

**CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: A CRACK IN
THE FOUNDATION OF A BETTER
FUTURE**

BY

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INTRODUCTION

All children deserve childhoods free from all manner of sexual abuse and exploitation. Without this safety, we put our future as a society at risk. As a part of the Old Nursery Rhyme states “.....*listen to your children, we are the leaders of tomorrow*”, the rise and fall of every nation deepens solely on her future leaders, which should be psychological fit to run the affairs of the state. Child Sexual Abuse is a devastating social problem in The Nigerian society. Over the years, very little cases have been reported and the supportive effort towards victims of such cases have been extremely low. However tragic and sensational, the counts of deaths and serious injuries provide limited insight into the pervasive long-term social, behavioural, and cognitive consequences of child abuse and neglect. Reports of child sexual abuse alone also reveal little about the interactions among individuals, families, communities, and society that lead to such incidents.

The Nigerian society has not yet recognized the complex origins or the profound consequences of child sexual abuse. The services required for children who have been abused, including medical care, family counselling, foster care, and specialized education, are neglected. Equally disturbing, research suggests that child abuse cases are highly related to social problems such as juvenile delinquency, gender based abuse, and violence, which require additional services and severely affect the quality of life for many Nigerian families.

Sexual abuse of children is a global health and human rights problem that has been largely underreported and understudied in Nigeria. Little is therefore known regarding information on the nature of child sexual abuse and the predisposing factors in our communities.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND ITS DEVASTATING EFFECT.

There are various definition of Child Sexual Abuse, however the definition by **HM Government 2015**:p.93 is best suitable it states that “*Child Sexual Abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a*

high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

This definition gives a very broad scope of sexual abuse and cover cases where a child will be unaware that they are being abused (**Whitehead, 2010**). The definition is also quite long which highlights the issues with creating a succinct description of sexual abuse that is inclusive. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines child sexual abuse as:

“The involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by adults or other children who are –by virtue of their age or stage of development – in a position of responsibility, trust, or power over the victim (World Health Organisation, 2006: p.10).

The UK government and WHO definitions stress that sexual abuse is also perpetrated by other children. This is important for people working with children to recognise. Child sexual exploitation also forms part of the wider problem of child sexual abuse. It is important to recognise that the sexual exploitation of children is damaging to children.

"The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities (National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People, 2008).

EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Victims of sexual abuse can show a range of symptoms during and for years after the abuse has occurred. Physical signs and symptoms are still given precedence in the literature but often

it is the emotional and psychological effects that do more long term damage to victims. **Alexander (2011)** calls sexual abuse a "chronic neurologic disease" and goes on to discuss how the effects create decades of negative consequences for victims. Up to 40% of victims of sexual abuse exhibit no long-term negative consequences of their experience (**Finkelhor and Berliner 1995**).

INDICATORS AND EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ON VICTIMS

The consequences of child sexual abuse can include:

- Depression,
- Psychopathology
- Anxiety
- Poor Self-Esteem
- Somatization
- Sleep Disturbances
- Eating Disorders,
- Post-Traumatic Stress
- Impaired Ability To Cope With Stress Or Emotions (**Allnock Et Al 2009**).

While children may exhibit regressive behaviours such as

- Thumb sucking or bedwetting,
- The strongest indicator of sexual abuse is sexual acting out and inappropriate sexual knowledge and interest.
- Victims may withdraw from school and social activities and exhibit various learning and behavioural problems including cruelty to animals.
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD),
- Conduct Disorder
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).
- Self-Blame.
- Self-Harm And Suicide (The feelings of shame and guilt that come from the abuse can reduce the likelihood of that child making a disclosure (**Allnock, 2010**.)
- Child sexual abuse can have a more fundamental effect on brain functioning, where a child's brain becomes damaged by the abuse they have suffered (**Mizenberg et al 2008**).

- The effects of sexual abuse can include dissociation, memory impairment and reduced social functioning (**Whitehead, 2011**).
- Being sexually abused as a child, especially where that abuse is not discovered, can lead to confused ideas about appropriate relationships and behaviour. It can lead some victims to block out the abuse so that they do not remember parts of their childhood. Where the abuse is not disclosed or discovered or where the children do not receive adequate help and support following a disclosure, the damage and negative effects can be life-long (**Goodyear-Brown, 2012**).

Sexual abuse can also have physical consequences for victims which includes;

- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Unwanted Pregnancy.
- Risky sexual behaviours.
- Change in sexual orientation.
- Death.

