

GIRL CHILD ABUSE AND ITS EFFECTS ON THEIR HEALTH AS ADULTS: A STUDY OF UDENU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Effect of child abuse can last for a long time. One of the critical consequences of child abuse is how it impacts on the child's health especially the girl child who always fall victim more than the boy child. It interferes with the foundation a child needs to be successful throughout their life career. This study centers on girl child abuse and its effect their health as adults using Udeni Local Government Area as study area of Enugu state. The population of this study consists of adults aged 18 years and above. Cross- sectional survey design was adopted. The sample size consists of 149 respondents selected through multi- stage sampling techniques. Questionnaire was the instrument for used data collection. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while Chi square was used for testing the hypotheses. Findings revealed that majority of the respondents indicated that major forms of child abuse in the area are; physical abuse, verbal abuse, child neglect and sexual abuse. There is high prevalence of child abuse among the girl child than the boy child, there is a statistical relationship between income levels and child abuse. The study recommended that there should be public engagement and education campaigns by educationists, government and NGOs, and also government implementation of policies against child abuse especially among the girl child.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Girl Child, Effect, Health, Adulthood, Udeni LGA.

INTRODUCTION

Every year, there are an estimated 40 150 homicide deaths in children fewer than 18 years of age, some of which are likely due to child maltreatment. This number almost certainly underestimates the true extent of the problem, since a significant proportion of deaths due to child maltreatment are incorrectly attributed to falls, burns, drowning and other causes. UNICEF, (2024). In armed conflict and refugee settings, girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation and abuse by combatants, security forces, members of their communities, aid workers and others. Furthermore, 120,000,000 girls and young females under the age of 20 have suffered some forms of forced sexual intercourse. Though child abuse is often hidden, only a small percentage of child victims of violence ultimately receive support from health professionals. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) associated adverse experiences during childhood (including other family dysfunctions apart from abuse and neglect) with a series of long term impacts on health. The average life expectancy of the ones reporting six or more adverse experiences during childhood was two decades less than the ones reporting none. WHO, in collaboration with partners developed and approved a

series of strategies called “INSPIRE” in total 7 strategies to put to end violence against children. Each of the letter of the word INSPIRE represents one of the strategies, most of which have proven to be effective in preventing various types of violence, as well as being beneficial in sectors such as mental health, education and crime reduction. The seven strategies are; implementation and enforcement of laws, norms and values, safe environment, parent caregiver support, income and economic strengthening, response and support services, and education and life skills. Successful delivery of INSPIRE’s evidence- based prevention programs and services depends on collaboration between multiple sectors and stakeholders- public, private, and civil society at national and local levels. These may include departments responsible for education, health, justice, finance and many others, because girl child abuse is still rampant in Udenu LGA. Therefore, the study explores successful way of handling the abuse of girl child in Udenu LGA in order to reduce the health effects on the girl child.

