

# SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND ITS PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS IN ENUGU, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Physical assault on children represents a significant societal challenge requiring professional intervention. It violates children's rights, undermining their healthy development and contributing to national decline. As future leaders, children must receive proper care to ensure emotional well-being and balanced growth. This study explored the issue of physical assault on children and its impact on their overall well-being in Enugu, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey employing a mixed-method approach was used, with qualitative data validating the quantitative findings. A total of 200 respondents participated in the survey, and a focus group discussion was held with secondary school students from Isi-enu Community Secondary School, Agbamere, Nsukka. The study utilized availability sampling and analyzed data using chi-square tests ( $\chi^2$ ). Results revealed that 181 (90.5%) respondents identified factors such as poverty, unemployment, corporal punishment as corrective measures, provocation, and parental lack of self-control as primary triggers of physical assault on children. Single parenthood ( $p = .000$ ), living in disorganized environments ( $p = .000$ ), and age ( $p = .037$ ) were also significant contributors. While 62 (31%) respondents viewed physical assault as a normal form of discipline, 138 (69%) recognized it as abuse that severely impacts children's health, leading to poor academic performance, psychological problems, physical*

*disabilities, death, and low self-esteem. Additionally, the study found that there was a lack of government presence and welfare officers to protect abused children in the area. The study concluded that single parenthood and disorganized living conditions are major contributors to physical assault on children, with detrimental effects on their well-being. It also recommended that social workers, health professionals, and other stakeholders conduct seminars to raise awareness of child rights and the consequences of child abuse.*

**Keywords:** Physical assault, Psychosocial impacts, Child welfare, Well-being and national decline

## **Introduction**

Physical assault on children represents a serious violation of children's rights, which negatively affects both individual and national development. Social work, as a profession, is dedicated to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including children. Research indicates that millions of children suffer various forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, trafficking, neglect by caregivers, and other forms of maltreatment (Okoli & Udechukwu, 2019). These abusive experiences result in long-lasting emotional, psychological, and physical harm, with some children even losing their lives to such violence.

To address these challenges, the Nigerian government enacted the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003, aiming to protect children from violence and promote their well-being. The Act prohibits physical, mental, and emotional harm, ensuring that every child has the right to a safe environment, adequate care, and access to education and health services (CRA, 2003). Additionally, Nigeria has established institutions such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to combat child abuse and trafficking. Despite these legal frameworks, physical assault remains a significant concern, with reports indicating persistent high rates of child abuse (WHO, 2012).

This study, therefore, examined the prevalence and impact of physical assault on children in Enugu State, Nigeria, with a focus on understanding its socio-demographic and economic influences.

### **Theoretical literatures**

Violence against children is a widespread issue that requires urgent attention from social workers, healthcare professionals, government bodies, and community stakeholders. The issue of child violence has been a global concern for several decades and is a significant barrier to sustainable development. In particular, the United Nations Security Council has highlighted child abuse as a key issue. According to the International Labour Organization (2009), violence against children is a public health crisis that transcends geographical, racial, cultural, and social boundaries. The 2001 ILO report highlighted the alarming statistics of child labor and abuse, with millions of children involved in hazardous work, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation.

Besides physical assault, children were victims of various social ills. The World Health Organization [WHO] (2014) estimates show that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years were sexually abused. About 100 to 140 million girls and women in the world have undergone some form of mutilations particularly Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Also, 1.8 million children work in prostitution and pornography situations and 1.2 million children are victims of child trafficking.

In Nigeria, children face various forms of violence, from physical assault and sexual abuse to neglect and exploitation. A national survey by the National Population Commission (2015) revealed that 60% of Nigerian children experience some form of violence before reaching adulthood. Physical violence is particularly pervasive, affecting both boys and girls, while sexual violence disproportionately impacts girls.

This national survey by National Population Commission which was supported by US Centre for Disease Control and prevention and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), has grave implications for the globe and Africa since Nigeria is the most

populous black nation in the world with a large proportion of her populace below 18 years. Further, the survey specifically found that, 60 percent representing six in 10 Nigerian children suffer one or more violence before they reach 18 years. Also; one in two children suffers physical violence; one in four girls and one in 10 boys suffer sexual violence and; one in five boys and one in six girls suffer emotional violence. Most children never tell anyone what happened to them while less than four per cent receive the support they need to recover (NPC, 2015).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power that results in harm, injury, or death. For children, violence may include physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, and neglect, which can have lasting negative effects on their health and development. These impacts can include physical injuries, psychological trauma, and difficulties in forming healthy social relationships.

