RED FLAGS AND CHILD ABUSE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN OYE EKITI

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Abstract

Child maltreatment is a global predicament that pervades all corners of the world. Nonetheless, determining an exact count or prevalence rate is problematic due to under-reporting caused by fear, shame, and social stigma surrounding such incidents. In Africa, child maltreatment is prevalent and widely accepted compared to other cultures as parents regard physical discipline as a means of child-rearing and instilling moral values in their offspring; thus, physical and behavioural cues are often disregarded or downplayed. Thus this study investigates red flags of child Abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to 200 teenage respondents highlighting both behavioral and physical indicators of child maltreatment along with various measures implemented to mitigate its occurrence. The findings revealed that most adolescents believed parental fear and going home (35%) was a potent behavioral indicator while unexplained bruises and welts (42%) were the strongest physical markers for detecting child abuse among teenagers. Consequently, this research recommends tailored counseling approaches primarily targeting parents and other agents of socialization alongside prompt responses from relevant authorities when reporting cases involving both affected parties as well as non-victims alike.

Keywords: child Abuse, Physical abuse, Adolescence, and Indicators

Introduction

Child abuse is an international concern that arises on every continent, and it is impossible to estimate an accurate number of instances or the degree of incidence of this as a consequence of under-reporting owing to the dread, humiliation, and stereotypes accompanying this sort of occurrence (Dubowitz, 2017). Despite the serious repercussions of abuse, child maltreatment has gone unreported because of the small number of complaints and data that have been made public (Taramsari, 2022). Evidence to support the argument that abuse poses a danger for mental health problems in the future was identified by Omigbodun (as referenced by Dubowitz, 2017). On a worldwide scale, the problem of child abuse has been a cause of anxiety for many governments and stakeholders in society (Swenson, 2010). Regrettably, these kids are mistreated by their biological parents, relatives, custodians, and caretakers, who are expected to be their first line of defence. Despite its ubiquity, opinions of child abuse differ among civilizations and regions. In Africa as a whole, child abuse is prevalent and generally tolerated, as opposed to other civilizations, since parents see corporal discipline as a form of childrearing and a manner of instilling morals in an infant (Akmatov, 2015). According to the NOIpolls (2017) survey, it was shown that Nigeria has an alarming frequency of child abuse (92%) (NOIpolls, 2017), which is mainly undetected.

Children's abuse involves anything that affects a kid or leaves a child in danger of injury (Adeoye, 2021). According to Wattam (2016), child maltreatment is referred to as any kind of bodily and/or emotional cruel treatment, intimate partner violence, abandonment, carelessness, or exploitation of any kind, resulting in actual or prospective harm to the overall health of the kid, staying alive, advancement, or self-worth in the wake of an attachment of obligation, confidence, or power. Speelman (2022). Child abuse is defined as any purposeful or inadvertent behaviour on the part of a parent. sponsor, or career leading to unintentional bodily or psychological injury or sexual assault. According to estimates made by the World Health Organisation (2021), more than 40 million children under the age of 15 experience maltreatment annually. The stresses that follow differ according on the severity of the attack and the child's own account, and they may eventually have negative effects on the child's health and mental state (Wong, 2022). Adolecence is a transitory age of change and growth between infancy and maturity (Stehlik, 2018). This is a vital time in both psychological and physical growth when a person develops from a state of immaturity to a mature one capable of procreation. At adolescence, difficulties with

psychological (if not physical) disconnection from family occur. Unfortunately, the phenomenon has existed since ancient times, it still exists, and it is a phenomenon of global scope, but also of global sensitivity (Damaskopoulou, 2023).

