

## **AN ASSESSMENT OF CHILD ABUSE AMONG MUSLIM PARENTS IN KEFFI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study intends to find out whether Muslim parents who acquire some level of formal Islamic education perceive the causes of child abuse different from those who did not acquire any formal Islamic education. Results from the questionnaires distributed indicated that the greatest cause of child abuse among Muslim parents in Keffi was poverty and lack of Islamic education. The paper recommended that the government should come to the aid of the masses by improving their lots economically as this would go a long way in reducing not only their sufferings but also their proneness to practice child abuse.*

**Keywords:** Abuse, Child, Education, Formal, Illiteray, Informal, Islam, Muslim, Parents, Poverty.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Islam, children are trust of Allah (SWT) given to the parents. Parents will be responsible for this trust on the Day of Judgment. Parents are essentially responsible for the moral, ethical, basic and essential religious training of their children. If parents fulfill this responsibility, children will become better citizens and a pleasure in the eyes of their parents and the society both in this life, and in the hereafter. Allah (SWT) stated in the Glorious Qur'an:

And those who believe and whose families follow them in Faith, to them shall We join their families: Nor shall We deprive them (of the fruit) of aught of their works: (Yet) is each individual in pledge for his deeds (52:21).

In addition, the Prophet (SAW) said:

Upon death, man's deeds will (definitely) stop except for three deeds, namely: a continuous charitable fund, endowment or goodwill; knowledge left for people to benefit from; and pious righteous and God-fearing child who continuously prays Allah, the Almighty, for the soul of his parents.<sup>1</sup>

Children, according to Islam, are entitled to various rights. The first and foremost of these rights is the right to be properly brought up, raised and educated. This means that children

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<sup>1</sup>Imam Muslim (1978).

should be given suitable, sufficient, sound and adequate religious, ethical and moral guidance to last them for their entire lives. They should be engraved with true values, they should be taught the meaning of right and wrong, true and false, correct and incorrect, appropriate and inappropriate value. Allah (SWT) stated in the Glorious Qur'an: "O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones" (66:6). The Prophet (SAW) said: "Every one of you (people) is a shepherd. And every one is responsible for whatever falls under his responsibility. A man is like a shepherd of his own family, and he is responsible for them".<sup>2</sup>Unfortunately, many parents from every walk of life, in every society, regardless of creed, origin, social and economic status have neglected this very important responsibility to their own children. Such individuals have indeed abuse and lost their children as a result of their own negligence.<sup>3</sup>

Children are to be well-fed, well-groomed, properly dressed, well-taken care of in terms of housing and utilities. It is important to offer the child serious care in terms of education, religious training and spiritual guidance. The heart of a child must be filled with faith, proper guidance, good knowledge and wisdom.

Islam views childhood with hope and aspiration, seeing it as something to look forward to, seek and long for. When it is achieved, the fruit reaped is happiness of the soul, delight of the heart and elation of the chest. According to the Quranic text, progeny is a gift from Allah (SWT) to His faithful servants. It is also one of the bounties bestowed upon them by Allah (SWT), as well as being a fulfillment of the hope that sincere servants of Allah (SWT) long for. The Qur'an says:

To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills (and plans). He bestows (children) male or female according to His Will (and Plan), Or He bestows both males and females, and He leaves barren whom He will: for He is full of Knowledge and Power (42:49-50).

Hence it is not surprising that Islamic law pays utmost attention to securing all that is needed to guarantee a wholesome psychological climate for the rearing of children, a climate wherein they learn about the world and good Islamic and moral custom and norms. As such Islam affirms:

- A child's right to good health and life
- A child's right to family, kindred, name, property and inheritance
- A child's right to healthcare and proper nutrition
- A child's right to education and acquisition of talents
- A child right to live in peace and security and enjoy human dignity and protection under the responsibility of the parents

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<sup>3</sup>Shaykh (2013).

-The caring role of society and the state to support all rights and support families incapable of providing appropriate conditions for their children.<sup>4</sup>

In Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, the child is not precluded from the above rights and privileges. Yet, unfortunately, from daily experiences today, the child in Keffi, Nasarawa State is undoubtedly placed in a pathetic condition vis-à-vis these principles and rights. That is, there is no doubt that the child is overtly and covertly abused in our society, given that child abuse is any act of maltreatment that is capable of denying the child such basic rights<sup>5</sup> as enumerated above.

