

# Assessment of Child Abuse Practices in Rural Areas of Odeda Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Many studies have defined and highlighted the major impact of child abuse on the overall well-being of a child. These impacts cannot be overemphasized as they can even lead to suicide. Many countries have put in place laws that can help protect the child, and punish the offenders. However, the extent of the effectiveness of these laws is not well-defined or known. It is also widely believed that certain classes of people in the society such as the low-income earning families, are more vulnerable to child abuse, rendering them less useful in society. Based on these common notions, this study aims to explore the relationship between demographic characteristics and child abuse in the Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. To do so, eighty (80) respondents were purposely sampled from two communities in Odeda Local Government. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the parents of most of the respondents are traders, and the majority of them hawk their goods around to customers. Also, corporal punishment and child neglect are the major forms of abuse experienced by the children, while other factors include poverty and unemployment. The results obtained showed that there is no relationship between many demographic variables like age, family size, and sex with child abuse, and the abused children are not aware of the Child Rights Law.

**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Nigeria, Rural Area, Rural Development, Extension

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## 1. Introduction

There are many definitions for child abuse in the literature. Among the most widely adopted definition is the one from the World Health Organization Report on the Consultation on Child Abuse and Prevention of 1999, which states that “Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, resulting into potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”. There are different forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse (e.g., incest, penetration, and fondling of a child’s genitals), physical injury (e.g., beating, kicking, and punching), psychological abuse (e.g., criticism, threats, rejection, withholding love, and over-expectation on a child), and neglect [4]. Neglect refers to the deliberate denial of children the requisite support and environment for development (e.g., education, health, nutrition, and shelter).

In Nigeria, child abuse also causes concern, particularly among the low-income earning families and these abuses are known to destroy the future of many children, rendering them less useful in society. Child abuse in children takes both mental and non-mental form (which may include physical abuse among others) [12]. In some countries, maltreating young people between the ages of 11 – 17 years increase their chances of committing suicide six-fold compared to children that are not maltreated [8]. Females have a higher possibility of being exposed to sexual abuse, psychological abuse, infanticide, and neglect than males [4, 11]. Poverty, low socioeconomic status, age, education, and parents’ income influence child abuse [2, 4, 10], therefore, making it a serious issue.

Several legal provisions aimed at protecting children have been enacted in Nigeria and across the world. However, most Child Rights Laws vary by country, and consequently, their effectiveness differs [10]. The Child’s Right Act (2003) is the Nigerian law that guarantees the rights of all children. Where

the laws are ineffective, the purpose is defeated, and child abuse is likely to be rampant. Child abuse has several consequences for the child's overall development and well-being, and it is prevalent in poorer communities [13]. As a result, calls to understand the drivers of child abuse practices have recently been made, particularly in developing countries in which such acts are predominant.

Several studies have attempted to analyze child abuse practices and how they can be curbed globally [2, 4, 10]. However, existing studies failed to provide the extent to which relevant laws are effective in curbing such acts, particularly in a developing country's context. Moreover, it is widely believed that certain classes of people in society are more vulnerable to child abuse. [2, 10, 13]. Hence, this study bridges this research gap by exploring the relationship between demographic characteristics and child abuse in the Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. This study seeks to proffer answers to two hypotheses, including:

*H1: There is a significant relationship between the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their exposure to child abuse.*

*H2: There is a significant relationship between children's exposure to abuse and their opinion about child abuse.*

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Description of the Study Area

The study area is the Odeda Local Government Area, located on Latitude: 7.2965 and Longitude: 3.5203 in south-western Nigeria. The people residing in this local government area majorly speak the Yoruba language. It has total land coverage of 1,560 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 109,449, according to the 2006 census. It is bounded by Bakatare and Alogi, respectively. Bakatare is a small village near Oyo State, while Alogi is a large urban center that separates the local government area from Abeokuta-South. The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), and Federal College of Education, Osiele, are located within the local government. It has several smaller towns and villages referred to as "abule". These include Osiele, Odeda, Agbede, Olodo, Ikija, among others.

### 2.2. Study Population, Sampling Procedure, and Data Collection

The children in Odeda community area constituted the study population. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 27 and 53 children from Osiele and Olodo, respectively. Primary and secondary data sources were used to analyze the research hypothesis put forward in this study. The primary data was collected using an interview guide, while the secondary data was collected from existing reports, bulletin, and literature. The interview guide has both open and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions helped in getting more detailed information from the respondents. The researcher's supervisor thoroughly checked the survey instrument for content validity, accuracy, and

consistency. The suggested edits were implemented to improve quality and completeness.

