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Article

# Understanding the Spectrum and Determinants of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nkpor-Uno, Anambra State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study presents a comprehensive investigation into the spectrum and determinants of child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-Uno, a community in Anambra State, Nigeria. Through a descriptive surveys design, the study explores various forms of abuse and neglect experienced by children, as well as the underlying factors contributing to these phenomena. The population for the study consisted of 1000 parents/ caregivers who are residents of Nkpor-uno. The sample for the study consisted of 100 respondents, purposive sampling techniques was used for the study. The questionnaire was a self-designed structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, mean and standard deviation. Findings reveal alarming prevalence rates of child maltreatment, including physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, parental substance abuse, family dynamics, and inadequate sex education emerged as significant contributors to child maltreatment. The study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the root causes of abuse and neglect and safeguard the well-being and development of children in Nkpor-Uno. By raising awareness, enhancing access to resources, and promoting positive parenting practices, we can strive towards building a safer and healthier environment for children, ensuring they are protected from harm and given the opportunity to thrive.

**Keywords:** child abuse; child neglect; Nkpor-Uno; Nigeria; spectrum; determinants

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## Introduction

Child abuse and neglect represent a complex spectrum of issues that adversely affect the development, health, and well-being of children worldwide. These issues span across physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect, each with distinct characteristics and consequences. Understanding the spectrum and determinants of child abuse and neglect is critical for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies (Mercer & Karim, 2023). Child abuse and neglect can manifest in several forms, each with unique implications for the child's physical and psychological development (Meyer et al., 2024). Physical abuse involves inflicting physical harm through beating, burning, or harming the child in other ways. Emotional or psychological abuse includes actions and behaviors that harm a child's self-esteem or emotional well-being, such as verbal abuse, isolation, or exposure to family violence. Sexual abuse encompasses any form of sexual activity with a child, while neglect involves the failure to meet a child's basic needs, including food, shelter, education, and medical care (Aina-Pelemo & Olujobi, 2023).

Each form of abuse and neglect leaves a lasting impact on children, affecting their emotional stability, physical health, and overall development. For instance, children who experience physical abuse may suffer from injuries, developmental delays, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Græsholt-Knudsen et al., 2023). Similarly, neglected children may experience stunted physical growth, cognitive delays, and emotional attachment disorders (Walz et al., 2024). The determinants of child abuse and neglect are multifaceted, involving individual, relational, community, and societal factors. At the individual level, parental characteristics such as substance

abuse, mental health issues, and a history of being abused themselves are significant risk factors (Straussner & Fewell, 2015). Relationally, family dynamics, including domestic violence, lack of parental knowledge about child development, and economic stress, contribute to the risk of child abuse and neglect.

Community and societal factors also play a crucial role. Communities with high levels of violence, inadequate social services, and limited access to educational and economic opportunities create environments where child abuse and neglect are more likely to occur (Collier & Mears, 2023). Societal attitudes and norms that condone violence, discrimination, or inequality can further exacerbate the risk of abuse and neglect. The impact of child abuse and neglect is profound and long-lasting. Affected children often suffer from immediate physical injuries and psychological issues, including trauma, fear, and anxiety. In the long term, these experiences can lead to chronic health problems, mental health disorders, substance abuse, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Verma, 2014). Moreover, the cycle of abuse may perpetuate across generations, as those who experienced abuse or neglect in childhood are more likely to exhibit similar behaviors as adults (Thornberry et al., 2014).

The motivation for the study "Understanding the Spectrum and Determinants of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nkpor-uno: A Holistic Investigation" stems from a critical gap in localized research and an urgent need to address the nuanced dynamics of child maltreatment within specific communities. While global and national studies provide valuable insights into the general patterns and consequences of child abuse and neglect (Schilling et al., 2016), they often overlook the unique socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors that influence these patterns at a community level. Nkpor-uno, a community with its distinct social fabric, may exhibit specific risk factors and manifestations of child abuse and neglect not adequately captured by broader studies.

Furthermore, existing literature highlights the importance of contextual and culturally sensitive research in developing effective prevention and intervention strategies (Rangel & Valdez, 2017). However, there is a noticeable lack of such detailed studies in regions like Nkpor-uno. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive understanding of the spectrum of child abuse and neglect within this context, identifying localized determinants, and thereby informing tailored interventions. By focusing on Nkpor-uno, this research acknowledges the diversity of child abuse and neglect experiences and emphasizes the need for community-specific data to drive effective policy and practice changes.

### **Theoretical Frame Work**

This study was anchored on one theory, which is social learning Theory (SLT). Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, posits that people learn through observing others' behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. Bandura emphasized the role of modeling, reinforcement, and imitation in shaping individual behavior. According to this theory, individuals are more likely to adopt behaviors if they see others being rewarded for them, and less likely to adopt behaviors if they observe negative consequences.