According to American Psychological Association (APA) (2017) violence is an extreme form of aggression such as assault rape or murder. Violence can also be defined as the physical, emotional maltreatment of a child. Operationally, violence is the maltreatment of someone. Violence against children who are not old enough to fight for their rights is a crime. A child is any human being below the age of 18 years according to the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, 1990.

### **Violence against children: issues and concerns**

Children are the most vulnerable members of our community. They do not have the power to stop abuse. They rely on others to help them. The responsibility for making sure that children are safe and that their needs are met is shared between; the family, the general community, community agencies, professionals working with children, police and government. Each stakeholder has significant role to play to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and to help prevent

harm from occurring. Despite this, children's rights and privileges are abused sometimes (Child Protection and Care 2010).

Violence against child harms the child physically and emotionally. The initial effects and the long-term consequences of violence against the child affect the individual, their family and the community at large. Early identification and effective intervention can lessen the initial and long-term effects of child abuse and promote recovery of the children and families concerned (Child Protection and Care 2010).

There abound reported cases of violence against children for years, such as torture, kidnapping, sexual harassment, rape, corporal punishment among others. In all of these, there are no proper records of most of these violent acts. This was aptly captured by Ogundipe and Obinna (2007) who noted that figures do not exist, but it does not mean that children are not abused. Different types of violence against children occur in homes, schools, streets, in places of work and entertainment and in care and detention centres (Abbas, *et al*, (2015).

### **Factors that significantly shape perceptions and incidences of violence against children**

Violence depends on how an individual views it; for instance, a child may perceive violence as life-threatening even if adults do not (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). An adult or parent who is inflicting the child will see it as a way of disciplining the child when the child does wrong.

There are many factors that can trigger or enhance violence against children. Culture is one of such factors. Culture is a way of life in any given society and each culture specifies the conditions under which violence is tolerated. Culture also differs in attitudes towards children and violence, and it is in these differences that causes of violence are explained. A culture that has too high-performance expectation of youths may, result from parents not having adequate knowledge about child development. Also, a culture that causes emotional deprivations or propel parents to have unlimited zeal in their life aspirations through their children and a culture that has a long and high normative support

for physical punishment may influence the perception of violence against children (MacPherson & Njemanze, 2015).

Cultural and socio-economic factors also play a significant role in shaping perceptions and incidences of violence against children. Most cultures in the Nigerian social environment appear to favour physical punishment for someone who did wrong or who persist to resist and not listen to reason. In many African societies, physical punishment is culturally accepted as a form of discipline, leading to the normalization of child abuse (MacPherson & Njemanze, 2015). Other contributing factors include poverty, family dynamics, parental education, and societal attitudes toward children (Onwe, 2014). In some regions especially in the northern part of the country, practices such as child marriage and the Almajiri system expose children to abuse and neglect. Either prevalent as a result of belief of allowing disadvantaged children to beg in view to feed or in some case remit proceeds to a master; highlighted practice of child abuse has exposed children to accident, kidnapping and other socio-economic or political turmoil in the system (United Nation, 2009).

Thus, Ezeoke, Awam and Enekwe (2009) revealed the causes of violence to include frustration, exposure to violent media, violence in the home or neighborhood and a tendency to see other people's actions as hostile even when they are not. Certain situations also increase the risk of aggression, such as drinking, insults and other provocations and environmental factors like heat and overcrowding. Potential risk factors of violence against children include family conflict, parental substance abuse. Arguably too, the media also contributes to social acceptance of violence especially if, for example, perpetrators are shown in a positive light with little attention paid to the victim or consequences. Besides and in low-income countries, violence against children is closely related to poverty and culture with social consequences and economic burden for the families. Perpetrators of violence against children include parents, family members, teachers, care givers, law enforcement authorities and other children (Ezeoke, Awam and Enekwe, 2009).

MacPherson and Njemanze (2015) carried out research on cultural factors influencing the perception of violence against children in Anambra state. The study reveals that poverty and cultural beliefs influence the perception of violence against children. Another study by Abdulahi and Oladipo (2010) on socio-cultural causes of violence against youth in Nigeria posit that child training practices besides individual-specific factors; social and cultural factors trigger or cause violence against children and youths.

Furthermore, a study by Utebor (2015) on perception of violence against women and children in Anambra state reveals that male dominance and low income are major causes of violence against women and children. The present study explored how socio-demographic and economic factors such as marital status, income level, education, and place of residence influence perceptions and experiences of violence against children in Enugu State.

