

## **Nature and Types of Maltreatment Suffered by Students of Secondary Schools in Niger State**

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### **Abstract**

*This study was carried out to examine the types of maltreatment suffered by children of secondary schools in Niger State. Questionnaire was the instrument of data collection, purposively administered to two hundred and forty students in eight secondary schools in the state. Percentages and frequencies were adopted as instruments of data analysis. The findings reveal the following as forms of maltreatment suffered by the children: inadequate medical care, inadequate school materials, being asked to hawk, being starved, being over worked, throwing objects at and pouring hot liquid on. It was found that hawking (67.5%) is the most frequently reported form of maltreatment. On the whole, the data show that a higher proportion of male children suffered severe forms of maltreatment than female. It is recommended that abusive parents be informed and advised on the negative effects of psychological and physical forms of maltreatment on their children. School teacher should pay more attention on identified maltreated children with a view to giving them necessary support. School teachers should be vigilant to identify and monitor abusive parents so as to guide them on best ways of disciplining their children.*

**Keywords:** Child abuse, child neglect, corporal punishment, abusive parents and maltreatment

### **Introduction**

In most African societies, and Nigeria in particular, children are highly esteemed and regarded as gifts from God. Birth of children into homes and families are highly celebrated by parents, relatives and friends in the society. Despite elaborate celebration marking the birth of children, studies have shown that they are abused and neglected by their parents (Kolo, 2008:1). The word child maltreatment is synonymous to child abuse and neglect. It is any form of physical, psychological, social, emotional and sexual maltreatment of a child with serious consequences on the survival, safety, growth and development of the child (Alokan and Bimbola, 2010:73). The term child maltreatment takes different dimensions. It involves acts of omission or commission by a parent or guardian which are considered by the values of the society and professional expertise to be inappropriate and damaging to the child (Adejobi, Osonwa, Iyam, Udonwa and Osonwa, 2013:175). Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013), defines child abuse and neglect as:

*“Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm”.*

Thompson (2004), cited in Gesinde (2008:111) reveals that more than three million victims of allegedly abused persons were reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) agents in the United States of America. The report further shows that 24% were physically abused, 12% were sexually abused, 6% were emotionally abused and 52% were neglected. In a study conducted in India by Indianngo (2004), cited in Kolo (2012:287), 50% of girls were sexually abused below the age of 12 years, while 35% were abused between the ages of 12 and 16 years.

In a study on the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Kogi State, Daniel (2004: 56 – 65), found that cases of physical abuse range between 20.3% and 87.5%, while emotionally abused cases were between 68.0% to 92.2%. Sexually abused cases were between 3.9% to 10.2% and cases of child labour stood at 56.3%. Nnachi (2004) cited in Gesinde (2008:111) on the dimensions of child abuse in Okigwe Metropolis of Imo State, found that the contribution of the child financially and materially to the survival of the family is the greatest dimension of child abuse. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (US. HHS, 2004), describes child maltreatment as child abuse and neglect. Child abuse is any act that inflicts pain and is injurious to the physical and mental development of the child. While child neglect is the act of denying a child basic rights and needs essential for his or her growth. Kolo (2008:9-10), defines child abuse as a social conduct injurious to the child in the process of interacting with parents and adults in the home/ family. Child abuse could manifest in various forms. For instance, it could take the dimension of child trafficking, child apprenticeship, child labour, girl marriage and street begging. In the same vein, Kolo (2012:289), describes child neglect as an act of denying a child basic necessity of life. It could take the following dimensions.

- a. A refusal to pay school fees promptly.
- b. A refusal by parents to send a child to school.
- c. Insensitivity to child's behaviour in school.
- d. Improper supervision of a child's academic activities. This attitude is capable of retarding academic progress of the child and the enthusiasm for academic excellence.

The prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria and other parts of the world is critical to the development and survival of the child. In view of the devastating effects of maltreatment on the physical, mental and emotional state of the Nigerian child, it has been widely condemned and criticized by teachers, counsellors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and agencies of government.

### ***General Objectives***

The overall objective of this study is to examine the nature and types of maltreatment suffered by students of secondary schools in Niger State.

### ***Research Questions***

The following questions are fundamental to the growth and development of children in Nigeria.

1. What is child maltreatment?
2. What are the nature and types of maltreatment suffered by students of secondary schools in Niger State?
3. What is the prevalence of child abuse across day and boarding school students in Niger State?
4. Which sex is more at risk for maltreatment?
5. How can child abuse and neglect be minimized?

