

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ALIMOSHO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study investigated the perception of child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. Child sexual abuse has been identified as a critical issue among the various forms of trauma children face, including domestic violence, neglect, and physical or emotional abuse. A total of 265 Junior Secondary School II students (117 males and 118 females) were randomly selected from three schools within Alimosho Educational District IV. The study was guided by two research objectives, questions, and hypotheses. Data were collected using a self-structured ten-item questionnaire and analyzed with t-test and ANOVA statistical tools. The findings revealed no significant gender difference in students' perception of child sexual abuse. Additionally, family dynamics did not significantly influence students' perception of the issue. Based on these findings, it was recommended that there should be general awareness campaigns on child sexual abuse targeted at parents, teachers, caregivers, and relevant government agencies. These campaigns should focus on educating stakeholders about the signs, causes, effects, and potential perpetrators of child sexual abuse to enhance prevention and early intervention efforts.

**Keywords:** Student's perception; Child sexual abuse; Family dynamics; Gender

### Introduction

Observations have been made that different events could orchestrate trauma in a child's life. These may include domestic violence, neglect, harassment, cruelty, physical assault or abuse, emotional abuse, and many others. Among these, the prevalent event that needs more attention is child sexual abuse. Ogedengbe (2011) mentioned that sexual abuse of children is becoming increasingly prevalent in our society. In fact, the recurrent events of child sexual abuse over the years had been of great concern to common people, policymakers, governments and, most especially, professional counsellors' world over. Child sexual abuse is a global public health and human rights concern.

Child sexual abuse is a form of abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation (Ali et al, 2014)). It can be defined as any activity with a child before the age of legal consent that is for sexual gratification of an adult or a substantially older child. Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. A central characteristic of any abuse is domination of the child by the perpetrator through deception, force, or coercion into sexual activity. Children, due to their

age, cannot give meaningful consent to sexual activity” (APA, 2013).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a significant societal issue that has a profound impact on children across various age groups, irrespective of their gender or socio-cultural background. Measuring the prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) poses challenges due to a significant number of incidents that remain unreported. Nevertheless, extensive research has indicated that childhood sexual abuse (CSA) constitutes a noteworthy issue, since around 10% of Children encounter instances of sexual abuse before reaching the age 18. Acha, et al (2020) reported that approximately 25% of girls and 10% of boys encounter childhood sexual abuse (CSA) prior to reaching 18 years of age.

Child sexual abuse can inflict profound harm onto its victims. The enduring consequences of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) can have a profound and pervasive impact on an individual's overall well-being, encompassing their physical, mental, and emotional dimensions. The impact of CSA has been widely discussed in recent years by various authors. Auch et al (2020) posit that victims of CSA in Africa are more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD while Emeka and Nwagu (2021) identified some physical health problems such as chronic pain, heart disease, and cancer. Victims of CSA in Africa are more likely to drop out of school and to have lower grades than those who had not experienced CSA (Odipo & Ndeti; 2022). Children who were abused sexually are at risk of long term-term consequences, including poor academic performance, low self-esteem, suicide attempts, unhealthy relationships, which may have effects on their psychosocial personalities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Child sexual abuse has been identified as one of the prevalent cancerous acts that causes psychological, social, physical, and emotional disorders in a child, and can have serious adverse effect on the victim's life. The incidence of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Nigeria is substantial, since research suggests that approximately 25% of girls and 10% male encounter (CSA) prior to reaching 18 years of age as reported in a survey conducted in 2019 by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. More than 31.4% of girls' first sexual experience in Nigeria was reported to be rape or forced sex (United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds, 2015).

Child sexual abuse is associated with long term physical and mental health consequences. The physical effects include vesicovaginal and rectovaginal fistula and chronic pelvic pain. The mental health consequences involve psychological or behavioural disorders which may manifest in suicidal thoughts, posttraumatic stress disorder, or depression. Other behavioural disorders include bodily shame, abuse-related fears and substance abuse.

Victims of sexual abuse can show a variety of symptoms during and years after the abuse has occurred. The child not only goes through physical trauma and pain, but psychological and emotional pain last long-term damage to victims. Long-term effects caused by sexual abuse involve guilt, shame, confusion, self-destructive behavior, feelings of isolation, social anxiety, feeling of stigma, post traumatic symptoms, depression, helplessness, aggressive behaviors, negative attributions, personality disorders and behavioral problems, substance abuse, poor self-esteem, sexual problems, divorce, eating disorders and mental illness. (Alexander, 2011; Allnock, 2010; Allnock et al., 2009; Beckett, 2003; Calder, McVean, & Yang, 2010; Cashmore & Shackle, 2013; Dube et al. 2005; Maniglio, 2009)

## Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study is to assess the perception of students about child sexual abuse. The study will specifically

1. Find out the gender difference in perception of child sexual abuse among Junior Secondary School Students in Agege Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria
2. Examine the relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse among Junior Secondary School Students in Agege Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria.