### **Effects of violence on the wellbeing of children**

The consequences of violence against children are far-reaching and can result in both immediate and long-term effects. Physical injuries such as bruises, fractures, and head trauma are common, but the psychological and emotional scars can be even more devastating. Children who experience violence may develop anxiety, depression, aggression, and other behavioral issues, which can persist into adulthood. Violence can also affect a child's ability to learn, leading to poor academic performance and difficulties in social interactions (Aderinton, 2010).

In some cases, the physical and emotional consequences of violence can lead to severe outcomes, including disability, self-harm, and even death. According to Aderinton (2010), the effects of violence are not limited to the individual but extend to the family and society. Children who grow up in violent environments may perpetuate the cycle of violence, contributing to the broader social problems of crime, poverty, and instability. Therefore, addressing child abuse is not only a matter of protecting individual children but also ensuring the future health and stability of the nation.

Children's well-being depends on their ability to grow and thrive in a safe environment. Exposure to violence hinders this process and often results in poor developmental outcomes. For society, the failure to protect children from violence results in a generational cycle of trauma and dysfunction. It is crucial, therefore, to prioritize efforts to prevent and intervene in cases of child abuse to ensure that children can grow into healthy, productive adults who contribute positively to society.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is grounded in Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1958), which posits that early bonds between a child and their primary caregiver are critical for emotional development. Bowlby argued that a child's emotional and social development is largely shaped by the quality of these attachments. Insecure attachments, such as those resulting from abuse or neglect, can lead to long-term psychological and behavioral issues.

For this study, the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) underscores the importance of nurturing, non-violent relationships between parents and children. Physical assault, as a break in the attachment process, can severely impact a child's emotional and psychological development, leading to problems such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulties forming healthy relationships in adulthood. The theory also emphasizes that children need protection and safety from their caregivers to develop secure emotional bonds. This framework guides the study's exploration of how socio-demographic factors such as marital status, education, and income impact children's experiences of violence and their ability to form secure attachments.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a cross-sectional design and was conducted in Enugu State, specifically among the staff and students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), given the diverse population of the university. The study population included 417,700 individuals (UNN Personnel, 2018). A total of 200 respondents (equally split between males and

females) were selected using availability sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and focus group discussions with secondary school students from Isi-enu Community Secondary School in Nsukka to complement the quantitative data.

Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests were used for test of significance. These tests investigated the influence of socio-demographic factors such as marital status, income level, education, and place of residence and incidence of child abuse in the study area.

### **Result**

The results of the study are presented in the following tables, showcasing the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their views on physical assault against children, as well as its psychosocial implications.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Age (Years)		
18-28	92	46.00%
29-38	59	29.50%
39-48	30	15.00%
49-58	15	7.50%
59 and above	4	2.00%
Religion		
Christianity	181	90.50%
Islam	6	3.00%
African Traditional Religion (ATR)	6	3.00%
Others	7	3.50%
Educational Status		
No formal education	6	3.00%
FSLC	15	7.50%
WAEC/GCE	45	22.50%
OND/NCE	48	24.00%

HND/B.Sc	78	39.00%
Others	8	4.00%
Income Level		
N1000 - N20,000	76	38.00%
N21,000 - N65,000	74	37.00%
N66,000 and above	50	25.00%
Occupation		
Student	74	37.00%
Farmer	6	3.00%
Trader	2	1.00%
Civil Servant	113	56.50%
Place of Residence		
Nsukka Urban	151	75.50%
Nsukka Rural	49	24.50%

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The majority (46%) were in the 18-28 age group, with the smallest proportion (2%) aged 59 and above. Most respondents identified as Christians (90.5%), and the majority (39.0%) had an HND/B.Sc. education. Income levels were varied, with 38.0% earning between N1000 and N20,000, and 56.5% were civil servants. Over three-quarters (75.5%) of respondents resided in Nsukka Urban.

