

# The Impact of Gender, Family Type and Age on Undergraduate Parents' Perception of Causes of Sexual Abuse

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the Impact of Gender, Family type and Age on undergraduate parents' perception of causes of child Sexual Abuse. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested. There was a review of relevant literature. The population for the study were 2014 sandwich contact students of Delta State University, Abraka who were about 2000 in number. The sample size of 303 was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for this study was a questionnaire and it had face, content and construct validity from expert judgment and factor analysis. The reliability was assessed with Cronbach Alpha statistics and yielded an r value of 0.90. The data was analysed with t-test statistics and the results revealed that variables of gender and age have no impact on undergraduate parents' perception of causes of child sexual abuse. But family type has impact on their perception of the causes of child sexual abuse. Recommendations made include the followings: that counselors should organize parents' conferences and use such fora to enlighten parents on their roles to their children or wards in terms of provision of basic needs as well as supervising and monitoring them, the government should provide students with adequate learning materials so as to reduce the financial burden on parents and thus enhance their care for their children.

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse, poverty, child neglect and single parenting

## 1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a global phenomenon. It is a violation perpetrated against an individual below 18 years of age. According to Ogunyemi (2000), such abuse may have physical, verbal and emotional components. Wikipedia (2015) has also defined Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) as a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation. The first published work on child sexual abuse was in France in 1857 by Auguste Ambrose Tardieu, the noted French pathologist and pioneer of forensic medicine.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 223 million children (150 million girls and 73 million boys) have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence globally (UNVAC, 2006). The prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide for females is 19.7% and 7.9% for males (2009 study published in clinical psychology review) that examined 65 studies from 22 countries, using the available data, the highest prevalent rate of child sexual abuse geographically was found in Africa (34.4%) because of high rates in South Africa.

Sexual abuse include rape, incest, prostitution, pornographic activities or other forms of sexual exploitation harmful or threatening to the child (Oregon, 2009). Others are oral or anal intercourse, fondling, unwanted touching, use of instruments on a child's genitalia, exposing a child to view adult genitalia, rubbing genitals against the child's body in a sexual manner, asking a child to arouse an adult and lastly the use of vulgar language in the presence of a minor. In this study, the focus is on rape. Rape can be defined as unlawful, coerced sexual intercourse with a minor.

It is common knowledge that these abuses are perpetrated by close acquaintances of the child such as parents, teachers, guardians relatives and other caregivers whom he/she confides in. Russell (1986) as cited in Henslin (1993) noted that uncles are the most common offenders followed by first cousins, then fathers (step-fathers especially) brothers and finally relatives ranging from brothers-in-law to step grand-fathers and that there is little

incest between mothers and sons. In Nigeria, the newspapers are replete with stories of child sexual abuse. Below Table 1 is a table indicating some of the instances of child sexual abuse in Nigeria in 2013.

Table 1. Some incidence of child sexual abuse in Nigeria in 2013

Date	Source	Age of victim	Age of perpetrator(s)	Items used to lure victim	Town and State
March 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	Wednesday Vanguard	7 years	25 years	-	Orerokpe. Delta State.
March 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2013	Sunday Vanguard	12 years	22 years	Food and shelter	Lagos State.
April 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	Saturday Vanguard	7 years	(3 perpetrators) 19, 21 and 43 years	Snacks	Lagos state.
April 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	Sunday Vanguard	13 years	30 years	Pretence that he will keep victim company on her way from school	Calabar, Cross River State.
August 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2013	Saturday Vanguard	11 years	41 years	Guise of sending her on errand	Ebute-Meta, Lagos state.
October 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2013	Thursday vanguard	5 years	20 years	-	Ado-Ekiti, Ondo state.
November 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	Tuesday vanguard	17 years	(2 perpetrators) 22 and 23 years	Offered to give her a ride on their bike	Abeokuta, Ogun State.
December 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	Wednesday vanguard	9 years	42 years	Invitation to his office	Bauchi state.

