

## Threat of Sexual Abuse Among in-School Adolescents in Kwara State

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reviewed on sexual abuse among adolescents to uncover areas that would lead to further researches and proffer a lasting solution. Sexual abuse of minors is an offense that is widely denounced. There exist various elements or causes of child sexual violence that the general public is unaware of. In order to safeguard children in society, it is critical to comprehend these variables. Sexual abuse has highly serious aftereffects that have a reflective impact on the victims' physical and mental health. The abuse upsets the child's bodily and mental order, the aftereffects are excruciating. Victims experience lifelong physical health issues as well as severe stress. It is therefore suggested that parents and guardians should watch their wards closely.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sexual abuse is a present day horror that has eaten deep into the society and the whole nation at large. This has become a source of concern for every Nigerian parent or guardian as many cases have been recorded lately across the nation (Nextier, 2020; Hassan & Abdulkareem 2023). Sexual abuse is any unwelcome sexual encounter in which the perpetrator threatens, employs force, or takes advantage of the victim's inability to give consent. According to the American Psychological Association (2020). In addition to long-term effects like anxiety, panic, or post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual abuse is typically accompanied with shock, fear, or disbelief. Any sexual interaction that is beyond a child's capacity for understanding, physical maturation, or cultural norms is considered sexual abuse. This practice has serious short- and long-term effects that include both physical and non-physical exposure that could harm the victim's physical and cognitive development. Sexual abuse, which includes rape and sexual assault, affects millions of teenagers globally, including those in Africa. APA (2020) posited teens are distinct from children and adults since they are in the critical stage of developing their identities and do not precisely fit into either category. Teenagers are more probable to practice sexual maturity, show increased sexuality, engage in dangerous sexual interactions, and have unsupervised access to sexual content on social media. They are also more prone to display risky behaviors related to their health. Teens that are ignorant of the proper growth and maintenance of their sexuality are more vulnerable to sexual assault. Peer pressure, inadequate parental supervision and management, poor health-seeking behavior, and, in some areas, a lack of teenage health insurance and well-stocked adolescent clinics are further reasons why teenage health-related concerns are frequently not treated effectively (Nextier, 2020).

As a result of an increase in rape and sexual assault cases, the majority of which involve minors, Nigeria has declared a state of emergency (Isiaka, 2020). Furthermore, the 2015 Violence against Prohibition Person's Act (VAPP) has been called for. The traumatic act that preceded the assault often causes victims of sexual abuse to suffer physically, socially, and psychologically (Caffo and Belaise, 2015). Sex abuse is said to be more common among teenage girls. In Nigeria, one in four females and one in ten males reported having been sexually assaulted prior to turning eighteen. The International Children's Fund of the United Nations provided this statistics (UNICEF, 2015).

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

There are several studies conducted in Nigeria which reported varying outcomes on the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse (Bugaje, Ogunrinde, & Faruk, 2012; Akinlusi, Rabi, Olawepo, Adewunmi, Ottun, & Akinola, 2014; Manyike, Chinawa, Aniwada, & Chinawa, 2015; Ezechi, AdesolaMusa, David, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, EugeniaIdigbe & Ujah, 2016; Hassan, Awosan, Panti,

Nasir, Tunau, Umar,... & Sulaiman, 2016); although methodologies from those studies differ significantly. Most of this studies reported a higher prevalence in girls (95%) than their male counterparts with the perpetrators most times known by the victim (WHO, 2006; Bugaje, et, al. 2012; Ezechi, et al. 2016; Hassan, et, al. 2016).

Long-term psychological and medical issues result from sexual abuse trauma, some of which increase the adolescent's vulnerability to future sexual abuse. According to the World Health Organization (2013), despite a significant rise in the number of reported incidents and calls for victims to come forward, the fundamental issue with rape in today's culture is that victims do not report their experiences to law enforcement. In a study conducted by Odeyemi, Olufunlayo, Ogunnowo, and Onajole (2016), sexual assault among female teenagers not in school in Lagos, Nigeria was evaluated. The findings showed that only 22.9% of rape victims reported the incident to the police. Given that the great majority of these incidents remain unreported and that those that are reported are not tried or prosecuted in a timely manner, those who commit such ills might not be scared to quit.