**Table 2: Factors leading to parental maltreatment of children based on marital status**

What do you think can make parents maltreat their children?	Marital Status						Total
	Single	Married	Divorce	Separated	Widow	Widower	
Lack of education	41(37.3%)	19(31.4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(1.6%)	0(0%)	61(30.5%)
Lack of money or hardship	27(24.5%)	14(31.1%)	2(4.4%)	0(0%)	1(2.2%)	1(2.2%)	45(22.5%)
The environment teaches aggression or ignorance of the best parenting style	25(22.7%)	30(51.7%)	1(1.7%)	0(0%)	2(3.4%)	0(0%)	58(29%)

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I believe in giving a child thorough beating, so the child can learn	17(15.5%)	15(45.5%)	1(3.0%)	1(3.0%)	1(3.0%)	1(3.0%)	33(16.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>110(55%)</b>	<b>78(39.0%)</b>	<b>4(2%)</b>	<b>1(0.5%)</b>	<b>5(2.5%)</b>	<b>2(2%)</b>	<b>200(100%)</b>

$\chi^2 = 50.030, p = .000 < .05$

The table reveals that single respondents perceived a lack of education (37.3%) and financial hardship (24.5%) as major reasons for maltreatment, while married individuals were more likely to attribute it to the environment's influence on aggressive behavior (51.7%). A significant relationship was found between marital status and perceptions of child abuse ( $\chi^2 = 50.030, p = .000$ ), indicating that marital status plays a crucial role in shaping views on child maltreatment in Enugu State.

**Table 3: Factors triggering child abuse based on religion**

What are the factors that can trigger violence against children?	African Traditional Religion			Total
	Christianity	Islam	African Traditional Religion	
Poverty and unemployment	68(91.9%)	2(2.7%)	4(5.4%)	74(37%)
We believe in beating children when they misbehave	53(86.9%)	3(4.9%)	5(8.2%)	61(30.5%)
Level of education	15(83.3%)	0(0%)	3(16.7%)	18(9%)
Previous provocation or transfer of aggression	22(95.7%)	0(0%)	1(4.3%)	23(11.5%)
Been easily provoked or lack of self-control	23(95.8%)	1(4.2%)	0(0%)	24(12%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>181(90.5%)</b>	<b>6(3%)</b>	<b>6(3%)</b>	<b>200(100%)</b>

$\chi^2 = 18.330, p = .106 < .05$

The majority of Christian respondents attributed violence to factors like poverty, the belief in corporal punishment, and lack of education. However, chi-square analysis revealed no significant relationship between religion and the perception of child abuse ( $\chi^2 = 18.330, p = .106$ ), suggesting that religious beliefs do not significantly influence perceptions of child maltreatment in the study area.

**Table 4: Perceptions of child abuse based on educational status**

How do you feel about such children?	Educational Status		Total
	*Low level of education	*Higher level of education	
Normal and a way of discipline	24(36.4%)	38(28.4%)	62(31%)
Abuse of child right/ Endangering the child's health	42(63.6%)	96(71.6%)	138(69%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>66(33%)</b>	<b>134(67%)</b>	<b>200(100%)</b>

$$\chi^2 = 2.745, p = .601 > .05$$

\*Low level education are the summary of respondents with no formal educational, FSLC, WAEC/GCE while \*higher level of education include OND/NCE, HND/B.Sc and others as in the demographic characteristics (table 1).

The table above shows that individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to view child maltreatment as an abuse of rights and a health hazard (71.6%). Chi-square analysis revealed no significant difference in perceptions based on education level ( $\chi^2 = 2.745, p = .601$ ), indicating that education alone does not significantly affect views on child abuse in Enugu state.

**Table 5: Factors leading to child maltreatment based on income level**

What do you think can make parents maltreat their children?	Level of Income			Total
	N1000 - N20000	N21000 - N65000	66000 and above	
Lack of education	29(50.9%)	16(28.1%)	12(21.1%)	57(31.7%)
Lack of money or hardship	12(32.4%)	18(48.6%)	7(18.9%)	37(20.6%)
The environment teaches aggression or ignorance of the best parenting style	19(36.5%)	22(42.3%)	11(21.2%)	52(28.9%)

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I believe in giving a child thorough beating, so the child can learn	8(23.5%)	12(35.3%)	14(41.2%)	34(17%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>68(37.8%)</b>	<b>68(37.8%)</b>	<b>44(24.4%)</b>	<b>180(100%)</b>

$\chi^2 = 13.849, p = .086 > .05$

Chi-square analysis indicated no significant difference in perceptions of violence based on income level ( $\chi^2 = 13.849, p = .086$ ). This suggests that income level does not significantly affect the perception of violence against children in the study area.

**Table 6: Perception of child abuse based on place of residence**

How do you feel about abused children?	Residence		Total
	Nsukka Urban	Nsukka Rural	
Normal and a way of discipline	34(22.5%)	28(57.1%)	<b>62(31%)</b>
Abuse of child rights and endangering the health	117(77.5%)	21(42.9%)	<b>138(69%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>151(75.5%)</b>	<b>49(24.5%)</b>	<b>200(100%)</b>

$\chi^2 = 21.057, p = .000 < .05$

A significant difference was found in perceptions of violence between urban and rural respondents ( $\chi^2 = 21.057, p = .000$ ), with urban respondents more likely to view child abuse as harmful and endangering children's health.

