Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse in Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined socio-cultural variables and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Four objectives, four research questions and four hypotheses guided this study. A correlation research design was used and the population of this study was 57,004 students in senior secondary II classes in the 253 public secondary schools for the 2020/2021 academic session in the study area and a sample size of 570 students from 11 of the schools selected through simple random sampling technique was used for the study but 526 students returned the questionnaires. A researcher-made questionnaire named Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire with reliability coefficient of 0.74 was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was duly administered on the respondents and the data collected were used in testing the hypotheses formulated. The data were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation at .05 alpha level. The findings of the study showed that poverty, domestic violence, child rearing practices and family structure significantly related with child. Based on these findings, it was concluded that socio-cultural variables significantly contribute to child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. It was recommended that parents/guardians irrespective of the family structure should strive as much as possible to provide for their children, positively influence them, and raise them properly with love so that they can develop the right attitude to life rather than allowing life situations to make them abuse their children.*

KEY WORDS: Socio-cultural factors, child abuse, Akwa Ibom, State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is an important public health problem in Nigeria at large and in Akwa Ibom State in particular. In fact, the issue of child abuse is often referred to as an epidemic and it is often a hidden epidemic due to lack of awareness and support attendant of the issue. Children's experience with abuse, either as victims or as witnesses has been described as a public health problem of epidemic proportions (Glodich, 2018). Many children experience or observe abuse within the confines of their homes or within their own neighbourhoods. The problems posed by children's exposure to abuse not only affect children's physical health and safety, but also their psychological adjustment, social relations and academic achievement. The impact of abuse exposure goes beyond emotional and behavioural disorders. It affects children's views of the world and of themselves, their ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, their expectations for future happiness and their moral development (Ney, 2014). Moreover, the

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impact of abuse goes beyond the period of exposure and the immediate aftermath, and sometimes occurs many years later, affecting individuals into adulthood.

Child abuse results have health implications and financial costs that impact society among others. Fang, Brown, Forence and Marcy (2012) reported that child abuse costs society approximately $124 billion annually. The costs of child abuse include injuries that result in the hospitalization of children and the cost of mental health treatment for the victims of physical, emotional, sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect (Fang *et al*., 2012). In addition to the financial costs, child abuse has long-term consequences for the children involved. Child abuse has been shown to be linked to delays in early brain development (Centre for Disease Control (CDC), 2014). In addition to the trauma children experience in their early years, there are consequences of child abuse that appear in adulthood. For example, research shows that abused children who enter adulthood are at increased risk for physical, mental and behavioural health problems such as causing or being a victim of violence, depression, obesity, smoking, risky sex behaviours, alcohol and drug misuse, and unintended pregnancies (CDC, 2014; Fang *et al*., 2012). Various studies have shown a correlation between child abuse and poor health (Felitti, 2012; CDC, 2014; Flaherty, Hanson, Sargent and Mondale, 2016). Adults who experienced abuse as a child are more likely to acquire physical ailments such as asthma, allergies, bronchitis, high blood pressure and ulcers (Springer, Sheridan, Kuo and Carnes, 2017). Other poor health consequences of child abuse are cancer, heart disease, sexually transmitted diseases and suicide (CDC, 2014). Abused children perform poorly in school and in life because they lack basic needs and support.

In addition to posing threats to the child's personal safety, child abuse all violate children immediate environment as a safe haven, and render parents potentially less available for physical and emotional caretaking (Margolin, 2018). Finkelhor and Kendall-Tackett (2017) assert child abuse as harm that occur to children because of other human actors behaving in ways that violate social norms, thereby setting exposure to violence apart from other stressors, such as chronic illness. Children's immediate reactions to child abuse are likely to be some combination of helplessness, fear, anger and high arousal. Since child abuse generally is a recurring event, over time, abused children may experience persistent, high levels of arousal that disrupt his or her efforts in age, academic and social pursuits. Research has shown that child abuse starts at home and in early childhood and is caused by many factors related to the home environment. The literature and research on child abuse has increased since 1970, a period during which child abuse research became increasingly empirical, there are still gaps in the knowledge and understanding of the constellation of factors that contribute to child abuse (Sadler, 2010). One of the gaps in the knowledge of child abuse is the role of socio-cultural factors. The studies on child abuse have mainly concentrated on parents and children factors that promote child maltreatment and very little on socio-cultural factors.