## 2. LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

According to Hornby the term “abuse” connotes an unfair or illegal practice or cruel treatment of a person (and animal).<sup>6</sup> When a person uses his or her power wrongly or excessively on a child or treats him unfairly, he or she is engaged in child abuse. Hence, child abuse can take different forms. UstazRilwanu has identified the following forms and types of child labour like serving as conductors in commercial vehicles; serving in restaurants and hotels; parking refuse, selling of drugs are all manifestations of child abuse. Other practices of child abuse includes; child hawking, rape, begging (*almajirci*) drug taking and addiction by children; ritual killings of children; mutilation of child genital organs, denying the child the right to education and prostitution by under- aged girls and others.<sup>7</sup>

There have been various opinions as to the causes of child abuse. Some of these include: poverty resulting to malnutrition among children, lack of basic health care and medical attention including ante-natal and post-natal care services at infancy. As the child gets to school, he or she battles with the poorly develop educational system. This makes the child’s condition worse as society is unable to cater for education while the income of his parents cannot even give him his daily food. Thus, the parents are forced to “use” or abuse their children in order to make both ends meet. Poverty, which is one of endemic social problems in Keffi today, can be said to be a major cause of child abuse.<sup>8</sup>Other probable, easy-to-understand causes<sup>8</sup> of child abuse include: economic reasons (as when children are made to abandon school to engage in different activities in order to help in providing economic succor for the family), cultural practices like begging and hawking, immorality and materialism as in pimping, cross cultural influences, broken home, lack of effective child welfare policies, loose sexual life, wicked foster parents, cheap labour among employers, lack of respect for children’s fundamental human rights laws and lack of Islamic education and enlightenment or illiteracy and ignorance on the part of parents.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Unicef Project (2005).

<sup>5</sup>Ismail (1997).

<sup>6</sup>Hornby (2000).

<sup>7</sup>Oral Interview with Ustaz M. Rilwanu (2013).

<sup>8</sup>Oral Interview with Pharm. Rabi`u Ibrahim (2013).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Coming to lack of Islamic education resulting to illiteracy and ignorance on the part of parents, it can easily be reasoned that parental illiteracy and ignorance can accelerate the problem of child abuse as parents cannot reason well to understand the Islamic implications of not giving their children proper educational training but prefer to send them to trade, hawk or do other things to help the family economically.

Illiteracy among Nigerians has been emphasized by Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in their findings from a "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)", between 1991 and 1999, adult literacy declined from 44% to 41% for men and 68% to 58% for women, and about two thirds of rural adult women are illiterates, as are almost 80% of women in the North<sup>10</sup> (this includes Keffi Local Government Area in Nasarawa State).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

It has been emphasized that the level of education can influence a person's perception of any situation or phenomenon. And in Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, so much have been said about child abuse, which is sometimes perpetrated by parents themselves.

As depicted earlier, the Muslim society in Keffi, Nasarawa State is bedeviled by the problem of parental illiteracy. How far this can affect the perception or participation of such parents in child abuse in the State constitutes a serious societal problem. Therefore, the concern of this study is to determine whether Muslim parents who acquired some level of formal Islamic education perceive the causes and practices of, or participation in, child abuse differently when compared with Muslim parents who do not acquired any level of Islamic formal education. In other words, do educated Muslim parents differ in their perception of the causes of and participation in child abuse from the more lowly educated ones?

#### 3.1. Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to:

- Determine whether Muslim parents who acquire some level of Islamic education perceive the causes of child abuse differently from those who did not acquire it.
- Find out whether parents' level of education causes differences in their degree of participation in or practices of child abuse.

#### 3.2. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Do the Muslim parents who did not attend or acquire Islamic formal education perceive the causes of and participation in child abuse differently from those who attended and acquire some level of Islamic formal education?

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<sup>10</sup>VSO (2004).

- Does parent's level of education cause differences in their degree of participation in or practice of child abuse?

