

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AMONG PARENTS IN KONTAGORA EMIRATE OF NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study examined psychological determination of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate of Niger State. A descriptive survey research design was employed. A random sampling technique was used to select subject from the parents and a total of 400 parents were selected for the study. 170 were males, 230 were females, 120 were Christians while 280 were Muslim inclination, 260 were public servants and 140 were self-employed parents. The instrument used for the study was a self-developed structured Psychological Determinant of Child Abuse (PDCA) with reliability index of 0.76. It was revealed that stress, tension, frustration, the child's behaviour as well as parents' relationship are factors responsible for child abuse among others. Recommendations were made as to how parents should be taught child and home management techniques and skills.*

**KEYWORDS:** Child Abuse, Parents, Emirate, Kontagora, Psychological Determination

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### INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is the maltreatment of children. Helter and Kempe (1996) described an abused child as any child who receives non-accidental physical injury as a result of acts or omissions on the part of his parents or guardians. This description of an abused child recognizes the vulnerability of the child and the responsibility placed on child's caretaker. Child abuse can be described as a variety of acts by adults ranging from frank explosive assaults to over punitive discipline or irresponsible neglect. This could take the form of sexual abuse by father, step father or other male members of the family, excessive labour, deprivation of certain basic needs such as inadequate clothing, shelter, malnutrition and starvation, lack of love, lack of opportunity for psychological development, abandonment and severe battering (National Centre for Child Abuse, 1978). The main objective of this study therefore is to find out the possible determinants of child abuse with special reference to psychological variable as they bother on parents in Kontagora Emirate of Niger State. To do this the following research questions were used as a guide

- (i) Will stress be a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?
- (ii) Will tension be a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?
- (iii) Is frustration a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?
- (iv) Could a child's behaviour be a contributing factor to child abuse by parents in Kontagora Emirate?

(v) Could unhealthy husband and wife relationship be a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?

## **LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

A child is a person between 18 months and 13 years of age (World Book Encyclopaedia, 1992). The United Nations Convention and the Organisation of African Unit (OAU) charter on the right of the children as Isamah (1997), views a child in their Article 1, as every human being below the age of 18 years. In the Nigeria Labour Act of 1974, Isamah (1997) further defined as child as a person below 15 years of age.

Eighty-five to ninety percentage of the child abuse are from the family members and most acts of child abuse is linked to the child's parents. Teenagers who become parents are most likely to become abusers, due to financial pressure or because they had not planned to train or have babies. Also, parents who were abused as children are also most likely to abuse their own children. They are parents involved in substance abuse, less stable and also likely to abuse their children (Mecks-Mitchell & Heit, 1989).

Statistics have shown that 25.8% of children aged 10 and 14 years in Nigeria work. Several of them can be found in the agricultural sector in outright slavery as bounded by labour in dangerous industrial occupations or the streets as scavengers, vendors and child prostitutes (Sementari, 1998).

The consequences of child abuse are enormous and very devastating to the abused child. A physically abused child may become distracted, lacking in persistence, ego control and enthusiasm and may also experience considerable negative emotions. A sexually abused child may suffer from chronic consequence or rape, which include Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, miscarriage as well as homicide and suicide in cultures where rape and unwanted pregnancy are highly stigmatized.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a survey design to elicit parents' opinions on how child abuse can be noticed within human population.

### **Population**

The population of this study consisted of all the literate parents in Kontagora Emirate of Niger State. The Emirate consists of five (5) local governments; Bangi, Kontagora, New Bussa, Rijau and Nasko.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

A total of four hundred parents were randomly selected from government establishments like schools, local government, private offices and ministries. Eighty respondents from each of the five local government areas participated in the study. 170 of the respondents were male, 230 were females, 120 were Christians, 280 were Muslims, 260 were public servants while 140 were self-employed parents. The research instrument is a researcher constructed questionnaire

known as Psychological Determinants of Child Abuse (PDCA). It contained a 10-item statements that sought information from people about specific aspects of behaviour of parents which ranges from stress, tension, frustration, attitudes, to parental relationships. It was a 4-point scale tailored along Likert-style of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was validated through split-half method and a reliability index of 0.76 was obtained.

### Procedure for the Data Collection

The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher with the support of head teachers and administrative officers of each establishments and institution visited. The completed questionnaires were collected, coded and analysed. Four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed and all were collected from the respondents.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

The data obtained for this study were analysed by computation of percentages. The frequencies of the categorical responses were first collated before deducing their percentages as indicated below

### Analysis for research Questions

**Research Question 1:** Will stress be a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?

**Table 1: Response of Parents on Stress as Determinant of Child Abuse**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1.	It is difficult to make ends meet	148 (37%)	150 (37.5%)	60 (10.5%)	42 (10.5%)	400
2.	Demands are just higher than supply	135 (33.4%)	130 (32.5%)	81 (21.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400
	<b>Column Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>800</b>
<b>Total Average</b>		<b>141.5 (35.4%)</b>	<b>140 (35%)</b>	<b>72.5 (181.1%)</b>	<b>46 (11.5%)</b>	<b>400</b>
		<b>70.4%</b>		<b>29.6%</b>		

Table 1, reveals a percentage agreement of 70.4% as against 29.6% disagreement. The researcher therefore, established that stress was found to be a significant determinant to child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate.