NO LAW NO CRIME

According to Martin Luther King, Jr. *“Law and Order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose they become that dangerously constructed dams that block the flow of social progress”*. The Law of every Country is to protect the lives and properties of her citizens, the situation in Nigeria is pitiful. The Judicial System which should be the hope of the common man is beyond the reach of the common man’s vision. The average Nigerian citizen on the street is not willing to take any legal action against anyone even when he is deprived of his right which is acknowledged in the constitution. The prevalent answers become *“Who has money to call lawyer? They can offer bribes to your lawyer, you lose everything, I leave all to God, let Him judge!”* Nigerian Lawyers in the past Three decades have made tremendous steps in bringing sanity to the judicial system, however the work though commendable is still below expectation. It is important to state that the National and State Houses of Assembly as well as Presidents, Governors and every Statesman are also responsible for the leaks witnessed in the Judicial System. The level of impunity and insecurity in the country makes it difficult for judicial processes to flow without hindrances.

In Recent times, criminals that are prosecuted are those who lack strong religious, social or political backgrounds. The Rich or Influential citizens are exempted from arrest and interrogation except they fall out of favour from the Leaders. ***“Where there is no law, crime thrives.”*** Criminals should be punished as provided by the law and not by political, social or religious affiliation.

On the case of Child Sexual Abuse it is to be noted that there is no concrete law in the Criminal Code which protects children from child sexual abuse. The Chapter 21 of the Criminal Code Act (Offences against Morality) is concerned with rape cases (Cases of actual intercourse), whereby making it difficult for Child Sexual Offenders to face the full weight of the law. The Nigerian Constitution Section 17 subsection 3f states that *“children, young persons and the age are protected against exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect”*, therefore the need for a substantial law stating as a crime the sexual abuse of children would help to prevent further spread of Child sexual abuse.

Article 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, *“state parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present convention.”*

With regards to economic, social and cultural rights, state parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation. Governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. When countries (including Nigeria) ratified the convention, they agreed to review their laws relating to children. Many States in Nigeria have reviewed their law in accordance with the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, implementation is far below expectation.

As it stands today, there is no law protecting the rights of the Nigerian child adequately (I stand to be corrected). (Akanbi Olayinka 2015) The Nigerian child, being the prey of sex predators is a burning issue of public discourse that needs to be treated with utmost exigency. With the growing rate of incest and sexual abuse making headlines almost every day it is about time Nigerians started questioning the existence of a bicameral legislature whose presence makes no difference whatsoever.

While other countries have set higher legal standards than those in this convention, Nigeria has no law of her own that protects the rights of the child and still finds it a herculean task to implement the provisions of this convention of which it is a party to. Even though governments are obliged to take all necessary steps to ensure that the minimum standards set by the convention in these are met, what we have had in Nigeria is our lawmakers sponsoring bills to legalize girl-child marriage due to the inconsistencies of the several laws operated in the country.

As stipulated in Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*". However, a child does not have to be battered before it is termed torture or inhuman treatment.

One should also think of the post-traumatic disorder the victim suffers after this ungodly act. Nothing is more inhuman or degrading than having carnal knowledge of a child either forcefully or seductively. It is the apogee of insanity. All this piece is asking for is coherence in every law utilized in the administration of justice. Let no law vindicate a criminal either by default or inconsistency; let not the lesser laws contradict the parent law (the 1999 Constitution) or other international conventions of which the country is a party to. With these measures taken,

all things being equal, the spate of sexual abuse against children can be exterminated from our society.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ON A RISE

With each passing day, Nigeria seems to be recording a very high rate of child sexual molestation. This is not only disturbing as children between the ages of fourteen months and twelve years are reportedly being abused in one way or the other; it also raises a lot of concerns as to our society in recent years is losing her grip on morality.

Sadly, Nigeria is experiencing a moral decline, with the society not putting up enough fight to nip this in the bud. Maybe one could say we are a bit worried, but the writing is obviously all over the wall if you cast your mind back to how parents failed to curb the incessant flooding of internet cafes and business centres by youths to watch online porn. Most secondary school pupils now have porn movies stored on their mobile or smartphones. Things are not getting any better in that front.

Perhaps, more worrying is the number of children being raped in the society these days. If they are not being raped in lecture rooms today, they are being molested by men old enough to be their grandpas somewhere in a quiet compound when everyone else has gone to work or school.

Child molestation is perpetrated by the rich and poor, teachers and coaches, religious leaders and laymen, educated and illiterate, and more especially by family members and neighbours. Sexual assault of minors and incest are rising globally, but we refuse to take solace in this. Citing several instances, Amnesty International petitioned the United Nations after its peacekeepers raped minors in the Central African Republic in August 2015. The case of a 12-year-old victim, whose brother and father were gunned down after the incident, is still very troubling. On hearing the report, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, described minors' sexual abuse as "a cancer in our system."