The pilot preliminary version of the interview guide was implemented twice with 20 random households in Alabata village at two weeks intervals. Following each survey session, the questionnaire was improved according to the suggestions and comments of the respondents. Data obtained from the pilot study were subjected to Pearson's moment correlation, and a score of 75% and above was considered reliable. The modified interview guide was subsequently used to interview 80 respondents. The questions in the questionnaire range from demographic characteristics to the awareness of the respondents to existing laws on child abuse and questions relating to child abuse.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square to test. The proportion of males and females, the different age groups, levels of education, religion, household size, and who the respondents live with was estimated using frequency. The frequencies for the different categories were expressed in relation to the total number of households and reported in percentages. The Chi-square test was used to test the two hypotheses put forward in this study. The data-set used for the analysis follows the assumption of independence and the number of frequencies (i.e., frequency >5). Chi-square tests the relationship between the actual and expected outputs, given the size of the sample and the number of variables in the relationship. If the obtained p-value is greater than 5% level of significance, then the null hypotheses will be rejected and vice-versa.

For the first part, the null hypothesis was that there was no significant difference between the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their exposure to child abuse. The alternative hypothesis was that there was a significant difference between the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their exposure to child abuse. For the second part, the null hypothesis was that there was no significant difference between children's exposure to abuse and their opinion about child abuse. The alternative hypothesis was that there was a significant difference between children's exposure to abuse and their opinion about child abuse.

### 2.4. Hypothesis Testing

The Chi-square result revealed that there was no ( $p > 0.05$ ) difference between the respondents' age group ( $\chi^2 = 1.644$ ), sex ( $\chi^2 = 3.607$ ), and religion ( $\chi^2 = 1.898$ ) and exposure to child abuse at  $p < 0.05$  (Table 7). This means that none of the respondent's demographic characteristics influenced their exposure to child abuse. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, while the alternative hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that age, for example, does not affect child abuse exposure, implying that children of any age could be exposed to child abuse. However, child abuse potential is driven by the children's physical health status. Whereas this study did

not find the effect of sex on child abuse, [4] reported that males are more subjected to physical and psychological abuse in Jordan. The difference in the former and present studies could be attributed to differences in location and the sampled population.

**Table 1.** The relationship between the perception of rural children on child abuse and the independent variables.

Characteristics	$\chi^2$	Df	p-value	Significance
sex	3.607	1	0.254	NS
Age	1.644	1	0.200	NS
Educational level	1.839	1	0.175	NS
Religion	1.898	2	0.387	NS
Family size	2.422	2	0.298	NS
Who children live with	1.131	3	0.770	NS

### Hypothesis two

The Chi-square result revealed a significant relationship between the children's exposure to abuse and their opinion about child abuse ( $p=0.010$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The result means that the children's opinion could facilitate their exposure to child abuse. Children with a negative opinion about child abuse are likely to watch their attitudes to prevent its eventual occurrence. However, previous studies have shown that abusive parents have a history of being maltreated during childhood, which may have shaped their opinion to carry the behaviour characteristic forward.

**Table 2.** The relationship between the children's exposure to abuse and their opinion about child abuse.

Variable	$\chi^2$ value	Df	p-value	Significance
Exposure	6.70	1	0.010	Significant

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. There were more females (63.8%) than males (36.2%) in the sampled population. This may be due to the higher population of females over their male counterparts, as reported in a previous study [3]. The study found that two out of every three respondents (66.3%) fall within the age range of 14 to 17 years, while the remaining 33.8% were 10-13 years old.

A larger proportion of the respondent (73.8%) was Muslim, and only 25.5% were Christians, indicating the freedom of religion and association as entrenched in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The mean household size recorded in this study was six (6). Most of the respondents (67.6%) had a family of 3 to 6 persons, 18.9% had a family of 7 to 12 persons, and a small proportion (13.8%) of the respondent had a family size fewer than 3 persons.

### 3.2. Result

The result shows that the respondents have a small

household size, potentially encouraging child abuse and poverty [5]. The results agree with the findings by [1] that poverty encourages using children as a source of household income – a practice that violates children's rights. Four out of every five respondents (82.5%) live with both parents and about 13% of the respondents lived with one of their parents. About 4% of the respondents lived with a guardian which includes extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. This corroborates with the findings of [6], who stated that 80% of children live with at least one parent, and extended family members promote good welfare for children.

