, forty-nine percent of the respondents agreed that sexual abuse is a non-consensual sexual contact, whereas 179 (44.6%) were of the opinion that it is rape. Also 312 (77.6%) agreed that common perpetrators of sexual abuse are males, with females being more vulnerable (76.9%). This is similar to the findings of a retrospective study conducted over a period of one year at Suleja General Hospital where 81 cases of reported sexual abuse were all females with male perpetrators.<sup>[4]</sup> Study also reported that most of the victims (95.1%) were children. However, in this study, only seven percent agreed that children are mostly affected. This demonstrates that many of the respondents are either in disbelief or lack awareness about some occurrences in the society.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents 335 (83.3%) agreed that sexual abuse cases are not always reported. Sexually abused victims have been observed to exhibit some level of reluctance towards case report.<sup>[19]</sup> However, It is also disturbing to observe that 311 (77.4%) perceived that sexual abuse cannot be totally eradicated in the society. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that sexual abuse in Nigeria is still surrounded

by some myths and until such myths are demystified, there may not be a change in our belief system.<sup>[20]</sup>

Study also revealed that forms of sexual abuse include showing pornography to a child (90.8%), fondling and caressing an individual without consent (81.6%). Two hundred and twenty five percent believed that rape is the commonest form of all sexual abuse. Among other factors identified, poverty was perceived to predispose a child to sexual abuse (55.5%). poverty has been associated with child sexual abuse especially at homes and schools and its effect has been noted to negatively affect academic performance.<sup>[5,7]</sup>

Several studies have identified that sexual abuse exert some negative effects on both psychological wellbeing and academic performance.<sup>[14-15,17-18]</sup> In this study, some of the identified perceived effects which sexual abuse could have on psychological wellbeing of a victim include post-traumatic stress disorder (56.2%), depression (95.5%), unwanted pregnancy (96.2%), stigmatization (100%), and sexually transmitted diseases (94.3%) including HIV. Also study revealed that 238 (59.2%) are of the opinion that sexual abuse could prompt victims to attempt suicide. Victims sexually abused in childhood were more than twice observed to likely commit suicide in adulthood.<sup>[21]</sup> It is therefore important to psychosocially support victims of sexual

abuse in order to prevent the occurrence of suicide and its attempts.

Other identified effects of sexual abuse on academic performance include loss of concentration in class (94.3%), having low grades in class assessment (85%) and drop out (67.4%). Female victims of sexual abuse are observed to exhibit attitudes and behaviours associated with loss of interest in school activities hence they find it difficult in studying and therefore seek transfer in other institutions or stop schooling due to hopelessness.

## CONCLUSION

Sexual abuse continues to pose serious negative effects on psychological wellbeing and academic performance of its victims. Findings from this study revealed that many undergraduate students are ignorant about sexual abuse and its consequences, hence the need to intensify public enlightenment and educational programmes on sexual abuse at schools, churches, social and cultural gatherings through the use of media. This will help to keep the populace informed on the occurrences in the society, demystify various misconceptions surrounding sexual abuse and correct some cultural practices such as early child marriage, use of wife or daughter to sexually entertain guests and the belief that sex with a virgin cures diseases. Also cases of sexual abuse are not often reported. Hence protocols on how to report these cases should be well established and appropriate legislative actions taken to prosecute perpetrators.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that study adopted a convenience sampling technique in assessing the perceived effect of child sexual abuse on psychological wellbeing and academic performance among undergraduate students, findings of this study cannot be generalized. Therefore there is need for further studies to be carried out. Such studies should focus more on victims of sexual abuse as well as their lived experiences. Regardless of this limitation, this current study has shown that sexual abuse exerts negative effect on psychological wellbeing and academic performance.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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