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## IMPACT OF LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT ERADICATION

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to explore the relevance of libraries and librarians in eradicating one of our societal menaces referred to as child abuse/maltreatment. Abuse is usually seen as a deliberate act of commission while neglect is an act of omission. Child abuse/neglect includes both acts of commission and acts of omission on the part of parents or caregivers that cause actual or threatened harm to a child.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The paper adopted conceptual approach. It examines the library, abuses, different types of abuses, causes, consequences as well as the perpetrators of child abuses and solutions were proffered. It also examines the impact of libraries and librarians in remedying the menace.

**Implication:** Libraries and librarians are to liaise with children advocacy centers to inform the society about the menace. If the recommendations are looked into, it will go a long way in addressing the menace of child abuse.

**Originality/Value:** It was recommended that libraries and librarians should organize regular campaign program where parents can be encouraged to be more dedicated and committed to the affairs of their wards as abuse is difficult to wipe off the memory of a child.

**Keywords:** Librarians, Child Abuse, Child Neglect, Physical abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse

**Paper Type:** Conceptual

### Introduction

The Library is an organized collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing purposes. It provides physical or digital access to materials, and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both. A library's collection can include books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, maps, prints, documents, microform, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, Blu-ray Discs, ebooks, audio books, databases, and other formats. (Atanda L. A. & Adeyemi S. A., 2018). Today's library is a place where information containing materials are professionally and electronically processed and stored for consultation, research and study. It is the store house of human memory. Ranganathan, 'Father of Library Science', defines the term 'library' as a public institution of establishment charged with the care of a collection of books and the duty of making them accessible to those who require using them and the task of converting every person in its neighbourhood into a habitual. IFLA (2009), defines a library as a

means of access to information, ideas and works of imagination.

A librarian is a person who works professionally in a library, providing access to information and sometimes social or technical programming. In addition, librarians provide instruction on information literacy.

### Importance of the Library

Duncan (2018) sees the library as a place that promotes the progress of knowledge. According to him, many people who love reading but are poor or cannot afford the books can find solace in the library. Libraries are important cornerstones for a healthy society. Libraries help to have a vibrant role in the development of a culture that promotes wider reading, motivated readers and learners for life. It provides a place for collaborative learning, creativity, and for developing independent research and information literacy skills.

As gateways to knowledge and culture, libraries play a fundamental role in society. The resources and services they offer

create opportunities for learning, support literacy and education, and help shape the new ideas and perspectives that are central to a creative and innovative society. (White, 2012). Libraries often operates as charity work, the essence is to ensure that all, whether they can afford it or not, have direct access to knowledge and technology which would in turn helps raise the education levels of society as a whole. Knowledge which is essential for life helps prevent many socio-cultural and other behavioural menaces in the society one of which is child abuse.

Child abuse does not really sound strange to anyone in Nigeria anymore. More often than not, it interplays in our neighborhood and environment and sometimes not regarded as a serious menace because it has almost become a normal act to the common man. According to Jerkins, (2019) child abuse is also called **cruelty to children**, the willful infliction of pain and suffering on children through physical, sexual, or emotional mistreatment. Research has traced this to poor standard of living, ignorance, drugs, poverty, hatred, slacked actions taken against offenders and poor reporting of seen or heard cases. The exploitation and maltreatment of children world-wide in form of either child trafficking, child labour, the impact of war on children, commercial sexual exploitations and the likes are societal problems that needs prompt attention.

UNICEF (2017) defines child abuse and child maltreatment as "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."

In the past sixty years, there have being considerable national concern about the "battered child syndrome". Children have been abused in various degrees. The line between physical abuses and harsh parental discipline is now difficult to define. Jerkins (2019. 43), said and I quote: "if a parent punishes a child with a belt, is it after the fourth slash with the belt that parental rights ends and child abuse begins; is it after the belt raises a welt over two

millimeters that it becomes abuse versus parental rights?"

Child abuse is the physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment of a child - someone who has not reached the age of 18. Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual, or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or other caregiver. It is seen as any act or failure to act by a parent or other caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with.

Survivors of these menace often times grow up with hardened heart prepared for anything, thereby resulting to the many societal problems such as prostitutions, cultism, and other crimes arising from tampered emotions. When our children are not properly cared for today, it exposes the parents, church, society and government to lot of challenges to tackle in other to maintain peace and development in the future.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, defines child abuse and neglect as "at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." Steadily rising reports of child abuse, an expanding body of child abuse literature and public declarations from adult survivors are a proof of the high amount of abused children all over the world.

