

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY ABUSE ON THE WELL- BEING OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD

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Abstract

The study investigated the perceived influence of the physical environment of the family on the well- being of the Nigerian child, it adopted a psychological survey design, with a population of eleven thousand, two hundred and sixty four students (11, 264), while two hundred students who were randomly selected constituted the sample of the study. The instrument of the study is a researcher made questionnaire titled “Perceived Influence of Family Environment on Well Being of the Nigerian Child” (PIFPEWNC) which was validated by two experts. It was subjected to a test retest method within two weeks using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Statistic and a reality coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. The instrument has a four point Likert scale with fifteen items having 2.5 as its decision point. Data collected was analyzed using mean statistics. The rated score of each item was cumulatively added as cumulative weight score. The finding showed that abuse is an integral part of the family psychological environment and is detrimental to the development and well- being of children. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that public awareness should be made in the society to enlighten people on abuse as there is more to it and it is more than only physical abuse.

Introduction

The importance of a family cannot be over emphasized as it is the bedrock of the society and a vital instrument to achieve the total development of people and society alongside their well- being. Hence Colman (2003), defines family as the primary social group, comprising parents, their offspring and in same household the extended family or more generally any group of individuals related by blood or descended from an identifiable common ancestor. The family can also be seen as one or more persons related by blood, through adoption or marriage, living together as a single housekeeping unit. Delamater and Myers (2011), posit that a family is recognized universally as an agent of socialization and plays the most tremendous role in socializing the child. It is also an organized system created by God geared towards the support, rearing, regulation and nurturance of its members. The fact remains

that man cannot withdraw from a family. It is universally regarded as the most sacred institution in the society, which is the nucleus of civilization and socialization of children. It is where children's needs are expected to be met alongside teaching them lifelong values. This is the case in the Nigerian society where the family guides and teaches the children, the accepted values and standards of behavior, enabling them internalize norms and provision of nurturance and needs.

Family psychological environment is the equality and quantity of the cognitive, emotional and psychological environment of a family as perceived by other. It also refers to the circumstances and social climate conditions within families. Bandhana & Sharma (2012) posits that an ideal family environment is one where there is proper reward to strengthen the desired behavior, a keen interest in and love for the child, provision of opportunities to express its views freely, while not compelling the children to act according to parental desires and expectations.

Moos & Moos (2002), states that family and social environment play major roles in determining the well-being of its members and the influence of other agencies is built upon the work furnished by the family environment, enabling individuals to cope with normal stressors of life, live productively and make fruitful contribution to the community. They further stated that the family and various relationship dynamics and interaction patterns serve as a vital contact for the psychological development of children as they attempt to discover themselves. These family dynamics involve notable parent-child interaction which plays a large role in children's social, educational and their well being. Here, children learn how to manage their emotions through observation, modeling and social referencing (Bodovski & Youn, 2010), these encompasses certain family factors like parental emotional distress, parenting styles, home activities etc. which have also shown that they can moderate the children's well- being. (Linver, Brooks –Gunn & Kohen, 2002).

The family psychological environment is vital, as it is in the family environment that the potentials in children are expressed and developed. Its members are the first group to socialize and influence the life and behavior of the children. It precludes that it is the people in the family environment around the children that begin to guide their actions and behavior, hence where there is cordial relationship among member, parental affection, mutual interest and understanding; children are likely to imbibe acceptable and desirable behavior and experience a positive well- being.

The family environment refers to the dimension of relationship, system maintenance, and personal growth, the functioning of the family, interaction pattern, and parents' involvement. Each family environment is unique as

families differ from each other. All these according to Cripps & Zyromski (2010), positively or negatively affect children sense of psychological well-being. Harter, (2012) and Thomson (2008), states that the family environment has a strong influence on the development of self- esteem and the home environment covers quality of parenting, cognitive stimulation and quality of the home environment. Bandhana & Sharma (2012). Also, Frasch and Brooks (2003) found that the family environment in which a child is raised can cultivate and promotes the development of a stable and meaning but cultural identity. This environment can be a positive, strong source of support for children, which provides close relationships, strong parenting skills, good communication and the modeling of positive behaviors. On the other hand, the family environment can be problematic where these support systems are absent or inadequate, alongside the modeling of negative behaviors by the adult members.

According to WCES (2012), Family environment can be accessed from the point of view of socio- economic condition and educational deficit. It can also exhibit various legal, social, moral or education deficiencies, deficiencies related to situations such as infidelity, abandonment, divorce, cohabitation, death, sexual vices, narcomamia, not mention the absence altogether of a family environment. Therefore, a child's total development is hinged on the family environment which in turn impacts upon the well –being of the child.

