

## **CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO CHILD ABUSE IN AWKA: ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

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### **Abstract**

*Child abuse is a pervasive issue that manifests in various forms such as physical punishment, child hawking, early marriage, and the exploitation of children as domestic workers. The harmful implications of these practices affect not only the individuals involved but also the broader social fabric, contributing to criminality, disorder, and weakened societal structures. With how delicate the delicate matter is, the role of Christianity in curbing child abuse cannot be understated especially as religious institutions hold significant moral and social influence in Awka. The study, however, provides an in-depth exploration of child abuse in Awka and the critical role the Christian community can play in addressing these challenges. The study identifies the major causes of this phenomenon, including poverty, marital instability, unemployment, and ignorance. The study obtained its data for the research from primary, secondary and tertiary sources. The primary data were obtained from oral interviews of well-informed men and women in Awka and beyond. The secondary data were from relevant textbooks and journal articles while the tertiary data were from internet materials. Historical method was adopted in doing a critical and rigorous analysis of the data generated. The study recommends that with adequate response from the Church in*

*areas of advocacy, partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies as well as the promotion of girl-child education, the menace of child abuse in Awka and its environs would be brought to the barest minimum. The active role of the church, as a moral and spiritual guide, is required as a significant force in combating child abuse and fostering a protective environment for children*

**Key words:** Christian Response, Child Abuse, Issues, Problems And Prospects

### **Introduction**

The arrival of a child in the average African home is always a great relief. It brings happiness to married couples and their entire relations. This happiness mostly manifests in terms of names given to the children. For instance, in Igboland, southeast Nigeria, we have such names like *Nwabugwu* (child is respect), *Nwakaego* (child is greater than money), *Nwamaka* (Child is precious), *Nwagbogu* (child settles conflicts). Among the Igbo you could hear names like *Chidinma* (God is good), *Chinecherem* (God thinks about me), *Mmesoma* (Goodness of God), *Chibueze* (God is King) and so many other related names. These names underscore the importance of having children in a family. Every child is seen as a potential leader of his society in the future and as such the child is accorded national and worldwide recognition.

According to Owolabi (2012), world history holds it that children have been subjected to various forms of unspeakable cruelties. Experts generally agree that various forms of child abuse and maltreatment are widespread in urban areas in general. In Awka, the rate of prevalence of child abuse is increasingly alarming. According to Owolabi (2012), child abuse covers a wide range of work activities such as: domestic services, bus conducting, car washing, drug peddling, herding of livestock, industrial work, street

hawking, child trafficking, street begging, agriculture and mines, food processing, construction, sex industry, textile industry and tourism. The abuses also include corporal punishments, kidnapping, child marriage, and child prostitution, among others.

In a report of child abuse cases, Ujumadu (2024) records that a renowned lawyer in Anambra state named Barr Adachukwu Chikelu Okafor who allegedly inserted hot knife into the private part of her 10-year-old house girl, has finally been arrested and detained. In the report, the girl suffered varying degrees of injury as a result of the lawyer's brutality on her. Ujumadu (2024) states that the lawyer surrendered herself to the police few days after a bounty of N2 million was placed on her by the state government, adding that the suspect has been arraigned before the Children, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Magistrate court in Awka. The lawyer had earlier boasted that she was untouchable because she is a lawyer. She later disappeared to avoid possible arrest, forcing government to place a 2 million bounty on her.

In addition, Okafor (2015) denotes that child abuse includes: the sale of children, child prostitution, the exploitation of the child for the purpose of labour, the sexual molestation of female children, the use of children in armed conflict, debt bondage, the sale of human organs, the exploitation of the girl-child for prostitution, and certain other practices which captures the purpose of human trafficking. The youths are given a hope of a better life only to be exposed to internet fraud and drug trafficking. Sometimes, children are sent to contribute to the family's finances. Most times, parents are often unaware of the realities that lie ahead.