A red flag is an alarm or signal that you are required to devote extra concentration to a problem. Children may not respond in a similar way to identical conditions, and most kids who are abused might not demonstrate any of the indicators described here. However, being able to detect situations that are risky and recognise the hallmarks of abuse is a vital ability for an indispensable reporter. Indicators may warn you of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect (Lui, 2019). It is possible to recognise psychological abuse of youngsters and teenagers by specific behavioural signs. They might entail dealing with vital developmental retardation, demonstrating serious indications of anxiousness, depression, withdrawal, or rage, exhibiting serious manifestations of self-destructive conduct such as attempted suicide or self-harm, experimenting with drug or alcohol abuse, as well as showing overbearing conformity, over-politeness, and excessive hygiene (Whitcomb, 2013).

In addition, the pace at which children continue to be molested in Ekiti State begs for the prompt involvement of all interested parties in the state. Particularly, the recent increase in The number of kids living in without mothers babies shelters in the state has increased as a result of child desertion (Olukoya, 2018). However, in Ekiti State, child abuse practice might be related to the following: lack of knowledge, penury, low-income position, and cultural prejudices (Olukoya, 2018). Hence, the current research was done to analyse the physical and behavioural signs of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this work is to investigate red flags of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. In addition to the main objective, this research has the following specific objectives
1. Investigates the main causes of child abuse practices in Oye-Ekiti.
2. Examine the physical indicators of child abuse among Adolescents in Oye-Ekiti.
3. Examine the behavioral indicators of child abuse among Adolescents in Oye-Ekiti.

Theoretical Framework

Three-factor theory was adopted as a theoretical framework for the study. The Three-Factor Theory A three-factor approach was created by Lesnik-Oberstein, Cohen, and Koers (1982) to explain the origins of both bodily and psychological/emotional abuse. Lesnik-Oberstein, Koers, and Cohen (1995) postulated that the likelihood of abuse rises in the presence of three factors:
1) "High level of parental hostility,"
2) "Low level of parental inhibition of overt aggression," and
3) "Focusing on parental aggression on the child."

The amount of both factors determines the type of maltreatment that young children experience. The greater the ratio, the greater the likelihood of experiencing physical abuse. Conversely, if the percentage drops, the chance of psychological or emotional abuse increases. Child abuse should remain unlikely if there is a low ratio between parental animosity and parental restriction of overt aggression. Lesnik et al. (1995) found that there are additional variables that are associated with each of the three variables. These variables include inadequate skills for coping, an affectionless growing up as a child for one's parents, high levels of tension and strain, previous abuse, use of drugs, and low empathy. Illicit drug use (IDU) among students is now one of the increasingly major global public health issues (Abidemi, 2021). All of these variables can potentially impact the possibility of abuse. The three variables, along with the supporting elements, help to explain how parental hostility can result in child abuse, particularly abuse that is psychological as well as physical.
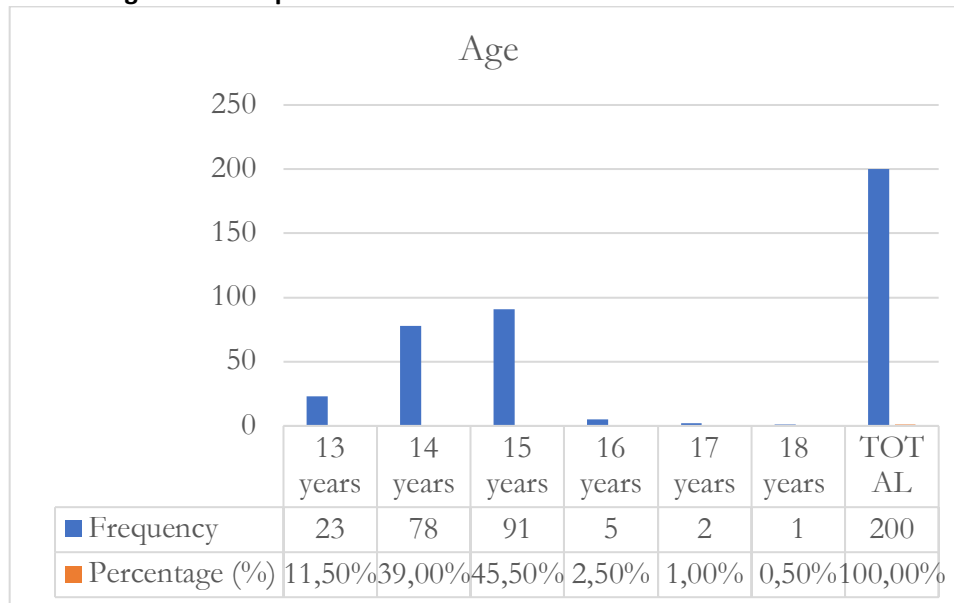
Method