**Table 7: Dangers of child abuse based on age**

What are the dangers associated with violence against children?	Age*		Total
	Younger (18-48 years)	Older (49 and above)	
Poor academic performance	47(88.7%)	6(11.3%)	53(26.5%)
Psychological problem	53(89.8%)	6(10.2%)	59(29.5%)

Low self-esteem/depression	54(100%)	0(0%)	54(27%)
Physical disability/poor health	18(78.3%)	5(21.7%)	23(11.5)
Death	9(81.8%)	2(18.2%)	11(5.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>181(90.5%)</b>	<b>19(9.5%)</b>	<b>200(100%)</b>

$$\chi^2 = 11.815, p = .037 > .05$$

\*The age range as in table 1 was grouped into younger and older people

Younger respondents were more likely to identify physical disability/poor health (78.3%), psychological problems (89.8%) and low self-esteem/depression (100%) as dangers resulting from child abuse. This finding suggests that younger respondents are more sensitive to the negative impacts of abuse.

### **Discussion**

The findings show that various socio-demographic factors such as marital status, religion, education level, income, place of residence, and age influence perceptions of child abuse in Enugu, Nigeria. Notably, marital status was significantly associated with how respondents viewed child maltreatment, suggesting that personal experiences with family structure may shape these perceptions. The finding is expected because different marital status has different challenges and therefore perceptions may differ significantly. Following, child training practice of different marital status differs. This is in line with the finding of Abdulchi and Oladipo (2010) who found that child training practice is one of the factors that influence violence against children in Nigeria. This has implication for social work and health education. The interview participants – both students and teachers – agreed with this position.

Majority of the Christians perceived more highly poverty and unemployment, previous provocation or transfer of aggression and been easily provoked or lack of self-control as against belief of beating children when they misbehave (associated with the Bible scripture that says spare the rod and spoil the child) and, lack of education as, factors

that trigger violence against children in Nsukka. There is no significant difference between perception of violence against children and religion ( $\chi^2_{\text{cal}} = 18.330, p = .106 > .05$ ). This is not expected since religion influences people's actions most times and it is as well contrary to United Nations (2009) findings that state that religious practice has exposed children to accident, kidnapping and other socio-economic/political turmoil in Nigeria. This is also contrary to the findings from the interview that perceived more highly belief of beating children when they misbehave as factors that trigger violence against children in Nsukka.

From table 4 most of the formally educated respondents (96; 71.6%) perceive child maltreatment is an abuse of child's right and that it endangers the child's health. There is no significant difference between perception of violence against children and educational status in the study area ( $\chi^2 = 2.745, p = .601 > .05$ ). This result is expected since the educated are expected to have correct view about child training than the formally uneducated. Obviously, formal education underscores the effect of violence against children can be devastating. This is in accordance with Aderinton (2010) who stated that violence against children can be devastating, and can result in, brain injuries, bruises and fractures, poor interpersonal relationship and communication, learning problems, emotional/psychological problems like anxiety, depression, aggression or attempted suicide, use of drugs, sexual indulgence and health problems such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Above all, most of the impacts can result in early death whilst children who survive may have to cope with terrible physical and emotional scars that require intervention of social workers, health educators and/or outright rehabilitation.

From table 5, perception of violence against children based on income level, fifty-seven respondents (31.7%) think that lack of education trigger parents to maltreat their children. Others; 37 respondents (20.6%) think it is due to lack of money or hardship; 52 respondents (27.8%) posit the environment teaches aggression or perhaps ignorance of the best parenting style while 34 respondents (18.9%) perceive it is people's belief of thorough beating such that the

child can learn. However, majority of these respondents were low-income earners. This may imply that income level did not influence perception of violence against children in Enugu State. Further, besides educational levels, income did not show a statistically significant impact on the perception of child abuse ( $\chi^2= 13.849$ ,  $p = .086 > .05$ ). Again, this may be due to cultural norms and values that transcend socio-economic barriers. This is not expected since apriori expectation is that money always drives people to behave in a certain way. This result contradicts that of Utebor (2015) that found violence against women and children in Anambra state to be associated with male dominance and low income.