### ***Methodology***

#### **Techniques of Data Collection**

The study employed survey method of data collection. Two hundred and forty questionnaires were administered to the purposively sampled students by the researcher. Student's socio- demographic data, socio- economic attributes of parents and types of child abuse and neglect suffered were collected.

#### **Selection of Schools and Students for the Study**

Niger State was categorized into four Educational Areas namely Bida (A), Minna (B), Suleja (C) and Kontagora (D). Two schools were purposively selected in each Educational Area. In areas A- Bida, B- Minna and D- Kontagora area, one rural day and one urban boarding school were selected. This was to reflect rural- urban spread of schools in each area. However, in Suleja area, one urban boarding and one rural boarding school were chosen. This is because Government Science College Izom is the only science secondary school in the area. Out of the eight selected schools in Table 1, six of them have three or more streams of SSII, while two of them have only two streams. On account of this, two streams were purposively selected in each school according to their designation (SSII A and SSIIB). This is done across all schools for uniformity. Two hundred and forty (240) SSII students from eight (8) schools were included in the study. The schools selected in the Educational Area are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Educational Areas / Schools, Types and Location of Schools**

Educational Areas	Schools Selected	Urban / Rural	Day- Boarding Status
Bida Area 'A'	(a) GSS, Bida (b) CCTV, Vunchi	Urban Rural	Boarding Day
Minna Area 'B'	(a) GGSS, Minna (b) GDSS Maikunkele	Urban Rural	Boarding Day
Suleja Area 'C'	(a) GSS, Suleja (b) GSC, Izom	Urban Rural	Boarding Day
Kontagora Area 'D'	(a) GGSS, Kontagora (b) GDSS, Tegina	Urban Rural	Boarding Day

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

### Selection of Students in Classes

In order to identify maltreated children in each of the selected classes, 480 preliminary questionnaires were distributed to all the SSII students in eight (8) schools. To achieve this, 30 questionnaires were distributed among 30 students each in two SSII classes in each school to determine the maltreatment status of the children. Questionnaires contain forms of maltreatment to which they were required to indicate the degree or frequency to which they underwent such treatments as applicable. The responses of each student on the questionnaires were summed up as index of maltreatment. Fifteen students with the highest index of maltreatment were considered maltreated, while those of them with low index were considered non- maltreated. Fifteen (15) most maltreated and fifteen (15) least maltreated students were selected from each school for the final stage of the study.

### Techniques of Data Analysis

The quantitative data (survey) was cleaned up, coded and processed using the Statistics Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS). Percentages and frequencies were used to analyze data.

### Types of Maltreatment Suffered By Students

The forms of maltreatment suffered by the children include:

(a) Hawking (b) Corporal punishment (c) The denial of basic needs.

Based on this categorization, eight specific forms of maltreatment were identified by the students as being meted out to them by their parents/ guardians. These are: being asked to hawk, inadequate medical care when sick, inadequate provision of school materials, corporal punishment such as being starved, being overworked, throwing of objects at, beating and pouring of hot liquid on as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Types of maltreatment Meted out to Students by Parents/ Guardians**

S/N	Types of Maltreatment	N	%
1.	Hawking	162	67.5
2.	Inadequate medical care	123	51.3
3.	Being starved	122	50.8
4.	Inadequate school materials	118	49.2
5.	Overworked	108	45.0
6.	Throwing objects at	82	34.2
7.	Beating	68	28.3
8.	Pouring hot liquid on	54	22.5

Source: M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

**Note:** The question on types of maltreatment required respondents to indicate each type of maltreatment suffered by a respondent. A child could suffer several forms of maltreatment.

Hawking (67.5%) is the most frequently reported form of maltreatment. Children are being asked by their parents/ guardians to hawk items such as groundnuts, kola nuts, cooked maize and other household materials. These goods are sold by the students on part- time basis, especially before and after school hours and on full- time during holidays to argument family income and provide for their needs. However, the least frequent, but probably the most severe form of maltreatment is the pouring of hot liquid on (22.5%).

About 50 percent of children reported being starved by their parents/ guardians in the process of carrying out economic activities and as a means of punishment.

**Table 3: Categorization of Maltreatment**

S/N	Severe	Moderate	Mild
1.	Pouring hot liquid on	Inadequate medical care	Inadequate school materials
2.	Throwing object at	Hawking	overworked
3.	Being starved	Beating	

**Source:** M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

Table 3 describes the grouping of the forms of maltreatment suffered by the students in terms of the severity of degree of pain and injuries inflicted. While certain forms of maltreatment meted out to children might cause severe pains, some may be mild. For instance, while pouring hot liquid on the child could inflict severe pain and probably scald the body, a child that lacks adequate school materials will not feel any physical pain.