Social factors are seen to have great impact on child training and upbringing. Social factors that are not properly managed may lead to problems such as child abuse, psychological and physical problems as well as social problems among children. Therefore, social factors are important factors to consider when studying child abuse because children of different backgrounds are abused as a result of social values (Elgar and Pfortner, 2015). It is also

important to take into account the differing standards of parenting behaviours as a result of cultures around the world. Culture is a society's common fund of beliefs and behaviours, and its concepts of how people should conduct themselves. In other words, culture helps define the generally accepted principles of child-rearing and care of children. Different cultures have different rules about what are acceptable parenting practices.

The study of child abuse in particular has been influenced by the emergence of interest in the role of poverty in child abuse. While several studies have examined the relationship between low income and child abuse in general, many studies have concluded that the strongest association is found with neglect as opposed to abuse (Drake and Pandey, 2016). Wolock and Horowitz (2019) have identified poverty as perhaps the single-most important contributor to child abuse. Wolock and Horowitz (2011) famously referred to families in which abuse was a concern as the poorest of the poor. According to an environmental deficits model, the contribution of poverty to abuse cannot be overstated and this has enormous implications for interventions proposed to address child abuse. Gelles (2013) writes that the relative poverty of low income families compared to the resources enjoyed by average family in any country has created extreme stress for poor families; consequently, any efforts to address child abuse must understand and alleviate the disastrous effect of being poor in an affluent society. Lending further support to this, Pelton (2018) contends that there is good reason to believe that the problems of poverty are causative agents in parents' abusive behaviours and that it is these root causes that must be addressed. The author further argues that the single most effective way to reduce the rate of abuse would be to increase family income levels.

Schumaker (2012) explored the relationship between poverty and child neglect in Canadian child welfare. The objectives of the study were to identify the nature and frequency of clinical and poverty-related concerns in child neglect investigations and to assess the service referral response to these needs; to examine the contribution of poverty-related need to case decision-making; and to explore whether substantiated cases of neglect can be divided into subtypes based on different constellations of clinical and poverty-related needs. This study was a secondary analysis of data collected through the 2008 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (Child Information Service (CIS), 2008), a nationally representative dataset. A selected subsample of neglect investigations from the CIS, 2008 (N = 4,489) was examined through descriptive analyses, logistic regression, and two-step cluster analysis in order to explore each research objective. The majority of children investigated for child abuse lived in families experiencing poverty-related needs, and with caregivers struggling with clinical difficulties. Cluster analysis suggested that there existed a subgroup of abused children living in families perhaps best characterized by the broader notion of social disadvantage. These families may be better served through an orientation of family support/family welfare rather than through the current residual child protection paradigm.

Masheti (2019) examined influence of parents' socio-economic status on child abuse in lower primary schools in Mekenene Zone Nyamira County, Kenya. The population was lower primary school pupils and their parents in twenty three schools in the zone. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. The researcher carried out a pilot study in two schools in the zone, one public and the other private. Data were analyzed using descriptive

statistics that is frequencies and percentages and results were presented using tables, figures and text. Results revealed that parents abused their children in many ways. The common forms of parent child abuse were physical, medical, inadequate supervision, emotional and educational form of neglect. Parents' level of education, income and occupation influenced parent child abuse.