Well- being is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that concerns every human being, relating to the subjective, social and psychological dimensions alongside the health dimension (Seifert, 2005). The concept according to Deci and Ryan (2008) is a combination of positive affective states such as happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life. Psychological well- being is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. It involves having a positive mien towards life and oneself, having social relations and a supportive environment, coping with challenges through the use of appropriate skills and techniques. WHO (2010) states that it is a state, where one realizes his/her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life and risk productivity, contributing to the environment.

Also, Rees, Bradshaw, Goswanic and Keving (2010) posit that the quality of family relationship is an important environment factor that influences people's social behavior and psychological well- being. They further stated that young people who live in families that get along well report higher levels of overall well- being than those living in families that do not get along. Bowen (2006) argues that a change in family dynamics/ environment has the potential to be disruptive to a child's well- being. Azuka –Obieke (2013), revealed that children to profit psychologically and academically when

both parents provide aspects of an orderly and nurturing home life, enhancing their well-being.

Abuse is the improper usage or treatment of a thing, often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit. It can be in many forms. Abuse involves the use of something to bad effect or force bad purpose, treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly. There are different form of abuse such as physical, verbal maltreatment, injury, violation, rape, unjust practices, psychological, or other types of aggression (Wikipedia.org.)

Abusive Families: are those that indulge in the abuse of children where parents tend to be undifferentiated partners who compete with each other and with their children for attention and nurturance. According to McCarthy (1990), Abusive parents attack the child who fails to gratify their needs, thereby giving vent to longstanding frustrations and feelings of being threatened by the child's individuation and competency. Also abuse within families are behaviorally nuanced and emotionally complex as the individuals involved. Family abuse is seen in family relationship abuses revealing a life-drawing and self – perpetually dynamic of power and control.

Family abuse dynamic commonly take the shape on varying forms of intimidation, manipulation, aggression and terrorism. Such victims are faced with a dual emotional experience of an affectionate emotional bond interlaced with anger, resentment and fear. Edwards (2015). Abuse may manifest as physical, emotional, sexual, financial, psychological, verbal, and neglectful. Here, family members are sometimes the source of the trauma, the perforators of oppression and violence towards other family members.

Families are functional where the family members fulfill their agreed role and responsibilities as well as treat each other with respect, affection and meet each other's needs. (Uwazuruike, 2015). These functions can be seen in areas of socialization, rules of behavior and values, patterns of interaction, emotional support, reproductive functions and economic functions. James (2005), posits that family members take time for each other, offering support and guidance, with the parents' caring about the family alongside making it's well-being their top priority in life. Hence, the parents teach their children, set good examples for them, are mostly interested in what they can offer their children, paying less attention to what their children will do with what they are offered.

Also, in a functional family, they family is seen as a garden where healthy people are grown, bearing in mind that children believe what they hear and learn within their families, whether it is good or bad. (James 2005), when families cannot provide the necessary needs of the children, there can be emotional, social and psychological problems and forms of abuse. It can also

lead to some obnoxious behavior like stealing, alcoholism, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and other societal vices. When these arise such a family can be said to be dysfunctional (Uwazuruike, 2015). Children from dysfunctional families resort, more often than their peers living in families with a strong core, to acts of deviant behavior, they are insufficiently developed, unstable, indifferent, they have difficulty adapting. They are exposed to risks, to dropping out of school, violence, and vagrancy (Mitrofan, Buzducea, 2003), parental absence or separation is also detrimental to the children as they face the bearing abandonment anxiety which to the child's greatest fear is that his parents do not love him and will abandon him (Ginott, 2006). Therefore one can say that children's total development increases as a result of a good family environment while it suffers if their family environment thrives on different forms of abuse. Abuse therefore has serious consequences for the development and well-being of a child. Abuse entails all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment or misuse of other people without sharing any concern for their integrity or innate worth on individuals and in a manner that degrades their well-being. (Kathryn, 2017). Abuse involves controlling others who are in a vulnerable position, using abusive behavior to manipulate the victims into submission or compliance.