NIGERIA is evolving into a child sexual abuse basket case. It is ideal to review this Editorial Publication by the Punch Newspaper on the 19th of May 2016 Titled: ***Rising Pandemic of Child Sexual Abuse*** 'In March, Saviour Edith, 24, was arraigned at a magistrate's court in Lagos for allegedly defiling his neighbour's three-year-old daughter. The court heard that it was the girl's agonising cry that alerted her mother to the scene. Edith is among a growing army of

child rapists in the country. If the phenomenon is left uncontrolled, it will mature into a pandemic.

For victims of the act, life is permanently bruised by the stigma associated with it. The account of a primary five pupil in Bariga, Lagos, who was gang-raped by six men in January, underscores this. The girl says everybody in the community has been avoiding her since the incident occurred. In 2015, Sylvester Ehijele, 49, allegedly raped his seven-year-old daughter. Mrs. Ehijele said the last straw was when her husband, who had earlier defiled their 17-year-old daughter, violated their 18-month-old granddaughter.

The lifelong trauma aside, sexual molestation can trigger fatality. Last year, Funmilayo Adeyanju stabbed her three-year-old son to death. Her neighbours in Ota, Ogun State, linked her act to depression, caused by the incestuous relationship that produced the boy. Rafiu Idowu, 26, was arrested by the police in Ile-Ogbo, Osun State, last year for defiling his cousin, aged 10. He strangled the girl for raising the alarm during the act.

This ugly spectre covers the country. The medical director of Funtua General Hospital, Katsina State, Tijjani Bakori, said all the 13 rape victims treated in the past four months in the hospital were below 13 years of age. He said that some of the cases required surgery because they “were very severe.” In one of the cases, the victim, aged 13, was allegedly raped by her neighbour, Dahiru Lawal. Jummai Musa, the mother, said her daughter was sent to buy oil when she was lured and raped by Lawal. Also, Matthew Umeh, 35 was arrested recently for allegedly raping his wife’s 15-year-old sister, who had been living with them from the age of five. Police reports stated that Umeh had been violating the minor since she was five years old.

In another repulsive case, a man raped his 12-year-old daughter in Ogbia, Bayelsa State. When the girl was four months pregnant, he took her to a quack health practitioner to procure a crude abortion for her. Recently, an undergraduate recounted how she was abused by her uncle, who made her to suck his manhood and swallow the semen thereof for three years.

All the above listed cases were those reported cases, the number of unreported cases are outrageous. It is difficult for an average Nigerian parent to properly orient their children on sex education. It is also difficult for most parents to share such information about their children because they believe it will traumatize the child.

RISK FACTORS FOR SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse can happen to any child but there may be certain circumstances that can increase a child's vulnerability. Other forms of abuse, especially previous sexual abuse or a disrupted home life can lead to a child being more susceptible to being sexually abused. Some abusers target children who are neglected by their parents or children who don't have many friends as they are more likely to be receptive to the attentions of an adult (**Elliot et al, 1995**). A disrupted home life can make children particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Domestic violence can push children out of the home and make them susceptible to people who seem kind and show them affection (**Goodyear-Brown 2012**). **Dagon (2012) and Pemberton (2011)** both use three distinct models for abuser-victim relationships.

- **Inappropriate relationships** where an older abuser has a measure of power over their victim. This could be physical, emotional or financial and in many cases the victim will believe that they have a sincere or loving relationship with their abuser.
- **The boyfriend model.** Cases often involve the abuser and victim entering into an almost conventional relationship with the exchange of gifts and other dating activities. This model can lead the abuser to manipulate the victim into undertaking sexual acts with other people. This is a common model for abuse by peers.
- **Organised exploitation and trafficking.** Children are abused by more than one adult as part of a network that may involve the movement of victims into and across the country as well as the exchanging of images of abuse.

Children of parents who misuse substances may have homes where lots of adults are coming and going or they may be left alone for long periods of time while their parents are out. This can leave those children vulnerable especially when the adults in the house may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. (**Goodyear-Brown, 2012**)

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. **Sullivan and Knutson (2000)** found that disabled children were up to three times more likely to be abused than non-disabled children. This can be because there are fewer people to tell, fewer ways to tell someone or that some disabled children may find it difficult to make themselves understood.

Children can also be at risk when using the internet. Social media, chat rooms and web forums are places where children could be groomed, persuaded to meet an abuser in person or persuaded to send pictures of themselves or perform sexual acts in front of webcams. However,

it should be recognised that the internet has also brought huge benefits for children (**Leonard, 2010**).