The research was conducted among adolescents at Federal University Oye, Ekiti, located within the Oye community, it was one of the nine Federal Universities established by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the year 2011. According to the administrative records, the total population of undergraduate students at Federal University Oye-Ekiti is 30,000. This excludes students offering part-time, Jupeb, Top - Pre-degree and postgraduate programs. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to have a quantitative representation of all the undergraduate students in FUOYE, the sample was drawn from this accessible population using probability sampling techniques. A total number of 200 questionnaires were given to various respondents (undergraduate students). The clustered sampling technique was used because the population of interest is large and widely dispersed. 40 students were purposively selected each from the Faculty of Arts, Management Sciences, Social Sciences, Engineering and Sciences. Data entry, coding, and univariate analysis were done using the statistical

package for social science. The demographic and background data of the respondents were presented using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages.

Findings
**Distribution of Respondents by Socio-demographic Characteristics (n=200)**
Table 1: Age of the Respondents

	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years	18 years	TOTAL
Frequency	23	78	91	5	2	1	200
Percentage (%)	11,50%	39,00%	45,50%	2,50%	1,00%	0,50%	100,00%

(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

On the age ratio of respondents, a substantial (46.0%) were 15 years, followed (39.0%) of the respondents who were 14 years, (11.5%) of the respondents were 13 years, however, an infinitesimal (0.5%) of the respondents were 18 years. This further attests that the sampled respondents were mostly adolescents.

Figure 2: Gender of the Respondents
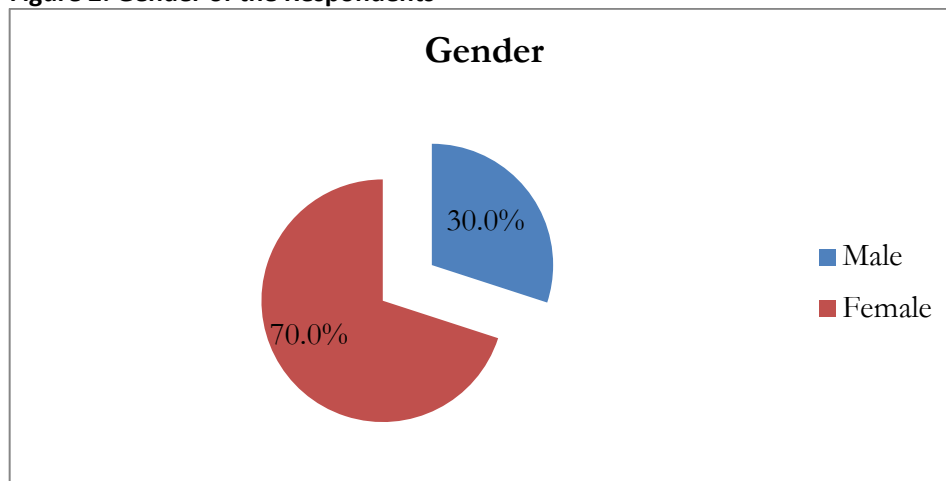
(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