Domestic violence has often been cited as a factor in cases of child abuse. Shepard and Raschick (2019) surveyed child protection workers to understand how they assessed and intervened in cases of domestic violence. Antle (2017) analysed cases investigated for child abuse and found a rate of co-morbidity between domestic violence and child abuse of 29%. Further, the authors noted a significant correlation between the level of severity of abuse and the presence of domestic violence, with more severe cases of abuse more likely to co-occur with domestic violence. McGuigan and Pratt (2011) noted that substantiated abuse is twice as likely in families where domestic violence is also present. Babatunde, Durowaiye and Modupe (2015) examined effects of domestic violence on young people in family setting in Kwara State, Nigeria. This article examined the perceptions, experiences, and the various ways in which the occurrence of domestic violence have shaped the lives of Nigerian young people. It used data emerging from a survey with the use of questionnaire administered to 150 school and out of school young people in Omu-Aran, Kwara State. Findings suggested that the experiences of respondents exert considerable influence on their perceptions of violence, child abuse, and family life and significantly shaped their decision as relates to choosing a life partner. The study concluded that domestic violence is indeed a social problem that leads to abuse of young people in the family setting. It recommended the involvement of various stakeholders including counsellors, religious and community groups, government as well as other institutions to focus on propagating anti-domestic violence enlightenment programmes that discourage violence in family setting.

Poor parental disciplining for example beating instead of punishing and poor child parental ties can be termed as child abuse. This kind of situation leads to poor parent-child relationship and in the end they happen to live as enemies under the same house. This makes the child to live with fear and aggressiveness with his/her parents and they may migrate away from their homes to solicit for places of comfort. Farrington (2015) identified poor parental child-rearing practices as among the most important independent predictors of child abuse. The author noted that strict, controlling discipline, lack of supervision, inter marital conflict and separation from parents constituted the basic elements featuring family functioning that lead to child abuse. Children who are abuse receive poor parental child-rearing behaviour, characterised by harsh or erratic parental discipline, cruel, passive, or neglecting parental attitude, and parental conflict. Their parents tend to supervise them poorly, being lax in enforcing rules or under-vigilant. Furthermore, potential abuse children are more likely to have experienced separation from their parents and their parents tend to have authoritarian child-rearing attitudes. It is equally plausible to assume that child abuse occurs as a result of harsh, rejecting and coercive parenting and in addition to the fact that many children who are abused have parents that show poor child rearing practices (Farrington, 2015).

Ajiboye, Atere and Olufunmi (2014) carried out a study on changing patterns of child rearing practice in Badagry area of Lagos State, Nigeria. Triangulation method was used for data collection. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select 100 respondents. Chi-square technique was used to test the hypothesis for the study. The study found positive relationship between pattern of child rearing practices, personality and delinquent behaviour formation among the people of Badagry. The study also found positive association between effective socialization by parents and child's positive attitudes towards life. It was recommended that parents should put more efforts to ensure that their children are adequately provided for and morally groomed instead of being abused. This call to question the issue and justification for family planning which among other objectives seeks to ensure that parents only give birth to children they can comfortably cater for. Government should therefore assist through education and enlightenment campaign that could help in the reduction of delinquent behaviour among the youth in Nigeria at large.

Family structure deals with the members of a household who may or may not be linked by marriage. Child abuse is the opposite of child love. A married family is based deliberately on a decision by the husband and wife to build their lives and family on the love they have for each other, made public in a solemn contract. Abuse is higher when the structure of family love is rejected or broken. The size of the family can also increase the risk for abuse. A family with four or more children are three times more likely to be violent towards their children than parents with fewer children (Berger, 2015). However, it is not always simply the size of the family that matters; data from a range of countries indicate that household overcrowding increases the risk of child abuse (Berger, 2015). Unstable family environments, in which the composition of the household frequently changes as family members and others move in and out, are a feature particularly noted in cases of chronic abuse (Wilkins, Warren, Hahn and Houng, 2011).

Okonya (2010) investigated the role of family structure in the abuse of children. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between family structure and specific types of child abuse utilizing cases from an agency in Montgomery, Alabama from 2012 to 2013. Approximately 727 cases of child abuse were reviewed. Logistic regression results indicated married and common law families' children were 1.83 times experienced sexual abuse than the reference category (single). As it relates to relationship to the offender, children were 2.1 times experienced sexual abuse from an acquaintance; someone who is known by the child but is a non-family member, compared to the reference level (stranger). This research can promote positive social change by providing awareness to the local community about child abuse. The findings provided policymakers, public health departments, healthcare officials, health advocates and communities needed information on child abuse and the specific family structures that are associated.