The theory's tenets include the idea that learning can occur through observation alone, without direct reinforcement; that individuals are more likely to imitate behaviors modeled by people they perceive as similar to themselves or as role models; and that cognitive processes play a crucial role in learning, such as attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Applying Social Learning Theory to the topic of understanding child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-uno, one can consider how children may learn behaviors related to abuse or neglect through observation of their caregivers or other authority figures. For instance, if a child observes a parent using corporal punishment as a disciplinary method and witnesses that the parent's behavior results in compliance or submission, the child may learn that such actions are acceptable or effective means of discipline.

Moreover, if the child does not witness any negative consequences for the parent's behavior, they may be more likely to imitate it themselves. This perspective underscores the importance of examining the social dynamics and modeling of behaviors within the community to understand the spectrum and determinants of child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-uno.

### Objective of the Study

1. To ascertain the various forms of child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-uno.
2. To ascertain the factors responsible for child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-uno.

### Research questions

1. What are the various forms of child abuse and negelect in Nkpor-uno?
2. What are the factors responsible for child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-Uno.

### Methodology

The research design employed in this study is a descriptive survey, aiming to understand the spectrum and determinants of child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-uno. Descriptive survey research was used, the design involves assessing the characteristics of an entire population. It provides an accurate depiction of events within their natural settings. This approach is suitable for gathering data from a large population for detailed analysis, fitting for a study concerned with understanding the prevalence of child abuse and neglect among children aged 0-10 years in Nkpor-uno.

The study area, Nkpor-uno, is situated within Idemili North L.G.A of Anambra State, Southeastern Nigeria. The community has a rich history, stemming from the migration and settlement of its inhabitants, primarily descendants of Dimudeke, an ancient hunter from Arochukwu. Nkpor-uno consists of five villages, each named after Dimudeke's children, with a population estimated at 1000 residents. The population includes various demographics such as parents, teachers, school children, market women, hospital staff, and church workers. A sample of 100 respondents, selected purposively, represents 10% of the study population. Purposive sampling ensures that participants possess characteristics relevant to the study. Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire titled "Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN)," comprising demographic information, forms and effects of abuse, and neglect prevalence. The questionnaire, validated through content and face validation, demonstrated reliability with a score of 0.75 using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient.

Data analysis involved calculating percentages and means to interpret responses. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, maintaining respect, confidentiality, anonymity, and a positive researcher-participant relationship. Overall, the descriptive survey methodology facilitated a comprehensive examination of child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-uno, ensuring rigorous data collection and ethical research practices.

### Results

The Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic profile and gender distribution among participants. It reveals an equal split between male and female participants, with 50 individuals in each category. Age-wise, 38 participants fall within the 1-5 years range, constituting 38% of the total, while 62 participants are aged between 6-10 years, representing 62% of the total. Further, the table highlights the gender distribution within each age group, indicating 18 males and 20 females in the 1-5 years category, and 20 males and 42 females in the 6-10 years category. This data aids in understanding the composition of the study population.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile and Gender Distribution of Participants.

GENDER	N	%	AGE GROUPS	Range	N	%	GENDER DISTRIBUTION AMONG AGE GROUPS	Total
MALE	50	50.0	1-5 years	38	18	18.0	MALE	38
FEMALE	50	50.0	6-10 years	62	20	20.0	FEMALE	62
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	38	38.0	Total	100

**Research Question 1:** What are the different forms of Abuse and Neglect experienced by a child?

The result in Table 2 shows the forms of Abuse experienced by a child. The forms of child abuse and neglect includes physical abuse which was (25%), physical neglect (25%), emotional abuse (10%), mental abuse (15%), sexual abuse (10%), parent and care giver neglect (10%), psychological abuse (5%). The result indicates that Physical abuse and physical neglect was more frequent by 25% while psychological abuse is the least by 5%.

**Table 2.** Showing the Percentage Result on forms of Abuse and Neglects experienced by a child.

S/N	Forms of Child Abuse	Frequency	Percentage
1	Physical abuse	25	25.0
2	Physical neglect	25	25.0
3	Emotional abuse	10	10.0
4	Mental abuse	15	15.0
5	Psychological abuse	5	5.0
6	Sexual abuse	10	10.0
7	Parent and care giver neglect	10	10.0

**Research Question 2:** What are the factors responsible for child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-Uno?

The Table 3 identifies the responses on the factors responsible for child abuse and neglect in Nkpor-Uno. The result of the findings revealed the mean and standard deviation of factors of child abuse and neglect. The participant responses show the mean scores of inadequate knowledges about sex education has the highest mean score of (3.39) and large family size contributing to child abuse and neglect with the least mean score of (1.58).