In the United States, approximately 15% to 25% of women and 5% to 15% of men were sexually abused when they were children. Most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims; approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, uncles or cousins; around 60% are other acquaintances such as friends of the family, babysitters, or neighbours; strangers are the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases. In over one-third of cases, the perpetrator is also a minor (George, 2014). In 1999 the BBC reported on the RAHI Foundation's survey of sexual abuse in India, in

which 76% of respondents said they had been abused as children, 40% of those stating the perpetrator was a family member. According to Sara (2002), approximately 150,000 confirmed cases of child sexual abuse were reported to child welfare authorities in the United States during 1993. This number represents about 15% of the more than one million confirmed cases of all child abuse and neglect.

### **Types of Child Abuse**

Different types of child maltreatment and abuse has been identified by scholars to include; physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional and psychological abuse; and neglect.

**Physical Abuse:** This is an action which causes harm to a child's body and are usually the most obvious abuse. It involves beating a child to the point at which some physical damage is done. It includes hard hitting, kicking, knocking, shaking; strangling, biting, burning body parts, suffocating or giving drugs or poisons which could result to bruises, broken bones, fractured ribs, lost teeth, scars, serious internal injuries; or other intentional use of physical force against the child that could results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity.

**Emotional Abuse:** According to the U.S. government, “emotional abuse (or psychological abuse) is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child’s emotional development or sense of self-worth.” This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. It could also occur when a child is constantly ignored, shamed, terrorized, threatened or humiliated. It can be seen as the cruelest type of abuse, because it attacks the psyche and self-concept of the child. According to the Joyful Heart Foundation, brain development of the child is greatly influenced and responds to the experiences with families, caregivers, and the community. Abused children can grow up experiencing insecurities, low self-esteem, and lack of development. Many abused children experience ongoing difficulties with trust, social withdrawal, trouble in school, and poor development.

**Sexual Abuse:** This is the involvement of children in sexual activities that they do not fully

comprehend. According to the observer 2019, Over 15,000 children were defiled in 2018, according to police statistics. At least 201 of these were infected with HIV. Another 115 were defiled by their guardians. These statistics are so alarming and yet they are only the minority of cases that got reported to police. Sexual abuse includes forcing to undress or to perform in sexual fashion, spying on a child in bed or bathroom, rape, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, displaying pornography to a child or using a child to produce child pornography. Selling the sexual services of children may be viewed and treated as child abuse.

**Psychological Abuse:** This is the most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse and neglect. American Psychiatric Association (APA), describes it as "non-accidental verbal or symbolic acts by a child's parent or caregiver that result, or have reasonable potential to result, in significant psychological harm to the child." APSAC sees psychological abuse as spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting, corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness, or neglect" or "A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value in meeting another's needs".

Psychological abuse was also defined as the production of psychological and social defects in the growth of a child as a result of behavior such as loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism, and denigration of the child's personality. Other examples include name-calling, ridicule, degradation, destruction of personal belongings, torture or killing of a pet, excessive criticism, inappropriate or excessive demands, withholding communication, and routine labeling or humiliation. In 2014, the APA stated that: "Childhood psychological abuse is as harmful as sexual or physical abuse". "Given the prevalence of childhood psychological abuse and the severity of harm to young victims, it should be at the forefront of mental health and social service training".

**Neglect:** Neglect is more of a problem of omission than commission. It is the failure of a parent or caretaker to provide the bare necessities of a child. It includes not giving enough food to the extent that the child looks very thin and ashamed of self before others, not obtaining medical help for instance parents who do not believe in taking medications or blood transfusion, leaving the child alone in a dark and cold place for a long time. Academic neglect probably because they are very busy with their jobs having no time for their kids, not paying school fees and buying the essential learning materials resulting in failure and poor self-esteem of the child. Material neglect, such as not clothing the child when you know the child cannot afford it for himself or herself. These situations do not always mean that a child is neglected. Sometimes cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may be contributing factors, indicating that the family is in need of information or assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources, and the child's needs continue to be unmet, then further child welfare professional intervention may be required. Emotional neglect is a bit difficult to define, meeting a child's affectional needs – emotional nurturing and emotional support necessary for the development of a sound personality, is as important to normal growth and development as meeting his or her physical needs and other needs.