Figure 1 above depicts the gender of the respondents; it showed that the majority of the respondents 70.0% were female while only 30.0% of the respondents were male. This implies that the majority of the respondents were females signaling that were more affected by the subject matter. Zahn-Waxler's (1993) findings, which indicate that women are more likely than men to become victims of sexual abuse, support this.
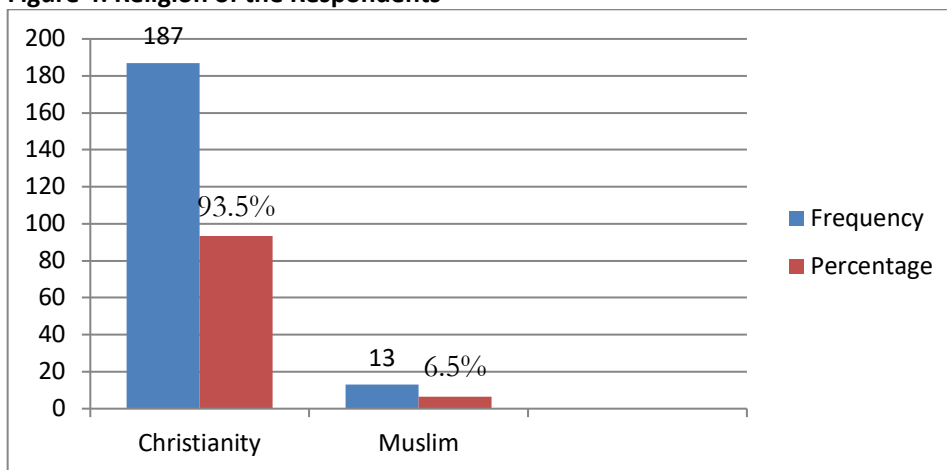
Figure 3: Tribe of the Respondents
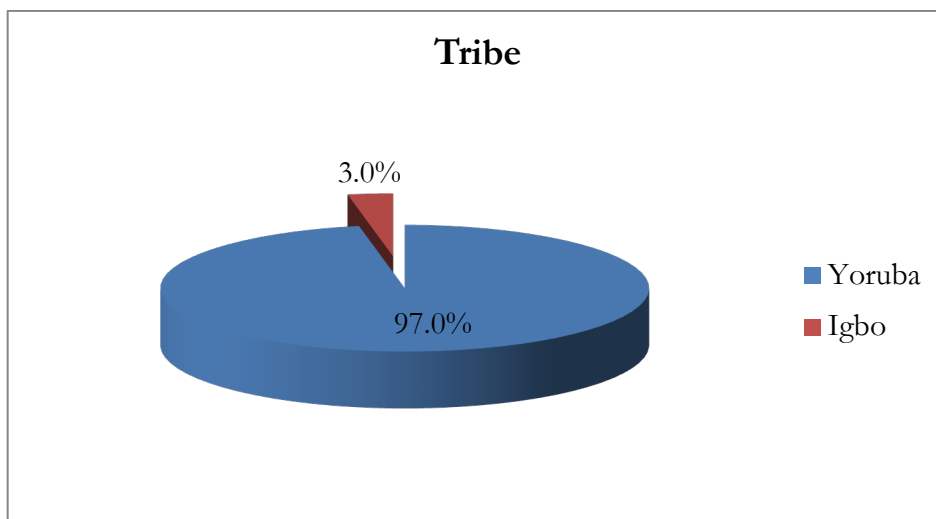
Tribe

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

The above chart points out the tribe of the respondents, It was revealed that the majority of the respondents (97.0%) were from the Yoruba tribe while an infinitesimal (1.5%) of the respondents were from the Igbo tribe, which is not surprising because of the geographic location of the study area

Figure 4: Religion of the Respondents

(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

Figure 3 shows the religion of the respondents, it revealed that majority of the respondents (93.5%) were Christians while a trifling (6.5%) of the respondents were Muslims. This attests to the religious affinity of the town

4.4 Distribution of Respondent by the Causes of Child Abuse Practices in Oye Community

Table 6: The Causes of Child Abuse Practices in Oye Community

Statements	YES	NO	N/A
Unwanted pregnancies	127 63.5%	69 34.5%	04 2.0%
Substance abuse	189 94.5%	08 4.0%	03 1.5%
Marital Crisis	163 81.5%	37 18.5%	-
Poor parental attachment	170 85.0%	29 14.5%	01 0.5%
Low educational attainment	87 43.5%	102 51.0%	09 4.5%
Religious beliefs	89 44.5%	111 55.5%	-
Gender and social inequality	106 53.0%	90 45.0%	04 2.0%