Statement of problem

Child maltreatment is a global problem with serious life-long consequences. According to WHO Child maltreatment is a global problem with serious life-long consequences. These abuse ranges from domestic violence which they face at home, psychological abuse like preventing the expression of choice and opinion. The effect of child abuse globally is difficult to determine precisely due to underreporting the cases of child abuse by the victims. UNICEF (2024) noted “Nearly 400 million young children worldwide regularly experience violent discipline at home.” This includes physical, sexual, emotional, and neglectful abuse. Some parents don't allow their children express their opinions, they feel that whatever they say to them should be final and any choice they make for them must stand. They don't consider what their children think and when they try to talk they are being shut Holguin,& Hansen, (2023). Due to disrupted attachment patterns and feelings of worthlessness, abused children may engage in risky sexual behaviors, increasing their risk of sexually transmitted infections (National Sexual Violence Resource Center).This affects them psychologically and emotionally, some children watch their parents fight at home and sometimes these parents maltreat their house help in front of their children. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is more prevalent among females it occurs in familiar settings, and perpetrators are typically known to the victims beforehand. Studies by Arnarsson et al., (2016) have agreed that girls are at 2.5-3 times higher risk of child abuse in household environments than boys (although this pattern does not hold for abuse in religious institutions, where victims are more often male than female). Females have also been noted to report child abuse than males. A study in a sample of 8- to 12-year-olds in Iceland had previously shown 36% of girls and 18% of boys reporting Child abuse (Sigfusdottir et al., 2016). These results are in line with a U.S. meta-analysis showing that 30% of girls and 15% of boys reported CSA (Arnarsson et al., 2016). The true magnitude of the problem of girl child abuse however remains difficult to determine. Ineffectual prosecution of offenders in reported cases also contributes to non-disclosure of abuse Yahaya et al,(2016). It has been estimated that 50% of girls who are deaf in household environments have been sexually abused compared to 25% of girls who are hearing while 54% of boys who are deaf have been sexually abused in comparison to 10% of boys who are hearing World Disability News(2021). Guochen, Fleming, Mullen, & Sibthorpe (2023), carried out a study to reveal the household factors associated with Child Abuse in China. The study was mainly focused on the impacts of family environment on increasing or reducing Child Abuse in the population. Findings from the study, revealed that girls had the highest rate of sexual abuse (39.6%), followed by boys (34.8%). In summary, most reviewed literatures focused on

the physical, psychological and behavioural effects of child abuse in Nigeria. However, there is little or no literature on the prevalence effect of child abuse on the girl child, therefore this study explores successful ways of handling such abuses on the girl child in Udenu LGA of Enugu state. Drawing from the foregoing, the study was guided by these research questions: What are the causes of child abuse in Udenu LGA?, and Are females in Udenu LGA more likely to experience child abuse than male?.

Theoretical framework

Attachment theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. It was derived from the work of Bowlby (1951) who carried out studies into the nature and effects of maternal deprivation on young children. He theorized that any significant separation of a child from the mother in the first five years of life could lead to varieties of psychological and social difficulties in later life since proper bonding and attachment to the mother is crucial if a child should benefit from physical protection and psychological security. Child is perceived as the child for all in the pre-colonial society of Nigeria, hence in the Igbo name Nwaora which implies that children are also children of the people they are living with. In relation to the study if a primary caregiver would give all the physical protection and psychological security needed by the child, an attachment would be created and all sorts of abuse can be avoided.

METHODOLOGY

Study design: Cross sectional survey design was applied for the study.

Study area: The study area is Udenu LGA of Enugu state and one of the 17 LGAs that made Enugu state. It comprises 12 communities which includes; Ezimo- Uno, Obollo- Afor, Ezimo Agu, Amalla, Igugu, Umundu, Orba, Agbodu Aba, Obollo Etiti, Obollo Eke, Imilike Uno, and Imilike Agu. These communities are made up of many villages. The local government headquarter is in Obollo Afor on A3 high way. Udenu LGA has an area of 248km and majority of the people are known for business and farming. Its people are Igbos and more of Christians.

Study Population: According to the National Population Census (2006), Udenu LGA has the population of 178,466 people with the projected population of 241,200 people (NPC data, 2019). The target population for the study was adults aged 18 years and above in Udenu. The choice of this was because it is the legitimate age for one to be considered as adult in Nigeria and therefore can give required information on child abuse.

Sample Size: Sample size of this study was one hundred and fifty six (156) people. It was determined using Taro Yamani (1967) formula at 0.007 error limit. The sample was selected from the target population.

The Yamani (1967) was applied thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)}$$

Where; n = sample size

N= population of study

e= error limit (0.05) or 0.0083

I= constant

Applying the above formula we have;

$$n = \frac{241,200}{1 + 241,200(0.08)}$$

$$1 + 241,200(0.08)$$

241200

241201(0.0064)

241200

1543.686

= 156.24 = 156

As a result the sample size for the study was 156 respondents.