#### **Causes of Child Abuse**

Many factors could cause child abuse. Children who are exposed to their parents' continued prostitution, criminal activity, drug addiction, and severe alcoholism are very prone to such behaviours as well; and this could be injurious to the moral development of such children. Other causes include;

- Divorce. When the mother of the home divorces the man and leaves her children behind and another woman is introduced into the home to take care of the abandoned children, child abuse is inevitable.
- Children are prone to abuse if parents or guardian or neighbors are drug addicts.

- Poverty and poor living condition sometimes leading to transferred aggression on children.
- Noncompliance of too high standard set for the child by parents or guardian; could cause frustration on the parents/guardian thereby resulting to abuse on the child.
- Ignorance of alternatives to corporal punishment or how to discipline their children most effectively at each age.
- Cultural norms that sanction physical punishment are one of the causes of child abuse.
- Children from an unplanned pregnancy are predisposed to abuse.
- Disabilities. There is some limited evidence that children with moderate or severe disabilities are more likely to be victims of abuse than non-disabled children.
- Parental negligence.
- Parents also may lack knowledge of the health, hygiene, and nutritional needs of their children.

These circumstances, combined with the inherent challenges of raising children, can result in otherwise well-intentioned parents causing their children harm or neglecting their needs.

#### **Consequences and Effects**

Researchers and clinicians have documented physical, psychological, cognitive and behavioural consequences of physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuses and neglect. Physical damage can range from death, brain damage, and permanent disabilities to minor bruises and scrapes. The psychological consequences can range from lowered sense of self-worth to severe psychiatric disorders, including dissociative states. Cognitive problems range from severe organic brain disorders to reduced attention and minor learning disorders. Maltreated children's behaviour problems can include severe violent and criminal behaviour and suicide as well as inability to relate to peers. (Gelles, 1997).

A significant result of child abuse is that violence breeds violence. George (2014) reports evidence showing that abused children may tomorrow become murderers and perpetrators of other crimes of violence. When they become parents, there is also the high probability that

they will become abusive parents, violent and hostile. Abused children are also at high risk of running away from the home which exposes them to other kinds of victimization and involvement in criminal activities such as breaking of shops, stealing and prostitution in order to keep on.

Other effects according to Daodu (2014), includes;

- Bedwetting
- Lack of interest in academics
- Self-reservation
- Depression and anxiety
- Sexual activeness and abusers
- Shyness and passiveness
- Early pregnancy
- Poor development and unwillingness to strive
- Self-pity with low self-esteem
- Exhibit aggressive or illegal behaviour.
- Physical, mental, emotional and psychological injuries.
- Suicide etc

The severe risks and effects associated with child abuse; and the impacts are stigmas in most cases that linger throughout the child's life. It in turn leads to poor productivity, unemployment, prostitution, religious crisis, crimes, increased funding for child welfare systems and other restive actions that adversely affects the family, church, society and nations at large.

#### **Perpetuators of Child Abuse**

By definition, perpetrators of child abuse and neglect are the very people responsible for the child's safety and well-being. : Ajayi (2014) categorized them as follows:

- Parents
- Other family members and relatives
- Teachers
- Babysitters
- Acquaintances
- Strangers

It is of great concerns that most abusers of children are mostly close and trusted ones expected to protect, properly guide and guard the child. Only in few cases you have strangers in the picture.

Child abuse happens to be one of the heartbroken crimes in the society today. It will be quite difficult to remedying the situation if

members of the families or professional group or a third party with knowledge of cases or suspected cases fail to report to the right constituted authority. Despite the rights by parents, and guardians to discipline their wards, abuse is prohibited by law.

#### **Solution/Prevention**

It is an established fact that child abuse has an adverse effect on the child, the economy and the society. It is therefore pertinent to find a remedy to the established problem. Some of the remedies as articulated by UNICEF (2017) and The National Centre for Prevention and Control (2018) include:

- Free counselling and prevention centers should be made available to help parents develop their parenting skills and understand the benefits of nonviolent discipline techniques. It will also help understand and meet their child's emotional, physical, health, nutritional and developmental needs.
- Parents, guardian or other care givers should prevent bad habits such as drugs.
- Poverty can be overcome by hard work. Parents should not be idle.
- Parents should understand their children's developmental stages and should not hold unreasonable expectations for their abilities.
- Set clear, fair guidelines. Explain your guidelines and the consequences. Never set rules without explaining them, children only obey rules when they understand them.
- Parents should be enlightened on the alternatives to corporal punishment or how to discipline their children most effectively at each age.
- Parents should be careful who they leave their children with. Don't leave them in the dark, park or secluded places and for too long.
- Parents should learn to manage stress because these circumstances, combined with the inherent challenges of raising children, can result in otherwise well-intentioned parents causing their children harm or neglecting their needs.
- Learn to listen and to talk to your child. Enlighten your children about child abuse,

causes, consequences and preventions. This will help their reactions in certain situations.