Some researchers have suggested that views on child-rearing across cultures might diverge to such an extent that agreement on what practices are abusive or neglectful may be extremely difficult to reach (Elgar and Pfortner, 2015). Nonetheless, differences in how cultures define what is abusive have more to do with emphasizing particular aspects of parental behaviour. It appears that there is general agreement across many cultures that child abuse should not be

allowed and virtually unanimity in this respect where very harsh disciplinary practices and sexual abuse are concerned. Socio-cultural factors that seem to promote child abuse include family structure, poverty, domestic violence, parents' socio-economic status, child-rearing customs, parent-child relationship, social isolation, marital conflict, disciplinary practices among others. Due to the inherent gap in child abuse studies and effect of child abuse on children's holistic development, performance in school and in life generally, there was need to examine socio-cultural variables and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State in order to fill this gap and suggest appropriate strategies to overcome the vice.

Statement of the Problem

Child abuse is a global problem regardless the efforts of researchers, policy makers, psychologists, social workers and child advocates. In 2019, over 3.5 million children in the world including Akwa Ibom State were reported to be abuse. Child abuse is acknowledged as a crime that is grossly under reported. Children who experience abuse are subjected to an array of problems and negative outcomes that include emotional issues, health-related problems, drug and alcohol abuse and social difficulties among others. Additionally, children who have experienced abuse are more likely to display disorganized or insecure attachments that leave them at a higher risk for psychopathy. To reduce the incidence of child abuse, several studies have been initiated but much of the studies have focused on parents and children related factors. Despite the recommendations put forward by these studies, child abuse is still on the increase. This situation therefore shows that more need to be done in order to eliminate or curtail the incidence of child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. It is as a result of this problem that this study on socio-cultural variables and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State was initiated in order to fill this gap.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine socio-cultural variables and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives of this study were to:
1. Examine the relationship between poverty and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Assess the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Ascertain the relationship between child rearing practices and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
4. Determine the relationship between family structure and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between poverty and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
2. There is no significant relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
3. There is no significant relationship between child rearing practices and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
4. There is no significant relationship between family structure and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted correlation research design. This design is most appropriate for this study since the researcher's aim is to explain a causal relationship between an independent variable and dependent variable without manipulating the variables involved in the study. Therefore the design is suitable for this study the research was concerned with establishing the relationship that exists between socio-cultural factors and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom State is one of the states in Nigeria where most of the citizens are educated. It has lot pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions across the state. The state also has numerous primary and secondary health centres to carter for the health of her citizens. The population of this study comprised all 57,004 senior secondary II students in all the public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State for the 2020/2021 academic session (Akwa Ibom State Secondary Education Board, 2021). A sample size of 570 Senior Secondary II students sampled from 11 public secondary schools across the three senatorial districts of State. The sample size was 1% of the population of students. The 570 students from the 11 public secondary schools were selected using simple random sampling technique. Ballots with "YES" and "NO" were wrapped and placed on a platform. Any students who chose ''YES'' participated in the study and a student who chose ''NO'' did not participate. The instrument used for collecting data for this study was developed by the researcher and was titled "Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire". It comprised five items each that elicited information on the independent sub-variables (domestic violence, poverty, child rearing practices and family structure) and ten items that elicited information on the dependent variable (child abuse) making a total of 30 items. The items on the questionnaire were declarative statements and the response formats for the items were strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. In order to ensure that the Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire was valid, it was assessed by one expert each in Health Education, Social Studies and Evaluation. The inputs of the experts were used to develop the final copy of the Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire. The researchers trial-tested the Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire in order to estimate the reliability of the instrument. Copies of the Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire were administered on 30 students who were not part of the main study. Cronbach alpha reliability method was used since the instrument consisted of response format such as strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was .74 which indicated that the instrument was suitable for this study. In each school, the students were gathered in a classroom and copies of the Socio-Cultural Variables and Child Abuse Questionnaire were given to the respondents at the same time for them to respond to. The respondents were asked to read the instructions carefully and ask questions where it is not clear before responding to the statements. The respondents were not allowed to share ideas; this enabled them to give their sincere response as regard the questionnaire administered on them. Out of the 570 copies of the instrument administered, 526 were properly responded to and returned to the researcher. The data collected for this study were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical technique. This type of statistical tool is considered most suitable in estimating the relationship between two variables. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One
There is no significant relationship between poverty and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
Pearson Product Moment correlation was used in testing hypothesis one as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between poverty and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal	r-crit	Decision at P<.05
Poverty (X)	740261	2051242				
			2415464	.794	.196	Significant
Child abuse (Y)	856694	2780243				