Sampling Procedure: Multi stage sampling technique was adopted for the study which includes systematic random sampling, purposive sampling and availability sampling. Through systematic sampling six communities were selected out of the 12 communities that made up Udenu LGA based on the proximity to each others. They include; Ezimo- Uno, Obollo- Afor, Igugu, Umundu, Orba, Imilike Uno. Through simple random sampling, two villages were selected from each of these communities making it a total of twelve villages, they are; Ibende, Ohulor Orba Owerre Ezeorba, Umu-Ugwu, Umunkpume, Ikagwu, Onicha-Ogbodo Umuazochi, Ohule etiti, Ifuroka, Umuelo and Iheakpu Obollo. Through availability sampling technique, 156 questionnaires were shared to respondents from the selected villages.

Instrument for Data Collection: Questionnaire was used as the major instrument for data collection which comprises demographic characteristics of the respondents and the main research issues. It was both self administered and others administered.

Methods of Data Analysis: The study applied a quantitative method of data analysis. The data collected from the field was computer-processed and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were used to present the responses from the items in the questionnaire. Chi-square (χ^2) was used in testing the hypotheses. One hundred and fifty six (156) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents, but one hundred and forty nine (149) copies of the questionnaire were correctly completed and returned. Therefore, this analysis was based on one hundred and forty nine (149) returned copies of the questionnaire.

Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Age		
18-22 years	11	7.4
23-27 years	59	39.6
28-32years	44	29.5
33-37 years	7	4.7
38-42 years	23	15.4
42 and above	5	3.4
Total	149	100
Occupation		
Students	61	40.9
Trader	37	24.8

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Farmer/ Artisan	42	28.2
Teacher	9	6.0
Total	149	100
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	139	93.3
Muslim	4	2.7
African Traditional Religion/ Atheist	6	4.0
Total	149	100
Sex		
Female	89	59.7
Male	60	40.3
Total	149	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Results from table 1 shows that out of six categories of the age brackets, (7.4%) respondents were aged 18-22 years, (39.6%) respondents were 23-27 years, (12.5%) respondents were aged 28-32 years, (29.5%) 7 were aged 33-37 years while (15.4%) were aged 38-42 years ,(3.4%) aged 43years and above. On occupation, it shows that 6.0% of the respondents were teachers, 40.9% of the respondents were students, farmers/Artisans are (28.2%) and lastly traders, 24..8% . The religious affiliation of the respondents indicates that (93.3%) respondents were Christians, (2.7%) respondents were Muslims, and (4.0%) respondents were practitioners of African Traditional Religion/Atheist. Lastly on sex of the respondents, out of a total of 149 respondents used for the study (40.3%) were male while (59.7%) were female. The sex distribution reflected females being more than males

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by income level in Udenu LGA

Level of income per annum	Frequency	Percent
Less than 200,000	97	65.1
201,000-N400,000	30	20.1
401,000-N600,000	16	10.8
601,000 and above	6	4.0
Total	149	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 shows the respondents' level of income. It reveals that 65.1% of the respondents receive annually below 200,000, 20.1% of the respondents receive between 201,000- 400,000 annually, 10.8% receive 401- -600,000 annually, and lastly, 4.0% receive between 601,000 and above annually. This shows that majority of the respondents received less than two hundred thousand naira annually.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Educational qualification	Frequency	Percent
No formal education	4	2.7
FSLC	7	4.7
SSCE	66	44.3
B.Sc.	58	38.9
M.Sc.	9	6.0
Ph.D	5	3.4
Total	149	100.0

Source, Field Survey 2026

Table 3 shows the educational qualification of the respondents. The results revealed that 2.7% had no formal education, 4.7% only had FSLC, 44.3% respondents had SSCE, 38.9% respondents had B.Sc. 6.0% holds M.Sc. Certificate and 3.4% respondents had Ph.D Certificate.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents on the major forms of child abuse in Udenu LGA

Major forms of child abuse in Udenu LGA	Frequency	Percent
Physical abuse	69	46.3
Verbal abuse	61	40.9
Child neglect	16	10.7
Sexual abuse	3	2.0
Total	149	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The data from table 4 show the distribution of respondents on the major forms of child abuse in their community. Results reveal that 46.3% mentioned physical abuse, 40.9% mentioned verbal abuse, 10.7% indicated child neglect and 2.0% indicated sexual abuse.