### **3.3. Sample Population**

The population was made up of Muslim parents who acquired some level of Islamic education and those who did not acquire any form of Islamic education from the eight wards division of Keffi Local Government Area in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. These wards are: AngwanRimi, Iya 1, Iya II, Kofar Hausa, GangarenTudu, Goriya, Lima Abaji and Yara wards.

The Muslim parents who do not acquire any formal Islamic education were male and female parents who are traders, drivers, farmers, house wives etc. while Muslim parents who attended and acquired some level of formal Islamic education were made up of teachers, lecturers, civil servants etc. whose qualifications covers various academic levels.

### **3.4. Sample Technique**

A sample of one hundred and ninety-two (192) Muslim parents who do not attend any formal Islamic school and one hundred and seventy (170) Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic school making the total of three hundred and sixty-two (362) Muslim parents was drawn from the population using both stratified and random sampling techniques. The Muslim parents who do not acquire any formal Islamic education consisted of 95 males and 97 females while those who acquire some level of formal Islamic education were 90 males and 80 females. Their ages ranged from 25-59 years. They were all married with children. They were traders, farmers, teachers civil servant, house wives etc.

### **3.5. Research Instrument**

The instrument of the research was a closed-end questionnaire designed to obtain information about the respondents educational level, their perception of causes of child abuse and their participation in the practice of child abuse. The questionnaire is divided into two sections: personal data such as sex, age, occupation and qualification. The second section elicited information about the perception, causes as well as differences between Muslim parents who acquired formal Islamic education and those who do not acquire formal Islamic education and their degree of practice of child abuse. The instrument was validated using pretest and post-test reliability techniques that gave  $r = 0.84$ .

### **3.6. Research Procedure**

The researcher administered the questionnaires to large groups of Muslim Parents on three market days, during a sandwich programme and at a workshop. They are usually targeted at serving teachers, traders, house wives and civil servants as this made it possible to collect relevant data in clusters.

This did not only contribute in the researcher's geographical coverage, it also enabled the researcher to make necessary clarifications about some items and assure the respondents of confidentiality of the information they gave so as to encourage sincere responses. It also guaranteed high percentage questionnaire returns.

#### 4. RESULTS/FINDINGS

The results of the findings are presented in the tables below:

**Table-1.** Muslim Parents perception of Child Abuse

S/N	Causes of child abuse	Perception frequency of those who do not attend Islamic formal education ( 192 )	Perception frequency of those who attended Islamic formal education (170)
i	Lack of Islamic education, illiteracy and ignorance on the part of the parents	100 (52.1%)	132 (76.6%)
ii	Economic reasons (poverty causes people to survive at all costs )	79(41.0%)	68(39.4%)
iii	Primitive practices	38 (19.8%)	56 (32.5%)
iv	Change in societal values ( immorality, materialism, no respect for human dignity)	37 (19.3%)	22 (12.8%)
v	Cross-cultural influences	30 (15.6%)	50 (29.0%)
iv	Marital conflicts and broken homes.	30 (15.6%)	22 (12.8%)
vii	Lack of effective child welfare policies and rehabilitation institution.	26 (13.5%)	40 (23.2%)
viii	Waywardness, loose sex life leading to unwanted pregnancies.	24 (12.5%)	60 (19.7%)
ix	Cultural attitude and practices	21 (10.9%)	34 (19.7%)
x	Wicked foster or step parents or guardians	20 (10.7%)	16 (9.3%)
xi	Quest for cheap labour among employers	9 (4.7%)	40 (23.2%)
xii	Non-enforcement and no respect for child fundamental human right laws	5 (2.6%)	38 (22.0%)

**Source:** Responses from questionnaires distributed

The result in Table 1 above reveals that the greater cause of child abuse as perceived by those Muslim parents who do not attend Islamic formal education and those Muslim parents who attended, was lack of Islamic education, illiteracy and ignorance of Islamic teachings as the figure indicated (52.1%) and (76.6%) respectively.

**Table-2.** Participation in child abuse by Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education and Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education.