[*]Significant at p<.05 alpha level, n = 526, df = 524

The result in Table 1 shows that poverty relates strongly and positively to child abuse with a strong coefficient of correlation (r-value) of .794. Thus, child abuse is greatly contributed to by poverty. The result further indicates that the calculated r .794 is greater than the critical r (.196) with degrees of freedom at 524 at .05 significant alpha level. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld, meaning that there is a significant relationship between poverty and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis Two
There is no significant relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
Pearson Product Moment Correlation was adopted in testing hypothesis two as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal	r-crit	Decision at P<.05
Domestic violence (X)	738845	1995826				
			2357248	.791	.196	Significant
Child abuse (Y)	856694	2780243				

[*]Significant at p < .05 alpha level, n = 526, df = 524

The result in Table 2 indicates that domestic violence relates strongly and positively to child abuse with r-value of .791. Therefore, domestic violence is a contributory variable to child abuse. The result also reveals that the calculated r value of .791 is greater than the critical r value of .196 with of 524 degrees of freedom at .05 alpha level. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained. This means that there is a significant relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis Three
There is no significant relationship between child rearing practices and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used in testing hypothesis three as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between child rearing practices and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal	r-crit	Decision at P<.05
Child rearing practices (X)	737218	1978457				
			2266837	.762	.196	Significant
Child abuse (Y)	856694	2780243				

[*]Significant at p< .05 alpha level, n = 526, df = 524

The result in Table 3 reveals that child rearing practices relates strongly and positively to child abuse with r-value of .762. Thus, child abuse is also dependent upon child rearing practices. The result further shows that the calculated r value .762 is greater than the critical r value .196 with degrees of freedom at 524 at .05 significant level. The null hypothesis was thus rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld. It therefore means that there is a significant relationship between child rearing practices and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis Four
There is no significant relationship between family structure and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.
Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used in testing hypothesis four as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between family structure and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	$\sum$X $\sum$Y	$\sum$X^2 $\sum$Y^2	$\sum$XY	r-cal	r-crit	Decision at P<.05
Family structure (X)	741275	2131643				
			2316493	.750	.196	Significant
Child abuse (Y)	856694	2780243				

[*]Significant at p < .05, n = 526, df = 524

The result in Table 4 indicates a positive and strong relationship between family structure and child abuse with a coefficient of correlation of .750. So, family structure contributes immensely to child abuse. The result in Table 4 indicates that the calculated r value of .750 is greater than the critical r value of .196 with degrees of freedom at 524 at .05 significant alpha level. The null hypothesis was upheld. This means that there is a significant relationship between family structure and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between poverty and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Chronic poverty adversely affects children through its impact on parental behaviour and the availability of resources. One of the most commonly noted features of families in which child abuse is experienced is their impoverished socio-economic condition. Poverty is often difficult to disentangle from child abuse. Poverty is often considered a factor of child abuse. Child abuse is primarily a result of poverty and they have attributed the lack of discernible improvement for children and families to the failure of the child welfare system to tackle poverty head-on. This finding is in line with that of Schumaker (2012) because he reported that majority of children investigated for child abuse lived in families experiencing poverty-related needs, and with caregivers struggling with clinical difficulties. a strong connection between poverty and child abuse. The findings also agrees with that of Masheti (2019) as he found out in his study that parents abused their children in many ways; the common forms of parent child abuse were physical, medical, inadequate supervision, emotional and educational form of neglect, and parents' level of education, income and occupation influenced the abuse mated on children by parents.