DaSilva-Ibru (2019) reports that the prosecution and conviction rate of sexual offenders is significantly low, even though sexual assaults, including rape, are frequent in our culture and are primarily addressed by a small number of laws. The legitimacy of the 18 convictions that were reported in a single publication cannot be easily verified using established data (DaSilva-Ibru, 2019). Despite the growing awareness campaigns carried out by several human right groups in the country, there still exists certain prevailing factors that encourage under reporting of cases in the country at large. The underreporting and poor conviction rates that are currently observed in the nation may be attributed in part to the victim's sense of humiliation as well as their decision to keep the name of the offender secret, particularly when it involves a family member. Sexual abuse is a criminal offense that violates a person's sexual rights and dignity. According to DaSilva-Ibru (2019), it's a crime for which there is a life sentence if proven guilty. Each person has the freedom and right to choose their own sexual preferences while also upholding the rights and dignity of others.

Protecting the rights, wellbeing, and safety of children who are at risk of rape and sexual assault is the duty of every citizen. As a result, it is urged that young people who ought to have practiced erotic misuse understand their rights as citizens and feel safe in the knowledge that justice will be served and those who commit such crimes will face consequences. This study aims to examine research done in Nigeria with the goal of identifying the gaps in the academic literature in order to provide the necessary remedies and suggestions that

would bring about a long-lasting solution and lower the occurrence of the threat in our country.

### **Predominance of Sexual Abuse in Nigeria**

In Nigerian culture, sexual abuse is a well-known danger. Teenage sexual abuse is common and affects 6-74% of them, according to a review by Eyong and Emechebe (2019). Different location, sample size, and scope variations can be the cause of the discrepancy in these prevalence rates. In 2015, Ogunfowokan and Fajemilehin carried out a cross-sectional study in Ife/Ijesa Zone, Osun State, Nigeria, to evaluate school-aged teenage girls' experiences with sexual pestering (SH), sexual misuse (SE), and rape. 31 (15.1%) of the adolescents reported having been sexually battered as kids (mean =  $1.2 \pm 0.4$ ), and 59 (29.6%) reported having been sexually abused as teenagers (mean =  $1.3 \pm 0.5$ ). According to Ogunfowokan et al. (2015), 56 (55.5%) of the adolescents had experienced sexual harassment, and 21 (20.8%) had been raped. Balogun and Adenowuro (2020) found that there is a 29.0% prevalence of sexual abuse among secondary school students in Ibadan, with the most common forms being non-contact sexual abuse, which involves watching explicit content, and contact sexual abuse, which involves touching or fondling of genitals.

Akinlusi et al. (2014) carried out a five-year retrospective analysis of sexual assault cases that occurred at LASUTH from January 2008 to December 2012. The study's conclusions revealed that 83.6% of girls under the age of 19 had experienced sexual abuse. Akinlusi et al. (2014) stated that the results are similar to those of other studies (Akhiwu, Umanah, & Olueddo, 2013; Daru, Osagie, Pam, Mutahir, Silas, & Ekwempu, 2011; Adeleke, Olowookere, Hassan, Komolafe, & Asekun-Olarinmoye, 2012), in which a sizable number of sexual assaults happened against children and adolescents. In their cross-sectional study evaluating child sexual abuse among teenagers in southeast Asia, Manyike, Chinawa, Aniwada, and Chinawa (2015). According to Nigeria, 40% of teenagers in southeast Nigeria reported having experienced sexual abuse overall. When compared to forced abuse, which was reported to be considerable (46.2%), penetration abuse was significantly low (7.5%). The prevalence of child sexual abuse among teenagers in south-western Nigeria is very low (25.7%), according to a community-based study by David, Ezechi, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, Ohihoin, Herbertson, and Odeyemi (2018). Okagua and Alex-Hart (2020) did a cross-sectional survey with 1,162 students in Port Harcourt. The study found that 422 (38.9%) of the students had been the victim of sexual assault in one form or another.

The findings of the reviewed studies established the fact that sexual abuse is prevalent among adolescents in Nigeria. The growing concern has

brought about increase in the protest and awareness campaigns being carried out all over the nation (Aljazeera, 2020). Although cases of sexual abuse are not frequently reported (Akinlusi, et al., 2014; David et al., 2015) to security personnel for prosecution of perpetrators but there has been a significant increase of late (Folayan et al., 2014; Premium Times, 2020). Numerous factors, such as poverty, ignorance, and substance usage, have been linked to sexual abuse. Ogunfowokan et al. (2015) discovered a noteworthy correlation between sexual abuse and child maltreatment. This means that children who experience sexual abuse stand more possible to practice abuse as teenagers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Causes of Sexual Abuse**

**Social Factors:** Unplanned and uncontrolled births in socioeconomically disadvantaged sectors of society, where parents are unable to give the essential care, safety, and sustenance for their kids, are one of the key difficulties that puts children at danger of abuse, violence, or exploitation, according to Seth (2018). Child abuse and poverty have a high correlation. Children of the impoverished who live by the sides of the road are more likely to experience these kinds of maltreatment. According to Southall and Mc Donald (2018), parents take their kids begging on the streets, where they run the risk of being abused and exploited.