Table 5 : Distribution of respondent on the sex that are mostly affected by child abuse in Udenu community

Sex that are mostly affected by child abuse in Udenu community	Frequency	Percent
Girls	115	88.2
Boys	34	22.8
Total	149	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Results from the above table shows that 88.2% respondents reported the number of girls that are affected by child abuse while 22.8% respondents reported the number of boys that are mostly affected by drug abuse in Udenu LGA.

Table 6 : Distribution of respondents on major reasons for causes of girl child abuse in Udenu

Major reasons for causes of girl child abuse in Udenu	Frequency	Percent
Poverty	49	32.9
Sex discrepancy	59	39.6
Illiteracy	25	16.8
Family instability	16	10.7
Total	149	100
Source: Field Survey, 2026		

Results from table 6 shows that 32.9% respondents reported poverty to be the major cause of child abuse in Udenu, 39.6% respondents reported sex discrepancy to be the major cause of child abuse in Udenu while 16.8% respondents were of the view that illiteracy is the major cause of child abuse in Udenu. 10.7% respondent however opined that family instability was the major cause of child abuse in Udenu.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis one

Substantive hypothesis: Children whose parent or caregivers are more educated are less likely to be abused than children whose parents or caregivers are not

Null hypothesis: Children whose parents or caregivers are less educated are more likely to be abused than children whose parents or caregivers are not.

Table 7 Cross tabulation of educational qualification and those who are affected more by child abuse

Educational qualification	Those who are affected more by child abuse		
	Girls	Boys	Total
Less educated	49 (63.6%)	28 (36.4%)	77 (100.0%)
More educated	39 (54.2%)	33 (45.8%)	72 (100.0%)
Total	88 (59.1%)	61 (40.9%)	149 (100.0%)

Fieldwork survey, 2026 Df =1, N=149, p< .000

Table7 is a cross-tabulation of educational qualification and those children who are mostly affected by child abuse. Educational qualification is an index built from question 2 that contains questions on educational qualification those children who are mostly affected by child abuse on the other hand was measured with reported responses received on number of boys and girls abused respectively from the community. The categories of, no formal education, FSLC and SSCE was grouped into "less educated" while the categories of , B. Sc, M.Sc. and Ph.D was grouped into "more educated."

Rejection region: If $p < .05$ reject the null hypothesis (H_0), but if $p > .05$, we accept the null hypothesis

From table 7, it was observed that there was a significant relationship ($p < .000$) between educational qualification and those children that are more affected by child abuse in Udenu LGA. Therefore, the substantive hypothesis which states that children whose parent or caregivers are more educated are less likely to be abused than children whose parents or caregivers are not is valid and therefore upheld.

Hypothesis two

Substantive hypothesis: Children from low income homes are more likely to suffer causes of child abuse than children from high income

Null hypothesis: Children from low income homes are less likely to suffer causes of child abuse than children from high income

Table 8: Cross tabulation of Income level and causes of child abuse in Udenu LGA

Income level	Causes of child abuse in Udenu LGA		
			Total
Low income	83 (60.1%)	55 (39.9%)	138 (100.0%)
High income	39 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)	11 (100.0%)
Total	88 (59.1%)	61 (40.9%)	149(100.0%)

Fieldwork survey, Df=1,N=149,
2026 P<.020

Table 8 is a cross-tabulation of income level and causes of child abuse in Udenu LGA. Income level involves an index built from table that contains questions on income level of respondents. Causes of child abuse on the other hand were measured with reported cases of child abuse of children in Udenu LGA. The categories of less than 200,000 annually, 201,000- N400,000 annually and 401,000 was grouped into "Low income" while the categories of 400,000- N600,000 and above was grouped into "High income."