A lot of factors may have given rise to child sexual abuse and they include child neglect, poverty, over population, non-implementation of the child rights law, single parenting, peer group activities, unwholesome mass media, lack of sex education and ignorance. In this write-up, three of the likely factors will be discussed and these are child neglect, poverty and single parenting.

## 2. Child Neglect

The family is a unit of the larger society and it appears to be the oldest institution in the history of mankind. The family is saddled with a lot of responsibilities which include child bearing and child childrearing among others. According to Onoyase (2013), the process of child rearing or upbringing involves meeting the basic needs of the child and these include food, clothing, love and affection. Child neglect occurs when parents are unable to cater for their children's physical and emotional needs. Children may experience neglect when they are hungry, not properly dressed, left unattended under risky circumstances and not supervised. Onozure (2013) opined that when parents fail to take proper care of their children, they make them (children) vulnerable to sexual assault as they roam the streets in search of what they will eat.

## 3. Poverty

Another likely cause of child sexual abuse is economical and this has much to do with poverty. Children of varying ages are sent by parents or guardians to hawk wares and food items along the streets so as to make both ends meet and in the process of hawking these goods, a good number of them may have been assaulted physically and become interested in sexual activities.

Awake (2003) reported that poverty often contributes to child prostitution. According to Edukugho (2014), poverty and lack of access to basic education are some of the contributory factors to the unwarranted defilement of underage girls. Continuing; he reiterated that these girls are seen hawking oranges, groundnuts, tomatoes on the streets, in town, cities and villages in order to boost family income, but could end up being lured into secret, quiet places or rooms and raped even by neighbours. Still buttressing this point, Pemedede (2004) reported that the rate of poverty in developing countries is so high that children engage in economic activities so as to assist their

parents in running the home and in the process, they have been lured with their wares into the houses of unscrupulous men who eventually raped them.

#### 4. Single Parenting

Children from single parent homes are likely to be exposed to child sexual abuse because they lack parental supervision. This may be so because single parents struggle to make ends meet and the situation could be worse if the parents are in low-paid jobs and as such stay away from home. In the views of McDowell and Hostetler (1996), Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) happens more in single parent homes than in intact homes and that this may be due to lack of proper supervision of children by single parents. According to Goldman, Salus, Wolcott and Kennedy (2003), the rate of child abuse (child sexual abuse inclusive) in single parent households is 27.3 children per 1000 which is nearly twice, the rate of child sexual abuse in two parent households (15.5 children per 1000). Continuing, they pointed out that from an analysis of child abuse cases in a nationally representative sample of 42 countries, children from single parent families are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than children who live with both biological parents.

#### 5. Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant gender difference in undergraduate parents' perception on the causes of child sexual abuse.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in undergraduate parents' perception on the causes of child sexual abuse based on family type.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in undergraduate parents' perception on the causes of child sexual abuse based on age.

#### 6. Methods and Procedure

The population for this study was 2014 sandwich contact students of Delta State University, Abraka. The population of students was about 2000. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of 303. The instrument for this study was a questionnaire titled "The perceptions of parents on the causes of child sexual abuse". It is made up of two sections. Section A elicits information on bio-data, males were 117, (38.61%) of the sample while females were 186 which was (61.39%) of the sample, other characteristics include family type, age (30-45) and (46-60 years) while the second section was basically on parents' inability to provide the basic needs for their children, child neglect and single parenting. The instrument has face, content and construct validity from expert judgment and factor analysis. The reliability was assessed using cronbach alpha procedure and the r value was 0.09. The scoring pattern of the instrument was Strongly Agreed (SA) agreed A, Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) scores (4-1) or (1-4) depending on the wording of the item, and t-test statistics was used to analyze the data.