High levels of unemployment or poverty	133 66.5%	65 32.5%	02 1.0%
Lack of awareness of child development or having unrealistic expectations	167 83.5%	29 14.5%	04 2.0%

(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

The above table revealed the causes of child abuse practices in Oye-Ekiti; the results revealed that an overwhelming majority (94.5%) of the respondents considered substance abuse to be the cause. Also, a substantial number (81.5%) of the respondents asserted that marital problems were also one of the factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse. Over two-thirds (85.0%) of the respondents maintained that poor parental attachment was also one of the factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse. A majority of the respondents (63.5%) affirmed that unwanted pregnancies were one of the factors influencing the practice. Furthermore, 53.0% of the respondents said that gender and social inequality were also factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse. The majority (66.5%) of the respondents agreed that high levels of unemployment or poverty were also one of the factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse. Additionally, the results showed that the majority of the respondents (83.5%) affirmed that lack of awareness of child development or having unrealistic expectations was also one of the factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse. However, over average of the respondents (51.0%) disagreed that low education attainment was one of the factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse. In the same vein, 55.5% of the respondents disapproved that religious belief was not one of the factors influencing the attitude of Oye-Ekiti community members towards child abuse.

It can be deduced from the above analysis that the factors influencing child abuse in Oye-Ekiti are substance abuse, poor parental attachment, unwanted pregnancies, marital crises, gender and social inequality, high levels of unemployment or poverty, a lack of awareness of child development, and unrealistic expectations. However, low education attainment and religious beliefs were not influencing factors. In addition, the aforementioned is in line with the assertion of Attari & Parekh (2009) that the problem of child abuse is common in countries associated with low incomes, poverty, high unemployment rates, increased stress levels, and unstable political situations.

4.5 The Percentage distribution of respondents on Physical Indicators of Child Abuse among Adolescents in Oye-Ekiti

Table 7: The physical indicators of child abuse among Adolescents in Oye-Ekiti.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Unexplained bruises and welts	84	42.5
Unexplained burns	31	15.5
Unexplained fractures	17	8.5
Unexplained lacerations or abrasions	50	25.0
Dressed differently from other children in the family	18	9.0
Total	**200**	**100%**

(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

The above table focused on physical indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. It revealed that the majority of the respondents (42.5%) claimed unexplained bruises and welts are the physical indicators of child abuse, followed by (25.0%) of the respondents who agreed that unexplained laceration or abrasions are the physical indicators of child abuse, followed by 15.5% of the respondents asserting that unexplained burns are also a physical indicator of child abuse. Also, 9.0% of the respondents claimed that dressing differently from other children in the family is a physical indicator of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti, while 8.5% of the respondents claimed that unexplained fractures are also a physical indicator of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. It can be inferred from the results of this study that respondents agreed on the indices used in measuring physical indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti, and most of the respondents claimed unexplained bruises and welts are the physical indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. In line

with this research, Jacksson (2015) claims that physical signs of emotional maltreatment in children are possible. Frequently experiencing psychosomatic complaints (such as migraines, nausea, and gastrointestinal pains), prolonged vomiting or diarrhoea, failing to meet important developmental milestones, and dressing differently from other family members are a few instances of this.