## Research Questions.

The following research questions guided the work:

1. Will there be any gender difference in perception of child sexual abuse among Junior Secondary School Students in Agege Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria?
2. Is there any relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse among Junior Secondary School Students in Agege Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria?

## Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated for the study,

1. There is no significant gender difference in perception of child sexual abuse among Junior Secondary School Students in Agege Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse among Junior Secondary School Students in Agege Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria.

## Methodology

The research design that was adopted in this study was descriptive survey. The population for the study is all the Junior Secondary School II Students in Alimosho Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria, during the 2022/2023 academic session. The sampling procedure used was stratified sampling. Stratification was based on the areas where the schools were located. It is appreciated that the procedure enhanced the emergence of representative samples. The sample comprised a total of Two hundred and sixty –five (265) students randomly selected from three (3) Junior secondary schools in Alimosho educational area. 109 males and 156 females were selected from the three schools chosen. The age ranged from 10-13 years. Data collected using 10 items researcher constructed instrument was used for the study. The instrument a 2–point scale varying from YES to NO. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. “Section A” measured the biographic data of the students while “Section B” measured the ‘Student perception of child sexual abuse among junior secondary schools students’ and the validation of the instrument was through submitting items to two experts in the department of measurement and evaluation to ensure content validation.

## Results

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant gender difference in the perception of child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students in Alimosho local government area of Lagos state.

**Table 1: *t*-test showing gender difference in the perception of students towards child sexual abuse**

Child Sexual Abuse	N	X	SD	df	p-value	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	109	22.81	2.22					
Female	156	22.59	2.14	2.63	0.423	0.803	1.984	Not Sign

$P > 0.05$   $d = 263$

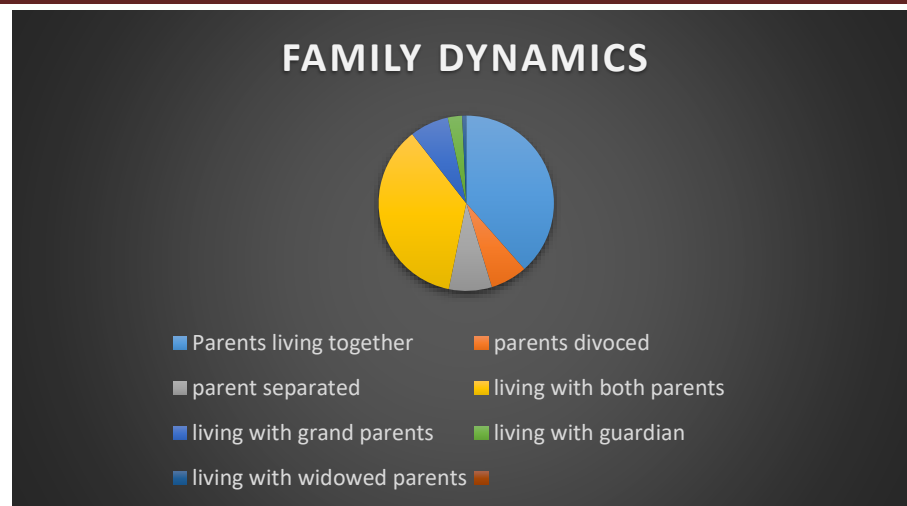
In the above, the mean score of the male respondents 22.81 is higher than that of the female (22.59). The t-calculated (0.803) is less than t-critical (1.984) the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. It implies that there is no significant gender difference in the perception of child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students in Alimosho local government area of Lagos state. The direction of the probability value also reveals that  $P > 0.05$  at 5% significant level.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students in Agege Local Government Area of Lagos state.