**Table 3.** Showing the mean and standard deviation result on factors responsible for child abuse and neglect.

S/N	Factors	Mean	Std	decision
1.	Poverty contributes to child	2.88	1.88	Accepted
2.	Excessive intake of alcohol/substance may affect a parent's ability to meet their child needs	2.61	2.27	Accepted
3.	Excessive intake of alcohol/substance may affect a parent's ability to meet their child needs	2.61	2.27	Accepted
4.	A child is abused when he or she is perceived as a problem by the parents	3.30	2.90	Accepted
5.	Large family size exposes children to abuse and neglect	1.58	1.20	Accepted
6.	Inadequate knowledge about sex education can expose a child to sexual abuse	3.39	3.05	Accepted
7.	History of abuse on the side of the parents is a contributory factor for child abuse	2.55	1.55	Accepted

## Discussion of Results

Research question one sought to know the forms of abuse and neglect experienced by a child. Result indicated that physical abuse and physical neglect with the highest percentage of 25 were frequent in children 0-10years in Nkpor uno, while psychological abuse is the least by 5%. This is in line with Fitzgerald and Hall (2024) who found out that early physical abuse affected behavior of children and their academic performance. Child abuse and neglect encompass various forms of maltreatment, each with distinct yet detrimental impacts on a child's well-being. Physical abuse involves the infliction of physical harm or injury upon a child, while physical neglect refers to the failure to provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, or shelter (Tuncer, 2018). Emotional abuse entails the consistent undermining of a child's self-worth and emotional security, leading to long-lasting psychological scars (Mercer & Karim, 2023). Mental and psychological abuse involve manipulation, gaslighting, or threats that undermine a child's mental health and stability (Ifeyinwa

& Ncheta, 2016). Sexual abuse involves any form of sexual activity imposed on a child, causing immense trauma and distress (Proctor & Dubowitz, 2013). Also, Lane and Dubowitz (2021) observed that negative health outcomes related to child maltreatment such as hunger, neglect and physical abuse are strong indicators of poor growth.

Research question two sought to know the factors that are responsible for child abuse and neglect in Nkpor Uno Idemili North L.G.A. Since child abuse is rampant in the area, poverty was identified as a major factor. Due to poor economic situation in the country, poverty is on the increase. The results showed that most parents find it very difficult to feed, clothe and carry out their basic responsibilities in their family. Poverty serves as a significant contributor, as families struggling with financial instability may lack resources to adequately care for their children (Halpern-Meehin, 2019). Excessive alcohol or substance intake by parents can impair judgment and diminish their ability to meet their children's needs, exacerbating the risk of neglect and abuse (Straussner and Fewell, 2015). Most of them resort to sending their under-age children to away as house helps/ domestic servants. Also, large family size contributes to child abuse and neglect in the area, some parents have as many as seven to nine children thereby having difficulty in providing for them. This is in line with Andrews et al., (2015) on his study trauma and recovery where he indicated that poverty and large family size contributes to child abuse. Additionally, children may be mistreated when perceived as burdensome or problematic by their parents, highlighting the role of parental attitudes and perceptions (Delvecchio et al., 2016). Large family sizes increase the strain on parents, potentially leading to inadequate supervision and care for children (Collier & Mears, 2023). Lack of knowledge about sex education may also expose children to sexual abuse, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive education and awareness (Verma, 2014). Furthermore, a history of abuse within the family can perpetuate cycles of violence, contributing to the likelihood of child maltreatment (Thornberry et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study "Understanding the Spectrum and Determinants of Child Abuse and Neglect in Nkpor-Uno: A Holistic Investigation" sheds light on the complex dynamics surrounding child maltreatment in the Nkpor-Uno community. Through a comprehensive examination of various forms of abuse and neglect, as well as the underlying factors contributing to these phenomena, significant insights have been gained. It is evident that child abuse and neglect are multifaceted issues influenced by socioeconomic factors, parental attitudes, substance abuse, family dynamics, and lack of education on sex education. The prevalence rates observed underscore the urgency of addressing these issues to safeguard the well-being and development of children in Nkpor-Uno.

Moving forward, interventions aimed at combating child abuse and neglect should adopt a holistic approach that addresses the root causes identified in this study. This may involve implementing community-based programs to raise awareness, providing support services for families in need, enhancing access to education and resources, and promoting positive parenting practices. Additionally, collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, healthcare providers, educators, and community leaders are essential to enact meaningful change and create a protective environment for children. By addressing the spectrum and determinants of child abuse and neglect comprehensively, we can strive towards building a safer and healthier future for the children of Nkpor-Uno and beyond.

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