Psychological Abuse: is also known as mental or emotional abuse. It is a form of abuse that is less visible than the physical one that is more prevalent in our society. It is one that occurs when one person controls information available to another person so as to control, manipulate that person's sense of reality. (www.mentalhelp.net). Psychological abuse exist and parents indulge in it, subjecting their children to it. This abuse manifests in various forms. Such as Indifference to children's needs or temperament as compared to other children, repeated humiliation in the face of a failed task or misunderstood instruction in private or public. This can also be denigration which entails a negative description of a child's achievement or interest, neglect to provide the needed emotional support or needs, threat to harm, kill or take away the children alongside an unrelenting pressure – where a child is expected to accomplish parental expectations alongside negative comparisons of such to others who are complying, and refusal to communicate etc. Psychological abuse affects the confidence, self-esteem and relationship to others even as adults. Some of such children regress to childhood behavior indulging in age inappropriate behavior like thumb sucking, rocking.

Verbal Abuse: refers to when one person uses words and body language to inappropriately criticize another person. (Kathryn, Mental Health. net) It Involves the use of negative word, by calling their victims or the children names, telling them they are stupid, have no worth or will amount

to nothing on their own. It also involves extreme in the volume tone of voice such as yelling, screaming or very complete silence, ignoring and refusing to respond. Use of intimidating words and threatening language, lack of apology where parents refuse to take responsibility and become hostile, by dismissing the child's feelings alongside conveniently forgetting promises or commitment to the child. Verbal Abuse goes beyond argument or speaking one's mind bluntly or honestly. It involves an attempt to control but not using physical act rather manipulating the emotions. The abuser may not know there is abuse. It involves "gas lighting" (Mathews, 2018). This occurs when one person uses words and body language to inappropriately criticize another person (Kathryn, 2015) (www.mentalhelp.net). At the same time blame game is also utilized where everything that goes wrong is the child's doing. Brow-beating, belittling the child's aspiration with sarcasm, integrating mocking responses, and defaming character, berating feelings, demanding answers with frequent interruptions are all forms of verbal abuse. (Hammond, 2017).

Neglect Abuse: involves ignoring or disavowing any responsibilities parents have towards the children. It entails causing damage through lack of action rather than through a harmful, manipulative action itself. This form of abuse also involves with holding normal human interaction or refusing to validate victim's feeling. It is a bit hard to detect as the abuser may have normalized the behavior without regarding it as abuse. (Hamarman & Bernet 2000). Also, there is failure to provide care in a sensitive and responsive manner, not providing a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter to grow and survive. Not providing access to health and educational services. These affect the child's well-being, putting him at risk of disease, retardation infection or a long term effect on brain development and future well-being. Abuldazis, Willaim, Lindsay (2013). Tronick in (Adulaziz and co, 2013), posits that there is effect of neglect on early brain development where lack of interaction with a child comprised the formation of neural circuits and pathways affecting the child's brain development and cognitive functions. Children who experienced neglect are more likely to show negative outcomes into adult life like emotional regulation, self concept, social skills, academic motivation as well as adjustment problem, depression, aggressive behavior, peer difficulties, substance abuse and delinquency are all detrimental to child's well-being. (Cafto, Foressi Strik, 2005).

Neglect abuse makes a child lack or exhibit poor hygiene such as unkempt or untidy hair, unwashed body or clothes, unpleasant body and mouth odor, untidy shoes. Such children are left unsurprised and atimes do not get to school or are frequently late and the last to leave the school. Child

abuse has also been found to be negatively correlated with low self – esteem and lower sense of self – control (Festing 2010).

Abuse affects children’s behavior development. Sleep disturbance, nightmares can be the result of abuse (McCain, Mustard, Sharkes (2007). By the age of four or five, children tend to express their reaction to abuse differently. Boys tend to externalize their emotions through anger, aggression and verbal bullying while girls internalize their behavioral attitudes by being depressed, socially withdrawn, having abdominal pain and headaches (Dehon, Weems, 2012). Some children also have problems adjusting in school, hence poor academic performance. Adolescents suffer from depression, anxiety and social withdrawal, some tend to run away from home and engage in delinquent behavior, smoking, drinking, early sexual activities, drug use and gaining involvement as a result of abuse.

These are detrimental to the development and well- being of the child since there is absence of wholeness and conditions that are contrary to a well developed child. Therefore, well- being is seen as a multifaceted concept which includes subjective, social and psychological dimensions as well as health related behavior. It is more than the absence of illness and goes beyond life satisfaction. It is linked with one’s physical health, health behaviors and resilience i.e. ability to cope with adverse circumstances. It is defined as a dynamic state in which an individual is able to develop their potential, work productivity and creativity, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to their community. (Foresight Report 2008). Here, an individual ought to fulfill their personal goals and a sense of purpose in the society giving a life satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

The total development of the child is important if properly handled as this will determine what the adult life will be. Childhood is a malleable period when equipping the child with the right skills and values are paramount, alongside how it is done and who does the equipping. The influence of inculcating positive family values in the children has far – reaching effects on the development of the children that is the successes and failures of these children’s well-being are dependent on it. The family environment is primary in ensuring the values and nurturing of these children and these account for their behavior and attitude well-being. The society is filled with a lot of social issues affecting these young ones morally, socially, psychologically, emotionally in essence their total well- being.