**Research Question 2:** Will tension be a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?

**Table 2: Response of Parents on Tension as Determinant of Child Abuse**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1.	I become easily touchy when faced with series of demands by my family members	140 (35%)	90 (22.5%)	90 (22.5%)	80 (20%)	400
2.	Whenever I am tensed up or under pressure, I easily become aggressive and loose my temper	150 (37.5%)	95 (23.8%)	75 (18.7%)	80 (20%)	400
	<b>Column Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>92.5</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>800</b>
<b>Total Average</b>		<b>145 (36.3%)</b>	<b>92.5 (23.1%)</b>	<b>82.5 (20.6%)</b>	<b>80 (20%)</b>	<b>400</b>
		<b>59.4%</b>		<b>40.6%</b>		

Table 2 revealed that 59.4% of respondents agreed that tension could contribute to child abuse, while 40.6% did not concur with the opinion. This result evidently showed that tension is a significant determinant of child abuse among parents.

**Research Question 3:** Is frustration a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?

**Table 3: Response of Parents on Tension as Determinant of Child Abuse**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1.	I feel frustrated whenever my set goals become elusive	160 (40%)	140 35%)	65 (16.3%)	35 (8.7%)	400
2.	I feel frustrated by non-manifestation of the increase on my labour	120 (30%)	140 (35%)	8 (20%)	60 (15%)	400
	<b>Column Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>800</b>
<b>Total Average</b>		<b>140 (35%)</b>	<b>140 (35%)</b>	<b>72.5 (18.1%)</b>	<b>47.5 (11.9%)</b>	<b>400</b>
		<b>70.0%</b>		<b>30.0%</b>		

The result on table 3 revealed that 70% of the parents agree that frustration made a significant contribution to child abuse among parents, while 30% of the respondents had a contrary option. It can be inferred that frustration is a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate.

**Research Question 4:** Could a child's behaviour be a contributing factor to child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?

**Table 4: Parents Response on Child's Behaviour as Determinant of Child Abuse**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1.	A stubborn child is prone to maltreatment than a well-behaved child	150 (37.5%)	120 (30.5%)	60 (15%)	70 (17.5%)	400
2.	An obedient responsible and quiet child is naturally liked and loved much more than a disobedient child	180 (45%)	104 (26%)	58 (14.5%)	58 (14.5%)	400
	<b>Column Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>800</b>
<b>Total Average</b>		<b>165 (41.3%)</b>	<b>112 (28%)</b>	<b>59 (14.7%)</b>	<b>64 (16%)</b>	<b>400</b>
		<b>69.3%</b>		<b>30.7</b>		

Table 4 shows that child's behaviour is a determinant of child abuse among parents from the responses of subjects taken collectively. It was observed that majority (69.3%) of the parents would naturally love well behaved and responsible children than a stubborn and disobedient child. However (30.7%) of the parents did not feel the child's behaviour could be a factor responsible for child abuse.

**Research Question 5:** Could unhealthy husband and wife relationship be a significant determinant of child abuse among parents in Kontagora Emirate?

**Table 5: Responses on Unhealthy Relationship between Husband and Wife**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1.	Anger at a spouse is often displayed on the relatively defenceless child	125 (31.3%)	130 (32.5%)	70 (17.5%)	75 (18.7%)	400
2.	Crisis in the home environment between parents exposes children to hostility	125 (32.5%)	120 (30%)	75 (18.7%)	75 (18.7%)	400
	<b>Column Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>800</b>
<b>Total Average</b>		<b>127.5 (31.9%)</b>	<b>125 (31.3%)</b>	<b>72 (18.1%)</b>	<b>75 (18.7%)</b>	<b>400</b>
		<b>63.2%</b>		<b>36.8%</b>		

From the responses of parents in the Table5, it is realized that (63.2%) of the parents in Kontagora Emirate affirmed that unhealthy relationship between husbands and wives was a significant determinant of child abuse. 36.8% of parents however had contrary view.

## Discussion of the Findings

It could be submitted from the results of the analysis in this study that a number of factors could be responsible for the cause of child abuse among parents. Among such factors are: stress, tension, frustration, the child's behaviour as well as parents' relationships. This result corroborates the submission of Henry, Joneway, Jerome and Carol (1990) that child abuse is frequently part of a pattern of family violence and anger of a spouse which is often displaced into the relatively defenceless child.

The cause of child abuse cannot be disconnected from the situation in the country in which poverty has eaten deep into the veins of every family. Not many families can make ends meet any longer. As a result, the parents now involve every "Jack and Harry" in the family to contribute their quota however little to the sustainability of the home. If this psychological problem could be redressed, it is necessary for the government to take over the responsibility of providing for the basic needs of every child below the age of eighteen (18) years. In addition, there is need for every parent to be gainfully employed to earn income that can support and sustain the demands of the family. In so doing, parents should decide on the number of children within which their carrying capacity could hold.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed that stress, tension, frustration, child behaviour and unhealthy relationship between parents are significant elements of child abuse in Kontagora Emirate of Niger State. It confirmed parents' involvement in the human act and there is urgent need to eradicate this denoxious and dehumanizing practice from our society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research It is therefore recommended that:

- a. Parents should be taught child and home management techniques and skills
- b. Abusive parents need counselling to change their low esteem, frustration and stress levels and often habits of substance use/abuse.
- c. Parents should learn to emphasize with the needs of their children and learn to control their impulse and anger
- d. Child maltreatment prevention strategies, which include teaching the young and other family members to reach out for help are very much necessary
- e. Religious and voluntary groups need to reach out to people in need by sponsoring poverty prevention programmes and educating the public about family violence. Preventive measures may also include teaching children certain safety strategies so that they are less vulnerable to any one that might try to exploit or maltreat them.

They should also be taught how to say 'no' assertively and how to seek for help when needed

- f. There is the need for contraceptive counselling and planned parenthood service for sexually active youths in our society
- g. The government should strive to eradicate poverty from our society through effective job creation policies and programme which provide job opportunities for our youths and working class

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