S/No	Forms of child abuse Practiced by Muslim parents	Practice Frequency (Muslim parents who do not attend Islamic formal education)	Practice Frequency (Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education)
i.	Sending children to hawk in the streets	37(19.3%)	10 (5.8%)
ii.	Child labour (under-age children go to work for money)	31 (16.1%)	4 (2.3%)
iii.	Gender discrimination (giving undue preference to the boys in educational and career opportunities)	28 (14.6%)	8 (4.6%)
iv.	Denying the child education (not sending him or her to school)	25 (13.0%)	2 (1.2%)
v.	Force marriage to girls	18 (8.9%)	2 (1.2%)
vi.	Sending children to beg and bring the proceeds	17 (8.9%)	2 (1.2%)
vii.	Child trafficking (exchanging children for money)	17(8.9%)	2 (1.2%)
viii.	Violence, cruelty and brutality against children	15 (7.8%)	4 (2.3%)
ix.	Sexual harassment of school children	10 (5.2%)	0 (0.0%)
x.	Throwing away unwanted children	9 (4.7%)	2 (1.2%)
xi.	Girl-child prostitution through pimping	7 (3.6%)	0 (0.0%)
xii.	Homosexual abuse of the boy child	4 (4.7%)	2 (1.2%)

**Source:** Responses from questionnaires distributed

The results in Table 2 above indicates that the two groups (Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education and those who attended) agreed that the most commonly practiced child abuse by them is sending children to hawk in the streets. However, they differ in their degree of participation as the result indicated (19.3%) for those Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education and (5.8%) for those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings is in line with the research questions that correspond with table 1 and II above.

-Table 1 has to do with research question 1:

*Do Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education perceive causes of child abuse different from those who attend formal Islamic education?*

The respondents perceived that the greatest cause of child abuse was lack of proper Islamic education or illiteracy and ignorance on the part of the Muslim parents with 52.1% of those who do not attend formal Islamic education and 76.6% of Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic

education indicating so. The next in their rating was economic reasons with 41.0% for those who do not attend formal Islamic education and 39.4% for those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education. Primitive practices rank next with 19.8% for those who do not attend formal Islamic education and 32.5% for those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education.

This is followed by change in societal values (immorality, materialism, no respect for human dignity), with 19.3% and 12.9% for those who do not attend formal Islamic education and those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education respectively. The cross cultural influences came next with those who do not attend formal Islamic education with (15.6%) and those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education with (29.0%). Marital conflicts and broken home was 15.6% and 12.8% for those who do not attend formal Islamic education and those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education respectively.

Lack of effective child welfare policies and rehabilitation institutions followed with 13.5% for those who do not attend formal Islamic education and 23.2% for those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education. While 12.5% of those who do not attend formal Islamic education indicated that waywardness was a cause of child abuse, 34.8% of Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education showed that. On the other hand, only 10.9% and 19.7% of those Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education and those who attended formal Islamic education respectively indicated that cultural attitude and practices was a cause. Whereas 10.4% of those who do not attend formal Islamic education showed that wicked foster or step parents or guardians was a cause of child abuse, 9.3% of those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education indicated that. Regarding quest for cheap labour among employers as a cause of child abuse, those who do not attend formal Islamic education and those who attended formal Islamic education showed 4.7% and 23.2% in that order. However, 2.6% of those Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education and 22.0% of those who attended formal Islamic education showed that non-enforcement and no respect for child fundamental human right laws is a cause.

As can be seen from the foregoing, the major finding of this study shows that there is agreement between those Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic education and those Muslim parents who attended formal Islamic education on the perception about lack of Islamic education, illiteracy and ignorance as the greatest cause of child abuse. This is a societal reality as has been confirmed by VSO in their study in 2004. According to them, between 1991 and 1999, a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) was carried and the result indicated that adult literacy “declined from 44% to 41% for women and 68% to 58% for men”.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that lack of Islamic education, illiteracy and ignorance can promote child abuse in the sense that such parents are not enlightened enough Islamically to know the implication of not sending their children to school and given them proper care, training and maintenance.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



## 6. IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This has a lot of educational implications for the children as confirmed by the supervising Minister for Education at a briefing to mark the 2013 International Literacy Day (which is marked September 8 every year). Nigeria supervising Minister for Education, NyesomWike, said that the number of illiterate Nigerian adults had increased from 25 million in 1997 to 35 million in 2013. This figure contrasts with statistics available from UNESCO and the CIA World Factbook. Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children put at 10.5 million. This increased number of illiterate Nigerian adults is against a global reduction of illiteracy levels; a development that has been seen as a huge embarrassment for the country and its quest to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2020.