- Parents could attend programs that can also help in identifying other needs they may have; and offer assistance in getting that additional support.

#### **Librarians' Impact in Remediating the Menace**

In the late 1960s, in response to a growing national concern about child abuse in the United States, they adopted child-abuse and neglect-reporting laws. Such laws are essentially a case-finding device. They require professionals (such as librarians, physicians, social workers, counsellors, hospital administrators, school administrators, nurses) etc to report suspected cases of child abuse to certain specific agencies such as the local police department and the country welfare department (Wambi, 2019). Libraries and librarians are to liaise with children advocacy centers to inform the society about the menace. Similarly, Zastrow (2017) stated that librarians can also come up with the followings:

#### **Organize Regular Campaign Programs:**

Libraries and librarians should hold campaigns monthly or quarterly to remind perpetrators and the general public of the dangers and consequences of child abuse. Parents should be encouraged to be part of the campaign and can be done in batches of men this time, women another time but somehow all-round the year there must be a continued campaign.

**Religious Bodies should be Involved:** Religious bodies should be invited for seminars in the library that could encourage them to teach and emphasize on child abuse regularly to their congregation. They could organize programs inviting other faith communities and general public to learn about and help prevent child abuse and family violence.

#### **Librarians as Volunteers in providing family support services:**

Librarians are helping as volunteers in making significant contributions to ensuring the healthy development of children in need. Librarian will provide one-on-one support, mentoring, and other wrap-around services to children and parent. Librarians work as solicitors with other firms and organization to provide funds, materials and information services that will immensely benefit the children.

#### **Librarians could team up with other professionals or semi-professionals to train the public:**

Librarians in an effort to Prevent Child Abuse can partner with other professionals in various fields of life to orient the parents of the challenges of life couples with the responsibility of taking care of kids and how all can be balanced without traces of abuse.

#### **Invite a local celebrity or feature a children's cartoon character:**

Raising a Healthy Child is quite challenging but interesting. Librarians have been trained on how to get the children focused and also help the victimized overcome. The library could host free event featuring comic books stories like Spider-Man, child abuse prevention, face painting, games, and snow cones.

Libraries should provide counsellors/Librarians who could help counsel identified victims on how they can overcome giving them the opportunity to be determined to make it in life.

#### **Librarians could organize a competition for men and fathers:**

The essence is to challenge them on the responsibility of a loving father and how to care, love, nurture and rock a complaining baby. It should also be intended to train them on the importance of patience, tolerance and dedication to their young.

**Involve local schools:** Librarians should work with local schools in the Prevention of Child Abuse, by providing parents positive information on how to cope with child's poor grades and other behaviours.

#### **Organise a child abuse day with legislators:**

Librarians should get an imprint on paper and distribute to schools and other community of people emphasizing the importance of this day in the library environment. On this day, each child is given the opportunity to express himself/herself on their challenges with their parents, guardians, caregivers, etc. Advice is given to them on how to improve their attitudes and in extreme cases the perpetrators are invited, for further interrogation, advice or necessary actions. The librarian are under legal obligation as responsible professional in child education and care to report suspected cases of abuse of a child to the necessary authorities.

The library and librarians are saddled with the responsibility of mentoring and careful

evaluation of the children's reading interest while in the library and also the material they are interested in reading. Libraries are expected to provide and librarians are to expose children to the right information materials that could make them wiser, sharper, build their knowledge in order to be able to perceive danger zones or signals.

Seminars and workshops are organized in the libraries regularly with emphases on the need to be more diligent, committed to their ward's upbringing and the dangers or effects on the affected child when they fail as parents.

Librarians are also to ensure that the children's library is child friendly with conducive seats, colourful and attractive books, pictures, games and an approachable librarian who can guide the child on how to read, learn and to grow in wisdom and knowledge.

Libraries should be opened till evening and librarians should help in monitoring the reading of children after school instead of keeping them at the mercy of strangers they should be brought to the library and picked up after the close of parents from work.

### Conclusion

It is worthy of note that everyone deserves his or her self-worth, regards and values. Abuses are inevitable when parents care less about their children or trust their children to the care of anyone around due to economic, marital issues, jobs or even due to laziness. Parents are to be more dedicated and committed to the affairs of their wards as abuses are not easily wiped out of the memory of any child.

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