Table 2. T-test analysis of respondents' perception on the causes of child sexual abuse based on gender

Variable	N	X	SD	df	t	Sig	Remark
Male	117	31.89	9.24		0.67	0.50	
Female	186	31.09	11.63	302			Accepted

The above Table 2 showed that there is no significant difference between the perception of female respondents and male respondents on the causes of child sexual abuse. The mean of male is 31.89 with standard deviation of 9.24 while that of female is 31.09 and S.D=11.63 with df=302, t=0.67 at 0.50 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Table 3. T-test analysis of respondents' perception on the causes of child sexual abuse based on family type

Type of family	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.	Remark
Monogamous	207	32.29	10.24	302	2.13	0.003	
Polygamous	96	29.50	11.63				Rejected

Table 3 shows that there is significant difference in the perception of parents on the causes of child sexual abuse based on family type. The mean for monogamous family is 32.29, with standard deviation of 10.24 while for polygamous family is 29.50 with 11.63,  $df=302$ ,  $t=2.13$   $p=0.003$ . The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Table 4. T-test analysis of respondents' perceptions on causes of child sexual abuse based on age

Age	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.	Remark
30-45 years	264	31.49	10.27	302	.383	0.71	
46-60 years	39	30.80	13.72				Accepted

Table 4 has shown that there is no significant difference among respondents' perception on child sexual abuse based on age (30-45 years and 46-60 years). The mean for 30-45 years is 31.49 with standard deviation of 10.27 while 46-60 years mean is 30.80 with standard deviation of 13.72,  $df$  is 302,  $t=.383$   $p=0.71$ , the null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

### 7. Discussion of Findings

The first finding has revealed that there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female respondents on the causes of child sexual abuse. This is evident from the mean scores of 31.89 for males and 31.09 for females. The result indicates that male and female parents alike have similar views on the causes of child sexual discussed in this study (which are child neglect, poverty and single parenting). The plausible reason one can adduce for this, is that parents of both sexes live in the same environment where children are assaulted sexually. This finding corroborates the view of Onozure (2013) who noted that when parents do not take proper care of their children, that such children may become vulnerable to sexual assault as they roam the streets in search of what they will eat.

The second finding has indicated that there is significant difference in the perception of parents on causes of child sexual abuse based on family type. This means that there are divergent views between parents from monogamous and polygamous families on the causes of child sexual abuse which are child neglect, poverty and single parenting. The probable reason is that in monogamous families, children are few and well taken care of in terms of food and shelter and so the issue of child neglect does not arise. Besides, most of the time, parents are around to supervise and monitor their children, and so incidents of child sexual abuse are reduced drastically. The contrary seems to be the case in polygamous homes where parents may be unable to properly cater for their children and thus expose them to sexual abuse through hawking and lack of parental supervision. The result contradicts the opinion of Pemede (2004) who reported that poverty in developing countries is so high that children engage in economic activities so as to assist their parents to make both ends meet and that in the process, they have been lured by unscrupulous men who eventually rape them.

The last finding indicated that there is no significant difference between younger and older parents in their perception of the causes of child sexual abuse. The implication is that being young or old does not influence one's perception of the causes of child sexual abuse. In other words, the youths and those in their middle age are of the same opinion about the aforementioned causes of child sexual abuse. This result supports the view expressed in Awake (2003) which stated that poverty is a contributory factor to unwarranted defilement of underage girls. The finding also corroborates the opinions of McDowell and Hostettler (1996) who opined that child sexual abuse happens more in single parent homes than in intact homes and that this may be due to lack of proper supervision of children by single parents.

### 8. Counselling Implications

The following are the implications of this study:

- Marriage counselors are needed in families to teach couples skills of marital adjustment so that they can keep their marriages and bring up their children properly.
- Counselling centres should be established in all higher institutions of learning and pre-marital counselling organized annually so that would-be couples would marry partners who are compatible with them.

## 9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations have been made:

- (1) Counselors should organize parents' conferences and use such fora to enlighten parents on their roles to their children or wards in terms of provision of basic needs as well as supervising and monitoring them.
- (2) The government should provide students with adequate learning materials so as to reduce the financial burden of parents and thus enhance their care for their children.
- (3) Unemployed parents should be sensitized by the government and other relevant agencies to learn entrepreneurial skills so that they can be self-employed and adequately fend for their children and thus minimize the incidence of child neglect.
- (4) As a matter of urgency, Delta State government should enact laws to ban street hawking by children so as to avoid sexual molestation.

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