The Nigeria State Minister of Education further noted that; the embarrassing literacy statistics on Nigeria, justifies the need for all stakeholders to redouble their efforts.” He further reiterated that, the current Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring report ranks Nigeria as one of the countries with the highest level of illiteracy. The report on Nigeria stated that the number of illiterate has increased by 10 million over the past two decades; to reach 35 million<sup>12</sup>as this frightening figure includes Keffi Local Government of Nasarawa State.

Closely related to illiteracy and ignorance is economic reason, that is poverty. According to Dogarawa (2008), he noted that: “poverty is an endemic social problem in all Nigeria states and the situation is getting worse by all indications”. He further stresses that there is “increase in the level of poverty from 16% in 1962 to about 87% in 1996”.<sup>13</sup> In fact, poverty is an enemy of national development. Any society classified as poor, like Nigeria, can be prone to child abuse. This is because citizens of such a country are likely to have no respect for human dignity.

This trend was further confirmed by the World Bank Country Director for Nigeria, Marie-Francoise Marie-Nelly, who said this at the bank’s Country Programme Portfolio Review in Enugu on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013. According to the World Bank boss, the number of Nigerians living in destitution makes up 8.33 per cent of the total number of people living in destitution all over the world. She said, “1.2 billion people live in destitution out of which 100 million are Nigerians.<sup>14</sup>Surprisingly, one of the causes that were perceived as the least by those Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic school is non-enforcement of and no respect for child fundamental/human right laws with (2.6%). This seems contrary to experience in our society where the child’s fundamental human right is abused always. Whereas, those who attended formal Islamic education perceived wicked foster or step parents or guardians as the least cause with (9.3%).

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<sup>12</sup>Ozordi (2013).

<sup>13</sup>Dogarawa (2008).

<sup>14</sup>Deolu (2013).

The results presented in Table 2 are in line with research question 2.

*To find out whether the parental level of Islamic education has differences in their degree of practice of child abuse.*

As can be seen from the results shown above, the most practiced forms of child abuse by those Muslim parents who do not attend Islamic formal school and those who attended formal Islamic school was sending children to hawk in the streets with 19.3% and 5.8% respectively. While the second in ranking was child labour (under-aged children to work for money) with 16.1% for those Muslim parents who do not attend Islamic formal school, child labour and violence or cruelty and brutality against children with (2.3%). However, gender discrimination (giving undue preference to the boys in educational and career opportunities) ranked third for those Muslim parents who do not attend Islamic formal school. While their counterpart who attended Islamic formal school came second in their participation.

The fact that the two groups practiced this forms of child abuse of sending children to hawk in the streets is an indication of the low income problem in the society where Muslim parents who attended Islamic formal school and their counterparts who do not attend Islamic formal school cannot earn enough to the extent that they use this kind of child abuse to make both ends meet.

On the other hand, one of the remarkable discoveries of this research is that a low percent of Muslim parents who attended Islamic formal school i.e. (1.2%) participated in the practice of homosexual abuse of the boy-child and throwing away unwanted children (1.2%) while 2.0% of the Muslim parents who did not attend Islamic formal school participated.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study are quite revealing. For instance, both Muslim parents who do not attend formal Islamic school and those who attended perceived lack of proper Islamic education, illiteracy and ignorance on the part of Muslim parents as the greatest causes of child abuse followed by economic reasons. It can therefore be concluded that people abuse children in order to survive because of ignorance and economic hardship and this attitudes are caused by bad leadership and poor governance.

Based on the finding of study, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be public enlightenment programme to educate the Muslim parents on the causes and implication of child abuse on the child.
- Parents should be made to understand the effects of not sending their children to both Islamic and modern schools.
- Children should be sensitized of their fundamental human rights to enable them know when they are denied these rights.
- The government should come to the aid of the masses by improving their lots economically as this would go a long way in ameliorating the suffering of the

downtrodden whose level of poverty aggravate their proneness to engage in the abuse of children.

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