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THE WAY FORWARD

The famous quote from Desiderius Erasmus says “*Prevention is better than cure*”. It is important for the government and most especially every citizen of Nigeria to fight and support the fight against child sexual abuse and exploitation. Currently, many of our systems on sexual abuse and exploitation are focused on short-term responses that are initiated after perpetration has occurred. While these services are invaluable, primary prevention requires a broader, more inclusive strategy that makes use of knowledge acquired from multiple disciplines and resources. The need to develop a plan to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation which involves individuals, communities, and policy-level strategies is inevitable.

While the wait for a national plan is on, it is important for individuals, organizations and government to stand and defend our children from future abuses.

The best way to eliminate deadly infections is by eradicating the source. The best way of preventing the spread of child sexual abuse in Nigeria is by using this 3 way method.

1. PUBLIC AWARENESS

The uninformed is deformed. The African Society has more cases of Human Right Violations in democratic countries because half of its citizens do not know their rights. Therefore the need to educate minors and adults on the damages of Child Sexual Abuse is inevitable. Public Awareness will assist in increasing public awareness of effective child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention technique and strategies.

How to Increase Public Awareness.

- Frame prevention and positive developmental messages in ways that increase understanding of effective prevention strategies, provide positive developmental approaches that may help avoid the problems, and motivate actions that will be more effective in leading to the social changes needed to support prevention.
- Disseminate well-developed and tested messages through mass and social media as well as through other creative technology, personal networks, and spheres of influence.
- Increase effective educational efforts, including those that promote social justice as well as healthy environments, relationships, and sexuality.

2. LAW FORCE

When there is no enforcement of a law, the law is assumed as to never have existed. People suffer human right abuses globally and never feel fulfilled when there is no legal assistance. There is need for a collaborative effort from Solicitors and Law Enforcement Agencies to assist in the fight against Child Sexual Abuse. This Collaborative effort will assist in pursuing legal actions against offenders with little or no cost.

How to effectively use the law force.

- Identify and eradicate specific policies and practices that promote all types of sexual harm to children.
- To arrest and sue possible offenders to serve as a deterrent to future offenders.
- Reduce the service operative cost of involving Legal Actions in cases of Child Sexual Abuse.

3. FUNDING/SUPPORT

No man succeeds without support. As Elections are won by number of votes casted so Fights against Helios crimes like Child Sexual Abuse and Other Human Right Abuses are won with the support of the majority or/and everyone.

The need to encourage the development and implementation of local, state, and national policies, practices, norms, and beliefs that advance the primary prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation and that strengthen comprehensive prevention measures. It is important to also promote creative multidisciplinary and grassroots collaborations to align resources that will foster successful prevention initiatives. However, proper networking of individuals, groups and organizations deepen wholly on the available funds. Therefore there is need to increase the funds invested into prevention and rehabilitation of victims of Child sexual abuses and exploitation.

How to effectively support and fund.

- Identify and improve specific policies and practices that, according to research or best practices, prevent all types of sexual harm to children.
- Promote prevention programs that are evidence based and adapted to the needs of various communities, organizations, agencies, and institutions.

- Disseminate information about productive policies and emulative practices.
- Advocate for research- and best practices based treatment services for individuals at risk to perpetrate sexual abuse.
- Promote local, state, and national coordination among organizations working to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation. Reach out to community leaders and potential partners, including industry, media, faith-based groups, and the arts.
- Build relationships with individuals and organizations in related areas such as interpersonal violence, health care and promotion, children's rights, and social justice and possibly increase the range and numbers of individuals and organizations involved in the movement to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Actively advocate for prevention funding, programs, policies, and practices.
- Inspire and engage a wide range of "Prevention Champions" who can serve as influential voices within communities. **(The National Coalition To Prevent Child Sexual Abuse And Exploitation, 2012)**
- Increase the number of local, state, and national leaders who can advance comprehensive, culturally relevant, and effective prevention efforts.
- Advocate for funding increases in both the private and public sectors to expand prevention and positive development research, prevention-focused policy development, collaboration, and awareness to-action efforts. These funds would be in addition to funding used to advocate for and treat victims and to assess, treat, and monitor those who have offended. **(The National Coalition To Prevent Child Sexual Abuse And Exploitation, 2012)**
- Include financial support for prevention in legislative measures that focus on sex crime punishment, prosecution and interdiction.
- Provision of a Counselling Facility, where children can receive counselling services at little or no cost

It is however important to provide a Child Rights Centre in every state in Nigeria where the Child Right Convention Act has been approved. The Provision of a Child Right Centre will provide the best picture globally of how the Nigerian Government and her various state Governments are handling the cases involving Abuse of Children. Finally, the provision of this centre will undeniably give children a voice in Nigeria and if replicated in Africa would give every African Child a sense of belonging.

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