**Table 4: Types of Maltreatment Suffered by students across Types and Locations of Schools**

S/N	Types of Maltreatment	Types and Location of schools							
		Boarding		Day		Urban		Rural	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Hawking	-	-	64	72.7	70	67.3	83	71.9
2.	Inadequate medical care	83	64.8	40	51.9	51	55.4	67	63.8
3.	Starved	80	58.8	40	46.5	61	58.7	54	48.6
4.	Inadequate school materials	69	48.3	47	52.8	51	48.1	60	50.8
5.	Overworked	65	47.8	41	47.1	53	52.5	51	44.3
6.	Throwing objects at	56	39.7	24	28.2	42	39.3	35	31.5
7.	Beating	45	33.6	22	26.2	29	29.6	36	31.6
8.	Pouring of hot liquid on	32	24.2	22	26.2	27	27.0	23	21.3

**Source:** M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

Table 4 reveals that hawking is the most frequently reported form of maltreatment suffered by children of day schools in rural areas. About 64 percent of children in boarding schools suffered moderate degrees of maltreatment in the area of inadequate medical care when sick than those in day schools. This is suggestive of the absence of functional medical facilities in the boarding schools in Niger State. Between 21 and 27 percent of children in schools located in rural and urban areas suffered severe degree of maltreatment because they reported being poured hot liquid on. The pouring of hot liquid on students are for offences like associating with groups disapproved by parents and stealing. In most of the cases reported by the children, this type of punishment is meted out of provocation and anger. It is not pre-meditated by parents.

**Table 5: Sex of Maltreated Students and Types of Maltreatment**

S/N	Types of Maltreatment	Sex			
		Male		Female	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Hawking	90	65.2	71	78.0
2.	Inadequate medical care	70	56.5	53	65.4
3.	Starved	70	52.2	51	58.0
4.	Inadequate school materials	70	51.1	47	49.5
5.	Overworked	67	49.6	41	46.6
6.	Throwing objects at	46	34.3	35	38.0
7.	Beating	45	33.1	23	27.7
8.	Pouring of hot liquid on	36	27.5	18	21.2

**Source:** M.Sc Thesis, 2008.

**Note:** The table reflects the fact that each child suffered several forms of maltreatment irrespective of sex.

Table 5 shows the sex of maltreated students and types of maltreatment inflicted on them. The result shows that both male and female students suffered severe degree of maltreatment in view of the fact that they reported being thrown objects at. It can be seen in table 5 that 78 percent of girls are engaged in hawking in contrast to 65% of the boys. This is indicative of the fact that most mothers in Niger State engage girls in hawking and selling of goods in shops, in addition to household chores. On the whole, the data show that a higher proportion of male children suffered severe forms of maltreatment than females.

### **Discussion**

Child maltreatment has taken various dimensions in the society in view of the activities and abuses children are subjected to by their parents and guardians. The forms of maltreatment reported by the children in this study include: hawking, physical punishment, starvation, denial of basic needs and being over worked at home. This is similar to the study of Gesinde (2008:114) on the types of abuse and neglect suffered by children in secondary schools in Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo State. This study found that hawking (67.5%) was the most frequently reported form of maltreatment. Children are being asked by their parents/ guardians to hawk items such as groundnuts, kola nuts, cooked maize and other household materials in order to augment family income and meet their needs. This report is in congruent with the findings of Obi and Ibabor (2008:210) on items hawked by children in some parts of Nigeria. According to the report, 70% of the children stated that they hawked cold pure water, fast foods, bananas, groundnut and garden eggs. They engage in hawking in order to support their parent financially and to provide for their needs.

### **Conclusion**

It has been established by the study that children in secondary schools are subjected to forms of maltreatment by their parents/ guardians. It was found that hawking, corporal punishments and denial of basic needs are forms of maltreatment suffered by the students in secondary schools in Niger State. The study discovered that a child could suffer forms of maltreatment irrespective of sex, boarding or day schools and schools located in rural or urban areas.

### **Recommendations**

The following suggestions are proffered to mitigate cases and effects of child maltreatment in Niger State.

1. Parents who have been pouring hot liquid on children should apply less physically harmful measures.
2. School authorities should make extra efforts to identify maltreated children and monitor the abusive parents and guardians.
3. School counsellors should be accorded the statutory rights to caution proven abusive parents
4. Efforts should be made by the government to provide adequate medical facilities in boarding schools in Niger State.

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