**Table 2: *Descriptive for the Categories of Family Dynamics***

Family Dynamics	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Parents Living Together	102	22.87	2.25
Parents Divorced	18	22.72	2.61
Parent Separated	21	22.48	1.89
Living with both Parents	96	22.52	2.078
Living with Grandparents	19	22.74	2.18
Living with Guidance	7	21.43	0.98
Living with Widowed Parents	2	26.00	1.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>22.68</b>	<b>2.17</b>

### **Pictorial Representation of Junior Secondary School Students Family Dynamics**



**Table 3: One way ANOVA table showing relationship between family dynamics and perception of child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students**

	Sum of  Squares	Df	Mean square	F-cal	F-tab	Sig	Decision
<b>Between Groups</b>	40.187	6	6.698				
<b>Within Groups</b>	1203.549	258	4.665	1.436	2.68	0.201	not sig
<b>Total</b>	1243.736	264					

$p > 0.05$

The one – way ANOVA table above indicates that there was no statistical significant relationship between the family dynamics and the child sexual abuse perception of junior secondary students in Alimosho local government area in Agege ( $F(6,258) = 1.437, p = .201, ns$ ). This implies that relationship does not exist between family dynamic and sexual abuse perception of junior secondary school students in Agege Local Government Area on their perception to child sexual abuse.

### Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one states that there is no significant gender difference in the perception of child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students in Alimosho local government area of Lagos state. The result of the study showed that there is no significant gender difference in the perception of students towards child sexual abuse. This study corroborates Agyemang and Adinku (2021) whose research findings indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female authors in their perception of child sexual abuse as a grave offence with severe repercussions for the victims. This study also aligns with Akello and Otieno (2022) who revealed that there was no significant difference in the likelihood of male and female authors endorsing policies and pro grammes designed to prevent and address child sexual abuse.

This finding contradicts that of Berkeley (2019) who reported that men, in comparison to women, were more inclined to believe that child sexual abuse is not a crime that has any victims. Their study also found out that men are more likely to place blame on the victim for the abuse and are less to report child sexual abuse when they see it occurring. This study did not align with that of Graford and Gartner (2021) who found out that women are more inclined than males to view child sexual abuse as a serious crime with life

–altering repercussions for victims. Their survey also indicated that female respondents were more likely to back measures meant to both prevent and address child sexual abuse.

The result of insignificant difference in gender perception to child sexual abuse could be as a result of the fact that both males and females have a greater propensity to perceive child sexual abuse as a grave offence compared to previous periods. Both males and females also exhibit a higher propensity to express their opposition to child sexual abuse and to actively contest detrimental misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding child sexual abuse.

Hypothesis Two states that there is no significant relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse among junior secondary school students in Alimosho local government area of Lagos state. The result showed that differences does not exist among junior secondary school students in Alimosho Local Government Area on their perception of relationship between family dynamics and that of child sexual abuse. The result is in contrast with the studied carried out by Chigozirim and Amodu (2017) which showed that parental togetherness and structure protected against child vulnerability and risk of being sexually abused.

This study corroborates the finding of Simth, Fromuth, & Moriris (1999), who found that there was no significant relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse when other factors like the child's traits and socio-economic position were taken into account. This study did not align with a number of studies that has established a relationship between family dynamics and child sexual abuse. One study by Finkelhor and Berliner (1984) found out that children who were sexually abused were more likely to come from homes that fought a lot, didn't talk to each other well, and didn't have anyone watching them. A different study by Kendall-Tackett and Berliner (2011) found that children who were sexually abused were more likely to come from homes with drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and general problems in the family. The outcome of this findings could be as a result of complex and multifaceted relationship that exist between family dynamics and child sexual abuse, hence suggesting that familial characteristics may play a less role in child sexual abuse than previously believed.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study concludes that students' perception of child sexual abuse is quite obvious probably due to prevalence of crime and the exposure of the incidence via the social media and some news outlets. Moreso, the study shows that there is no difference in the perception of students due to gender that is, both have the same opinion about the issue, The study has shown that child sexual abuse has enormous impact not only on the affected victims but also for the family as well as the society and this need to be addressed to the minimal level if it cannot be totally eradicated As a result of these, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Public Awareness Programme:** Public awareness programme can be done via various media viz radio, newspapers, television, and films. All other social handles cab also help in raising students' awareness of the negative impact of CSA.
2. **Implementation of Child Right Acts:** This act contains different measures that can be taken against any perpetrator of such act. Government at all the tiers of their administration should ensure that the act is fully enforce in their areas of jurisdictions. This will help to reduce the prevalence of the individual abusive acts.
3. **Counselling Services:** The government at all levels should employ more counsellors in the schools (both primary and secondary) so as to provide guidance and Counselling services for students as



early as possible and those that has been victims will be able to get out of the trauma involved through counselling.

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