The result of hypothesis two indicated that that there is a significant relationship between domestic violence and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Husband-to-wife abuse can make each of them less available to their children, with the father unpredictable and frightening and the mother distracted by basic issues of safety and survival for herself and her children. Punitive, belligerent style of communication exhibited by abusive parents toward the wife or husband may carry over into their communications with their children, particularly their sons. Children are vulnerable to the effects of violence because violence exposure may alter the timing of typical developmental trajectories. Domestic violence results in anxiety, depression. Exposure to violence in young children can result in regressive symptoms, such as increased bedwetting,

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decreased verbalization or separation anxiety. These symptoms secondarily affect children's socialization skills or ability to concentrate in school. Moreover, at a time when children may have difficulty with typical developmental tasks, exposure to violence can result in having to acknowledge and cope with adult issues. Childhood is regarded as a period of special protection and rights. The home and the neighbourhood, generally considered the primary safe havens for the child, lose those protective and comforting qualities in the aftermath of family or neighbourhood violence. This finding is in line with that of Babatunde *et al*., (2015) because they reported in their findings that domestic violence was indeed a social problem that leads to abuse of young people in a family setting.

The result of hypothesis three showed that that there is a significant relationship between child rearing practices and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Child-rearing practices are cognitions that predispose a parent or an individual to act either positively or negatively toward a child. Practices most frequently considered involve the degree of warmth and acceptance or coldness and rejection that exists in the parent-child relationship, as well as the extent to which parents are permissive or restrictive in the limits they set for their offspring. Efforts to protect the child may be exhibited in authoritarian and restrictive parenting practices, as well as in certain precautions that may heighten the child's anxiety. Poor parental disciplining for example beating instead of punishing and poor child parental ties can be termed as child abuse. This kind of situation leads to poor parent-child relationship and in the end they happen to live as enemies under the same house. This makes the child to live with fear and aggressiveness with his/her parents and they may migrate away from their homes to solicit for places of comfort. Child rearing practices have been consistently found to be related and predictive of child abuse; thus, it is considered a general risk factor for child abuse and general socio emotional functioning. This finding is supported by that of Ajiboye *et al*., (2014) as they found out from their study that a positive association existed between parents rearing practices and child abuse. Parents ought to put more effort to ensure that their children are adequately provided for and morally groomed instead of abusing them.

The result of hypothesis four revealed that there is a significant relationship between family structure and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Child abuse also occurs when there is lack of love in a family. Abuse is higher when the structure of family love is rejected or broken. The size of the family can also increase the risk of child abuse. Unstable family environments, in which the composition of the household frequently changes as family members and others move in and out, are a feature particularly noted in cases of chronic child abuse. Physically abusive parents are more likely to be young, single, poor and unemployed and to have less education than their non-abusing counterparts. In both developing and industrialized countries, poor, young, single mothers are among those at greatest risk for using violence towards their children. Single mothers are more likely to use harsh physical discipline than mothers in two-parent families. Low education and a lack of income to meet the family's needs increase the potential of physical violence towards children. Single parent families are at greater risk of child abuse than two parent families. Members of an abusing family often fight over infidelity, and the primary parent frequently will change partners, causing stressful rearrangements of major family responsibilities and conflicts over the children. Children with cohabiting parents are likely to see their parents break up compared to children with married parents and this type

of instability often leads to behavioural problems on the part of the children. This finding is supported by the finding of Okonya (2010) because he found that family structure played a great role in the abuse of children.

CONCLUSION

This study examined socio-cultural factors and child abuse in Akwa Ibom State. The results revealed that there was a significant relationship between the independent sub-variables (poverty, domestic violence, child rearing practices and family structure) and the dependent variable (child abuse). Based on these findings, it was concluded that socio-cultural variables significantly contribute to child abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

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

1   Parents should strive as much as possible to provide for their children and positively influence them so that they can develop the right attitude to life rather than allowing poverty to make them abuse their children.

2   Parents should live in love and happiness in every household without fighting and any other forms of domestic violence because domestic violence leads to child abuse which influences the behaviour of children.

3   Parents should adopt positive child rearing practices that build friendly parent-child relationship as these kinds of child rearing practices would eliminate all forms of abuse of children.

4   Members of a family, irrespective of the structure should strive to live in harmony love and care for one another; this would ensure that children in such families are not abused.

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