The social issues depict children with the tendency of being aggressive, withdrawn, hostile, frustrated, fearful, alongside exhibiting certain

delinquent, obnoxious, deviant, unstable, inappropriate and mal-adaptive behaviors, which might impact upon the development and well-being of the children leading to far reaching consequences especially in the face of disruption in the child's mien, alongside their general development and well-being. Affecting also their response and adjustment in life and their future well-being. The question is, is the family environment satisfactorily doing what it ought to do and in the right manner? Hence the study investigated the perceived influence of the family psychological environment on the well-being of the Nigerian child.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the perceived influence of the family abuse on the well-being of the Nigerian child.

Specially, the study tried to

1. Find out the extent of perceived influence of psychological abuse on the well-being of children
2. Find out the extent of perceived influence of verbal abuse on the well-being of children.
3. Find out the extent of the influence of neglect abuse on the well-being of children.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of perceived influence of psychological abuse on the well-being of the children?
2. What is the extent of perceived influence of verbal abuse on well-being of children?
3. What is the extent of perceived influence of neglect abuse on the well-being of the children?

Method

The study adopted a survey design. Students in secondary schools in Imo State constituted the population for the study. Giving a total of eleven thousand, two hundred and sixty four students (11,264), two hundred students (200) randomly selected constituted the sample of the study. The researcher administered a researcher structured questionnaire titled "PIFPEWNC"-perceived influence of the family psychological environment on the well-being of the Nigerian child. It was validated by experts in educational psychology and measurement and evolution. The instrument was subjected to a test-retest method. An interval of two weeks was given; using Pearson's product moment correlation statistics, reliability co-efficient of 0.89 was

obtained. The instrument had a personal data section A, while section B consisted of factors relating to the family environment and abuse. A four Likert format was adopted with VHE – Very High Extent, being (4points), HE – High Extent (3points) VLE- Very Low Extent (2points) LE – Low Extent (1 point). The instrument has fifteen items (15) with 2.5 being the decision point where any respondent who obtained a score of 2.5 and above was accepted while scores below 2.5 were rejected. The data collected were analyzed using mean statistics. The rated scores of each item were cumulatively added as cumulative weighted score.

Research Question 1

What is the extent of perceived influence of psychological abuse on the well-being of the children?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents’ of the extent of perceived influence of psychological abuse on well- being of children

S/N		N	Cumulative Weight Score	X	Decision
1.	I am told I can’t do anything right.	200	624	3.12	Accepted
2.	No one corrects me softly when I make mistakes		650	3.25	Accepted
3.	The things I love doing are ridiculed as useless.		590	2.95	
4.	No one comforts me when I am sad unlikely siblings		574	2.72	Accepted
5.	When I make mistakes bad words are used on me.		67.3	3.37	Accepted
				3.08	

The result on table 1 shows that the grand mean is 3.08. This shows that the extent of psychological abuse is high and as well affect the well- being of the children and their adjustment to life in different areas of their lives.

Research Question 2

What is the extent of perceived influence of verbal abuse on well- being of children?

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on the extent of perceived influence of verbal abuse on the well- being of the children.

S/N		N	Cumulative Weight Score	X	Decision
1.	I am always told that I am worthless	200	636	3.18	Accepted
2.	I get blamed when if it is others fault.		630	3.15	Accepted
3.	I am always mocked		608	3.04	Accepted
4.	I get yelled at constantly		678	3.39	Accepted
5.	I am not allowed to express my view		650	3.25	Accepted
				3.20	

The result on table 2 that the grand mean is 3.20 which show it is above the acceptance point and shows that there is verbal abuse in use in families and these affects the well – being and self – esteem of the children. They lose interest in their environment and tend to have a poor self- concept which affects their general development and well – being.

Research Question 3

What is the extent of perceived influence of neglect abuse on the well- being of the children?

Table 3: Mean rating of respondents on the extent of perceived influence of neglect abuse of well- being of the children.