**Familial Factors:** Given that many of them are unsure of how to broach the topic and that their children are still too young to understand it, most parents steer clear of discussing the sensitive topic of sexual assault with their children. Many people believe they lack the knowledge or resources necessary to help them talk about it with their child (Foster, 2017). The likelihood of committing a crime is increased when a capable guardian is absent. Parents frequently lack knowledge about sexual abuse, despite the fact that it is vital to children's safety. Unknowingly, parents raise their child's risk of developing CSA because they lack awareness that, in the majority of cases, acquaintances or trusted individuals are the prospective offenders about this important fact (Finkelhor, 2018).

**Media:** Online exposure to sexual and pornographic content is a significant contributing element to the global rise in the rate of juvenile delinquency. Due to the growing tendency of young people seeing pornography, adolescents who access it tend to become more violent and have skewed views about sexuality and relationships. This has led to an international crisis of "child on child" sexual abuse (Johnston, 2019). According to Thekaekara (2018), rape rates among young boys in Nigeria are on the rise due to a mix of violent pornography and alcohol usage. Teens who use social media frequently send

and receive sexually explicit text messages, also known as "sexting." Teenagers also trade nude or semi-naked photos on social media. Teens who engage in such activities run the risk of being sexually abused, raped, or murdered since they don't realize that the stranger they are chatting with could be a predator who could cause them serious harm (Undiyaundeye, 2014).

**Substance Abuse:** Substance misuse, including alcohol abuse, is strongly linked to child maltreatment (WHO). Most sexual offenses involve alcohol consumption, and those who abuse alcohol and become intoxicated are more likely to use physical force to initiate sexual contacts (Johnson, 2014). Substance abuse depresses the mental stability of the individual and causes him to commit the offense, which he may later regret.

**Lack of Policy Implementation:** The main reason why offenders have such a free pass to gather the bravery to commit such a heinous crime is the gap between policy and its execution. The culprit escapes punishment due to the police's insensitive handling of the cases, postponed trials, convictions, and evidence manipulation. The Human Rights Watch report discusses a few cases. In one, a young girl was gang raped, but the police treated her aggressively and did not act despite the victim's medical report showing no signs of rape. Additionally, in an effort to submit a false complaint, the victim's family was physically assaulted by police, including the station officer (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The police compromise a number of cases without allowing a trial, and survivors are asked to retract their charges. As a result, the criminal is free to commit similar crimes in society in the future (Arya, 2018).

#### **Consequences of Sexual Abuse**

**Social Stigma:** According to Kennedy and Prock (2018), shame is the stigmatization's most potent component. In the eyes of society, victims—not offenders—face humiliation and disgrace. It is their fault that they experienced maltreatment. To the abused victims, this stigmatization is extremely painful and distressing. Most typically in non-abusive personal relationships, stigmatization persists in the victim child's subsequent life. Singh (2019) reports that due to societal stigma, a sizable fraction of parents whose children have been abused decide against getting them medical assistance.

**Physical Outcomes:** Abuse of children can have very negative long-term impacts on one's physical health. The victim's general health is declining. Comparatively to women who are not victims of such crimes, women who have endured sexual abuse experience persistent pelvic pain. Hormonal issues, exhaustion, and headaches are other health consequences. Genital injuries like hymen lacerations are caused by violent child abuse. The girl child victim has her genital organs damaged and has permanent hymenal scars, which are

evidence of the penile insertion, after a blunt object is inserted into her genital region (Kim et al., 2017).

Physical repercussions of child sexual abuse include, among many other bodily locations, injuries or bruises on the neck, head, or thighs; these include pelvic fractures, urethral injuries, urine retention, and so on (Cohen and Cohen, 2018).

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs):** are terrible results of sexual assault. Minors who ought to have practiced sexual mistreatment are particularly susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Repeated child abuse by the abuser might lead to mucosal injuries and sexually transmitted diseases. Another risk factor for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases is multiple perpetrators of sexual assault (Sexually Transmitted Disease Evaluation and Care, 2019). Infectious STDs that can spread through sexual activity include syphilis and gonorrhoea (Hammerschlag, 2018).

**Mental Outcomes:** The psychological and mental health of a child abused sexually is disturbed. The victim's behaviour and social life are greatly impacted by mental injuries, which do not always heal quickly. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2019), common behavioural repercussions include depression, low self-esteem, difficulty sustaining relationships, mistrust towards people, and terror. The development of a child's brain is negatively impacted by trauma and crimes against children as a result (McCrary et al, 2020).