4.6 The Percentage Distribution of Respondents on Behavioral Indicators of Child Abuse among Adolescents in Oye-Ekiti

Table 8: The Behavioral Indicators of Child Abuse among Adolescents in Oye-Ekiti

Responses	Frequency	Percentage%
Parental fear and going home	70	35.0
Extreme apprehensiveness or vigilance	21	10.5
Display of attention-seeking behaviour or extreme inhibition in plays	13	6.5
Symptoms of depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression	44	22.0
Symptoms of self-destructive, self-harming, suicide attempts, engaging in drug or alcohol abuse	27	13.5
Flinching easily or avoiding touch	05	2.5
Overly compliant; too well-mannered	20	10.0
Total	**200**	**100%**

(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

The above table focused on behavioural indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti, it revealed that majority of the respondents (35%) claimed that Fear of parents and going home is one the behavioural indicators of child abuse among adolescents, followed by (22%) of the respondents who claimed that Symptoms of depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression to be a potent indicator, consequently, (13.5%) of the respondents claimed that Symptoms of self-destructive, self-harming, suicide attempts, engaging in drug or alcohol abuse to be a behavioural indicator,(10.5%) of the respondents approved extreme apprehensiveness or vigilance, closely followed by (10.0%) of the respondents claimed that being Overly compliant; too well-mannered is also one the behavioural indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. Also, a trifling (6.5%) of the respondents claimed that a display of attention-seeking behaviour or extreme inhibition in plays is a behaviour indicator, while an infinitesimal (2.5%) of the respondents claimed that flinching easily or avoiding touch is also a behavioural indicator of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. These findings align with the research conducted by Dirajlal (2020), who found that fear of parents and going home, pronounced aggression or passivity, and withdrawal were the behavioural indicators of child abuse.

Discussion- Conclusions

The findings in Table 6 revealed the major causes of child abuse practices in Oye-Ekiti to be substance abuse (95%), poor parental attachment (85%), lack of awareness of child development or having unrealistic expectations (83%), marital crisis (81%), high levels of unemployment or poverty (67%), unwanted pregnancy (64%), and gender and social inequality (53%). However, respondents refuted religious beliefs (45%) and low educational attainment (44%) as being the basis for child abuse practice. This is corroborated by the research carried out by Bunting (2018), who found that the problem of child abuse is common in countries associated with low incomes, poverty, high unemployment rates, increased stress levels, and unstable political situations.

The study also examined the physical indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti. Table 7 shows that (42.5%) respondents reported unexplained bruises and welts, (25.0%) unexplained lacerations or abrasions, (15.5%) unexplained burns, (9.0%) dressing differently than other children in the family, and (8.5%) unexplained

fractures. This is corroborated by the research of Shanahan (2017), who asserted that sometimes there may be physical symptoms that a kid is being mistreated.

In conclusion, behavioural indicators of child abuse among adolescents in Oye-Ekiti revealed (35%) that fear of parents and going home (22%) displayed signs of aggressiveness, hopelessness, nervousness, or isolation; (3.5%) displayed signs of self-harm, self-destructive behaviour, suicidal thoughts, or substance or alcohol misuse; (10.5%) approved extreme apprehensiveness or vigilance; (10.0%) were overly compliant; too well-mannered, 6.5% of the respondents claimed that a display of attention-seeking behaviour was extreme, while an infinitesimal (2.5%) claimed to flinch easily or avoid touch. The above indices align with the research conducted by Fitzpatrick (2023) that fear of parents and going home, pronounced aggression or passivity, and withdrawal were the behavioural indicators of child abuse.

According to the research findings, the residents of Oye-Ekiti are well-informed about the intricacies of child abuse. Despite this, instances of child abuse persist in the community, mainly due to substance abuse and inadequate parental attachment. Additionally, the study highlights that unexplained bruises and welts, unaccounted-for lacerations or abrasions, fear of returning home, and indications of depression, anxiety, withdrawal, or aggression are telltale signs of child abuse, both physical and behavioural in nature.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is imperative to introduce a more adapted educational and pragmatic counselling approach for parents, guidance, and families, specifically on the line between abusive actions and discipline.

2. Parents must build a strong and unwavering relationship with their children. This will ensure that any instances of sexual abuse are reported immediately and with confidence. By doing so, the diagnosis and legal proceedings for child sexual abusers will be significantly improved.

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