S/N		N	Cumulative Weight Score	X	Decision
1.	My parents are rarely at home	200	579	2.89	Accepted
2.	I eat whatever I find in the home		647	3.24	Accepted
3.	My clothes are worn and thorn		635	3.18	Accepted
4.	My fees are rarely paid on time		585	2.93	Accepted
5.	I cry before my needs are met		650	2.25	Rejected
				2.89	

The result on table three (3) shows that the grand mean is 2.89 which is above the acceptance point of 2.5. Shows that neglect abuse is present in families though item number 5 shows that some children do not cry before

their needs are met. Neglect makes them withdrawn with unsatisfactory needs, giving a feeling of unacceptance and frustration.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study revealed that abuse especially psychological abuse is present in the family environment where there is destruction of an individual's self – esteem. It is common and most time not regarded as abuse. The findings reveal that the well- being of the child is influenced by the degree of support and help and commitment got from the family. This finding is in line with Mitofan, Buzducea (2003), and Matheus (2018), which states that children from dysfunctional families who are abused are insufficiently developed unstable and have difficulty adapting to their environment. They are also manipulated emotionally with the abuser not knowing there is abuse therefore gas lighting is present. Gas lighting therefore is when one uses words and body language to inappropriately criticize another person. Also, Health direct ([www:healthdirect.gov](http://www.healthdirect.gov).) in supporting states that most of such children suffer from anxiety, low self- esteem and depression at a rate greater than children who were physically or sexually abused and this is detrimental to the well- being of the children, there is development and mental health which can persist into adult life.

The second finding revealed that there is extreme usage of negative words which constitute abuse, and affects the self concept of children, making them loose interest in their environment, retreating to themselves. This is in line with Hammond (2017), McCain, Mustard, Shakers (2007), James (2015) and Kathryn, (2017), which states that children believe what they hear and learn within their families whether it is for good or ill. These children by the age of four and five children express their reaction to abuse differently where boys extremely through anger, aggression and verbal bullying while the girls internalize theirs by being socially withdrawn and depressed (Dehon, Weens 2012). This also affect their adjustment in school and the learning situation, hence they give up more easily than their counterparts and are predisposed to social deviance since they are told they cannot amount to anything (Catana, Catana 2010). Also, these children do not speak or rather speak only when spoken to and have difficulty with communication.

The third finding revealed that neglect of children involves ignoring or dissolving any responsibility parents have towards their children through lack of action and withholding normal human interaction. This is in line with Uwazuruike (2015), Cuirrot (2006) Caffo, Foresi and Strik (2005), which states that when families cannot provide the necessary needs of the children, there will be emotional, social and psychological problems leading to

obnoxious behavior and some societal vices. Parents' absence is also detrimental to the children as they face abandonment, anxiety, lack of interaction with children compromise the formation of neural circuits and pathways affecting the brain development. These children also show negative outcomes into adult life such as emotional regulations, self concept, social skills, academic motivation as well as adjustment problems, depression, aggressive behaviors, withdrawals which are all detrimental to the development and well being of the child.

Festings (2010), also says that neglect abuse makes a child lack or exhibit poor hygiene, looking untidy, especially in appearance- hair and clothes. Unpleasant body and mouth odor. and there is lack of supervision hence might not be regular in school and there is a low sense of self – control which impacts negatively on the development and well- being of children as there is absence of wholeness.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study the following recommendations were drawn

1. Awareness on abuse should be created alongside its symptoms for easy and early identification.
2. Interventions on an abused child should not be delayed; rather the counselors should be involved, in counseling the abused child.
3. Teachers, parents and the society at large should be exposed and taught child right laws and different types of abuses not just physical abuse or child labour.
4. Families should strive to meet the needs of their children to enable them overcome the challenges of the society and have a positive well-being in life.

Conclusion

The family as the main agent of socialization acts as a link between the children and the society. It is also used to meet the challenges of the society basically through imitation and observation. The functions of family members are important as a deficient model has detrimental effects on the child's development and well- being. Therefore the degree of support and commitment from the family is vital for the well-being of children.

Consequently when the family fail to meet the needs of the members and society, the children might end up depressed, withdrawn, angry have low self – concept and self- esteem, remain dependent and aggressive with criminal tendencies and they may be violent to the family and society. Negative words and verbal bullying impact upon the well-being of the children

which is detrimental to their development and well-being. Neglect above impacts upon the overall bearing and appearance of the affected children making them unkempt with an absence of wholeness hence affecting the well-being of the children. Hence a conscious awareness is necessary in the interaction of families to disabuse this and its attendant impact.

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