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders:** Children who are sexually abused typically suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSDs). Individuals who have experienced sexual violence, accidents, militant attacks, or other traumatic experiences may be affected by this mental illness (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). According to Bloom and Reichert (2018), there is a direct correlation between sexual abuse and trauma. The American Psychiatric Association (2018) lists remembering thoughts as one of the many signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Frightful dreams, flashbacks, nightmares, and the persistent feeling of bad recollections are some other symptoms.

### **Perpetrators of sexual abuse**

Growing concerns are raised on a daily regarding how to bring about an end to the menace of sexual abuse in the nation. Scholarly literatures have researched into identifying the perpetrators of this ill and have come up with findings to help identify these set of individuals with the hope of bringing about a lasting solution to the menace in the nation. A few Nigerian authors have researched into this area and this study reviewed their findings. According to Okagua et al (2020) among the Sexual abuse victims claimed that

123 (27.2%) of the abusers were neighbors, and 153 (33.8%) were caregivers or family members. These results corroborate those of a study by David et al. (2015), which similarly discovered that family members and relatives account for the majority of child sexual abuse cases. However, Manyike et al. (2015) found that the majority of those who committed sexual abuse were their partners (31.2%) and neighbors (16.1%). According to Ogunfowokan et al. (2015), male friends and sexual partners are the ones that abuse adolescents sexually, which is consistent with this conclusion. The causes of these results are several. According to Kunnuji and Esiet (2015), living arrangement, age, and fundamental deprivation are some of the factors that anticipate experiencing statutory rape. Balogun and Adenowuro (2020) report that around 54.1% of victims of sexual abuse suffered abuse at the home of the addict. Additionally, they noted that friends (55.5%), neighbours (22.7%), and family members (20.9%) were the most common culprits of non-contact sexual abuse, whereas friends (47.3%), neighbours (25.7%), and strangers to the victims (12.2%) were the most common perpetrators of contact sexual abuse.

Therefore, it could be concluded that perpetrators of sexual abuse are not people far off, but rather individuals who happen to be close, that is friends, neighbours and relatives alike. Having established this fact parents and guardians are left with the task of watching their wards so as to prevent them from being abused in any form.

### **Counselling Implication**

Whether as a counsellor or as a parent or any other person counselling sexual abuse victims, there are ways to go about it. The ways are discussed in this paper as do's and don'ts. It is imperative to mention here that this aspect of the paper is very important to parents because most of the time they discover by themselves that their children have been sexually abused and because of the age bracket of children involved, It could be difficult for the kids to tell the counsellor about the abuse directly, but they can always tell their parents—especially their moms—and other trusted adults. It might be difficult to start a conversation with victims of child sexual abuse while you are providing counselling.

Nevertheless, the most important message to get across to the child either through words or actions is that the child is not to be blamed for the abuse hence the following do's and don'ts as highlighted by Faller (2019) may be adopted.

#### **Do's**

- The child sexual abuse victims should be reassured. They should be made to realise by whoever is counselling them that they believe them.
- Victims should be reassured of their safety.

- They should be made to know that they are not to be blamed.
- They should be told that they are still loved especially by the parents.
- They should be given time to talk about it at their own pace.
- The victims should be allowed to talk about the confused way that they may feel.
- When talking with the victims there is the need to be calm so that it may not be confused for anger.
- Parents should understand as much as they can about the effects of child sexual abuse so that they can best support themselves and their children. This, they can do by seeking help from a professional counsellor or a child sexual abuse therapist.

#### **Don'ts**

On the other hand, the following don'ts should also be observed.

- The child should not be blamed for what happened.
- The child should not be told to forget it ever happened.
- The child should not be prevented from talking about it.
- No behaviour should be put up to suggest to the child that it would have been better if he/she has stayed quiet about the abuse.
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#### **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Teenage females are more likely than boys to be sexually battered, according to the study's findings. Also, there's a greater chance that teenagers are acquainted with those who sexually abuse them.

From the above conclusion, this study suggests that;

1. Parents and guardians should watch their wards closely; as well as keep adolescence under the supervision of caregivers with established reputation and un-questionable character so as to protect them against abuse.
2. Education regarding sexual abuse vulnerabilities and safeguards for children and adults should be provided through workshops held in schools. It is imperative to use child-friendly and easily understandable approaches to create awareness among school-age youngsters. Initiatives for raising awareness should come from the local administration, police, media, and civil society. Its goal ought to be identifying the intentions of those who harm you and protecting you from them.
3. Law enforcement agencies in collaboration with the judiciary should see to the quick trial and prosecution of sexual abuse offenders, so as to encourage victims of such cases to open up and seek justice.

#### **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

This research has limitations so further research needs to be done on this topic.

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