Additionally, urban-resident respondents were more likely to recognize the harmful effects of child abuse, while rural-resident respondents tended to justify it as a form of discipline. In fact, majority (77.5%) of the respondents who resided in urban zones perceive violated children are abused and it endangers their health as against 42.9% of the rural-resident respondents. The result was significant ( $\chi^2 = 21.057$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ). This is expected since environment has a way of influencing behaviours. This agrees with Ezeoke, Awam and Enekwe (2009) who posit that environment influences perception of violence and the causes include frustration, exposure to violent media, violence in the home or neighbourhood and a tendency to see other people's actions as hostile even when they are not. Certain situations also increase the risk of aggression, such as drinking, insults amidst other provocations besides environmental factors like heat and overcrowding. This has implication for the social work and health education, since there is need for education of the masses on the best way to avoid environmental influence.

Furthermore, younger respondents seemed more attuned to the psychological and emotional harm caused by child maltreatment, reflecting a growing awareness of child welfare in the contemporary Nigerian context. Following, majority (181; 90.5%) of the young respondents agreed with all the dangers stated in the table while 19 of the older respondents (9.5%) concurred with poor academic performance, psychological problem, physical disability and death

except low self-esteem which was indicated by younger respondents. This result of significant difference between perception of violence against children and age ( $\chi^2 = 11.815$ ,  $p = .037 < 0.05$ ) shows that age influences perception of violence against children in Enugu State. The result is expected since, arguably, age makes for experience and can change perception. This result is in line with Bowlby (1969) theory of insecure attachments that promote feelings of threat, rejection, and personal unworthiness when the parent and child have no attachment. The attachment theory emphasizes that the violent acts perpetrated by adults against children may be seen as an exaggerated response of a disorganized attachment system. Violent acts perpetrated against children, can be seen as a strain or break of bond/attachment between mother and child. When there is no bond between the parent and the child, hatred can set in and aggression can disorganise the child's personality and can lead to low self-esteem or the many other dangers as accentuated in this research. This has implication for social work and health education.

### **Implications of the study for social work, Health education and development**

Violence against children is a pervasive social issue that transcends racial, geographical, and cultural boundaries. To effectively address and combat this issue, a collective effort is required, involving social workers, health educators, and other key stakeholders. Social work, as a profession dedicated to solving social problems, plays a critical role in the fight against child maltreatment. Social workers are trained to engage with individuals, families, groups, and communities to address issues such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, neglect, and abuse. In this context, social workers should actively contribute to eliminating the underlying causes of violence against children, in alignment with the profession's commitment to social justice, one of its core values.

Similarly, health educators are pivotal in promoting positive health behaviors and discouraging harmful practices, including violence against children. Through advocacy, public education, and community outreach, health educators can help change societal attitudes toward

child abuse, fostering a culture of care, respect, and non-violence. By using persuasive communication strategies, health educators can raise awareness about the devastating effects of violence on children's physical and mental well-being.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights that can guide the efforts of social workers, health educators, and policymakers. The results will help these professionals develop targeted interventions and policies to shift public perceptions of child abuse. For example, counseling programs can be strengthened to educate parents on non-violent methods of discipline, emphasizing the importance of showing love and understanding in their approach to child-training, rather than resorting to anger or corporal punishment. This can prevent harm and foster healthier, more nurturing family environments.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the importance of considering socio-demographic factors when addressing child maltreatment and its psychosocial consequences in Enugu State. It calls for tailored intervention programs that address the specific needs of various demographic groups, including urban versus rural populations, to foster a more comprehensive understanding of child welfare in Nigeria towards enhancing national development.

### **Recommendation**

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

1. Policy development and implementation: Governments should prioritize the development and enforcement of policies aimed at ensuring the domestication and full implementation of the Child Rights Act in all states. This would provide legal frameworks to protect children and hold perpetrators of abuse accountable.
2. Rehabilitation and support for victims: There is a pressing need for rehabilitation programs for children who have already been affected by abuse. These programs should focus on healing and recovery, in

collaboration with social workers, health educators, and family support services, to provide comprehensive care to victims of violence.

3. Parenting education and counseling: Social workers and health educators should engage in ongoing education and counseling initiatives targeting parents, caregivers, and communities. These programs should promote positive parenting techniques, teaching parents how to discipline children lovingly and constructively without resorting to violence. By equipping parents with these skills, it is possible to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment and foster healthier family dynamics.

4. Community awareness campaigns: Awareness campaigns should be designed to educate the general public about the consequences of violence against children and the importance of protecting children's rights. These campaigns should involve schools, religious organizations, and community leaders in spreading the message of child welfare and protection.

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