**Table 3.** Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	29	36.2
Female	51	63.8
Total	80	100
Age group (years)		
Young child (10-13 years)	27	33.7
Old child (14-17 years)	53	66.3
Total	80	
Education		
Primary not completed	21	26.25
Primary completed	38	47.50
Secondary not completed	15	18.75
Secondary completed	6	7.50
Total		100
Religion		
Islam	59	73.8
Christianity	20	25.0
Traditional	1	1.2
Total	80	100
Household size		
0-2 person	11	13.7
3-6 person	54	67.5
7-12 person	15	18.8
Total	80	100
Who do you live with		
Father	4	5.0
Mother	7	8.8
Both parents	66	82.5
Extended family	3	3.7
Total	80	100

Table 4 shows that about 18% of the parents are farmers, while 31.7% and 11.9% of the parents are civil servants respectively. However, the majority of the parents engage in other activities, including trading, electrical work, contract jobs, hawking, tailoring, and other artisanal engagements. The result implies that more fathers are civil servants [7] while more mothers are traders [9].

### 3.3. Forms of Abuse

The different forms of child abuse experienced by the interviewed children are shown in Table 5. 35.00% of the children reported marks on their bodies due to beating, indicating physical abuse. 28.80% of the children could not explain the injury on their body, while 10.00% work for long hours on the farm. 90% of the respondents were victims of corporal punishment by their parents or guardians, 12.5%

were sexually abused, and 82.5% were neglected by parents and guardians. The results show that children in the study area are exposed to different kinds of abuse [14].

Table 6 shows the children's opinions on child abuse. 97.5 percent of children believe child abuse is negative, while 2.5 percent believe it is positive. This result indicates that the children are not comfortable with all the forms of maltreatment they are suffering from parents and guardians. Notably, the children believe that the abuses they endure are not their fault. Thus, innocent and vulnerable children sometimes find themselves in homes where abuse is a way of life [15].

Three out of every four children interviewed (75.0) agreed that poverty reinforces child abuse (Table 7). Also, 57.5%, 53.8%, and 50% agreed that unemployment, low income, and high family size reinforce child abuse. This supports [12] findings that child abuse is a public issue that affects the health and well-being of the victims.

**Table 4.** Distribution of respondents' parent occupation.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Father's occupation		
Farming	14	17.50
Civil servant	25	31.70
Others	41	50.80
Total	80	100.00
Mothers' occupation		
Farming	14	17.8
Civil servant	10	11.9
Others	56	70.3
Total	80	

**Table 5.** The forms of child abuse suffered by children.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Forms of abuse		
Marks on the body	28	35.00
Unexplained injury	23	28.80
Use of children on the farm for long hours	8	10.00
Corporal punishment	72	90.00
Sexual abuse	10	12.50
Child neglect	66	82.50

**Table 6.** Distribution of children's opinions on child abuse.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Positive opinion	2	2.50
Negative opinion	78	97.50
Total	80	100.00

**Table 7.** Distribution of factors that reinforce child abuse.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Reinforcing factors		
Poverty	60	75.00
Unemployment	46	57.50
Low income	43	53.80
Family size	40	50.00
Single parent home	39	48.80

Table 8 shows that only 36.25% of the children are aware of the Child Rights Law enacted by the Ogun State Government. In contrast, 63.75% are unaware of the law, which aims to protect and cater for the well-being of children

across the state. This will have implications for the care and support received by such children in the study area.

**Table 8.** Respondent's awareness of the Ogun State Child Rights Law (CRL).

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Aware	29	36.25
Unaware	51	63.75
Total	80	100

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 4.1. Conclusion

Most of the abused children were teenagers with average family sizes. Their parents engage in other forms of occupation such as trading, hawking, etc. Corporal punishment and child neglect are the major forms of abuse experienced by children. Factors reinforcing child abuse include poverty and unemployment. Many of the abused children are not aware of the Child Rights Law. Finally, demographic variables do not influence children's exposure to child abuse, but income and level of education could.

### 4.2. Recommendations

- 1) Parents should endeavor to take adequate care of their children's rights from infants.
- 2) Corporal punishment and child neglect need to be reviewed by society.
- 3) Efforts should be made to assist and boost the income-generating capability of the parents of abused children.
- 4) Children's support for their parents should not affect their education.
- 5) There is a need for strong advocacy on child abuse.
- 6) Parents should endeavor to give birth to the number of children they can look after to decline the prevalence of child neglect.

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