Rejection region: If $p < .05$ reject the null hypothesis (H_0), but if $p > .05$, we accept the null hypothesis

From table 8, it was observed that there was a significant relationship ($p < .020$) between income level and causes of child abuse in Udenu LGA. Therefore, the substantive hypothesis which states that children from low income homes are more likely to suffer child abuse than children from high income homes is valid and therefore upheld.

DISCUSSION

Child abuse is a global social problem which needs urgent attention to be tackled especially on the girl child who is more affected. Thus the study tries to ascertain the prevalence effect of child abuse on girl child in Udenu community Enugu state Nigeria. Findings from table to ascertain the various forms of child abuse in Udenu LGA indicates that 46.3% said that there are physical abuse, 40.9% mentioned verbal abuses, 10.7% said child neglect, and 2.0% said sexual abuses. Majority of the respondents stated that physical abuse was the most prevalence

and this can cause psychological problems such as depression. Supporting this, UNICEF (2024) also stated that “Nearly 400 million young children worldwide regularly experience violent discipline at home.” This includes physical, sexual, emotional, and neglectful abuse. The study also ascertains the major causes of girl child abuse. Findings from the study show that 32.9% indicated poverty as one of the causes of child abuse while only 39.6% of the respondents indicated sex discrepancy, 16.8% said that illiteracy is one of the causes and lastly, 10.7% said that family instability leads to child abuse. Holguin, & Hansen, (2023) stated that some parents don't allow their children express their opinions, they feel that whatever they say to them should be final and any choice they make for them must stand. They don't consider what their children think and when they try to talk they are being shut. This is in line with hypothesis one which states that “Children from low income homes are more likely to suffer causes of child abuse than children from high income homes” Lastly, another finding also shows that the prevalence of child abuse in Udenu is felt more by girls (88.2%) than boys (22.8%). This is in line with the second research question which asked if females in Udenu LGA are more likely to experience child abuse than male. Guochen, et al (2023), carried out a study to reveal the household factors associated with Child Abuse in China. Findings from the study, revealed that girls had the highest rate of sexual abuse (39.6%), followed by boys (34.8%). Also, World Health Organization data revealed that, approximately three in four children all over the world have suffered physical punishment and/ or psychological violence by their parent and caregivers. Furthermore, one in five females and one in 13 males have stated that they have suffered sexual abuse during childhood up to 17 years old, and 120,000,000 girls and young females under the age of 20 have suffered some forms of forced sexual intercourse. Though child abuse is often hidden, only a small percentage of child victims of violence ultimately receive support from health professionals.

Conclusion

The study sought to ascertain prevalent of child abuse on girl child and health effect in Udenu Local Government Area, Enugu State. A close observation on the degree of girl child abuse practice in Udenu LGA, revealed that there are girl child abuse. Verbal abuses are the most profound among the girl child where they are always reminded that they are girl and as such must be submissive to instructions as the will still continue in later in live when they will be living with their husbands. The resultant effect is that the girl child stay depressed while they are both with their peers and public engagements. In conclusion, Prevalent Effect of Child Abuse on Girl child health in Udenu Local Government Area, Enugu State can last for life, one of the most critical consequences of this abuse is on how to impact a girl child achievement in schools and interference with the foundation a child needs to be successful throughout her school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Government to ensure that household financial security is strengthened.

There should be public engagement and education campaigns by both educationists, government and non- governmental organizations on the factors propelling child abuse practices in Udenu community. Government should implement policies to that guards the rights of children especially the girl child who always fall victim of child abuse.

There should be increased public campaign or awareness against the attitude of people towards child abuse practices.

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