The motivation of the researchers towards this study is to investigate the impacts of child abuse in Awka as well as proffer solutions to ameliorate this social problem. The problem of the study is that the family and society are places where children should

be loved and cared for, but sometimes this is not so. Children have encountered violence and abuse from those expected to show love, protect and care for them. This has detrimental effects on the development of children. This injustice against children has continued in Awka, Anambra state. This is probably because children are the most vulnerable to abuse. There is need to tackle this menace through pragmatic approach to restore the dignity of the children and for them to develop their full potentials in order to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the society it is this growing concern about child abuse that this research seeks to address. The church as a religious institution, the government and society at large also has a role to play his menace.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

This section clarifies the concept of child abuse as implied in this study. Child abuse as understood in this study is implied as violating the rights of the child. Such abuse can be in form of: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and child neglect.

Therefore, it could be probably said that some parents construe child abuse as a corrective measure for disobedient and stubborn children. This is why Umana and Willie (2020) say that child abuse is in the form of abuse meted out in order to gain total control over a person. Umana and Willie (2020) further states that the traditional Nigerian society, in a subtle manner, accepts the beating of Children as a form of discipline. Hence, in beating their children, parents believe they are instilling discipline in them. Others view it as a “just therapy” for a dissident child.

Exploring the theories of child abuse, it is well known that gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Adeyemo and Bamidele (2016)notes that although the

roles of boys and girls vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Boys' roles are generally more highly valued and rewarding than girls' roles and this may be the basis for domestic violence against girl children in Nigerian society.

### **Theoretical Framework: Social Learning Theory**

There are various theories used to explain domestic violence but this research will make use of the social learning theory. Sutherland (1939) introduced social learning theory based on the premise that individual behaviour is learnt through interactions and group learning. In this context, learning takes place according to the frequency, duration, intensity, and priority of social interactions with family, peers, and other social groups with whom individual associates. By applying this theory to the concept of child abuse, the family is viewed as the primary social group where individuals have frequent and intense interactions over a long period of time. Through interaction with members of family, individuals learn and develop certain attitudes and behaviours which may be classified as negative or positive behaviour. Thus, child abuse is a less personal choice and more as a result of differential socialization processes. In line with this, Bandura (1977) as a chief proponent of social learning theory also viewed human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental influences. According to Bandura (1977), social learning or "observational learning" involves how behaviours and attitudes can be modeled merely by observing the behaviours and attitudes of others.

### **Attitude that Encourages Child Abuse in Awka**

#### **Use of Physical Punishment**

Physical punishment is associated with the phrases such as corporal punishment, physical punishment and physical discipline. These

phrases are used interchangeably according to Freeman (2014) as they refer to “the correction or punishment of a child's behaviour through the deliberate or ill-considered infliction of body pain, however minor or intense” (p. 158) In Igbo society especially Awka, some parents still uphold that physical punishment is one of the means of disciplining a child. It is a popular opinion among some parents that it is necessary to smack a naughty child. It is true that these physical punishments are carried out by parents with the intention of correcting their children but the problem is that sometimes it ends up inflicting the child with a serious injury. Sometimes, the parents that were seen as not punishing their children physically are considered as weak parents, in fact, some believe that they are spoiling their children. The Igbo family and the Nigerian family discourages and prohibits acts likely to bring disrepute to the family. As a result of these, Offohia and Sadiku (1996) opines that severe physical punishment is meted out to the young offenders in the hope that this will serve as a deterrent” (p. 79). It is obvious that physical punishment aggravates and leads to child abuse Awka and African society in general.

### **Child Hawking**

Poverty is a notable factor that has contributed strongly to child hawking in some major junctions in Awka, for instance, Aroma, Unizik Junction, Quatar and School gate axis. As a result of the poor socio-economic status of some parents, they send their children into hawking in order to make both ends meet. Children are now the ones making money for their school fees and their welfare. When a child goes to hawk food items early in the morning before going to school or as soon as he comes back to school, it seriously affects his academics. These are the children that come to school weak and tired and in most cases they are always the ones dozing in the class. In such cases education becomes a ceremonial instead of being a right. A child's human dignity is affected when he is subjected to such treatment (Emezue, Kosch and Kangel, 2014). In Awka, it is

worrisome and alarming that some parents accept the idea of sending their children especially the girls to hawk. Although one can argue that the economic factor and many other factors like war, illiteracy, religion, poor family planning can induce parents into involving their children into this very act. However, this despicable phenomenon and experience has a horrendous effect on the developmental process of the child. Child hawking has many consequences for the child. It has a physical, psychological and social consequence for the child. Apart from the stress, fatigue, depression, anger that the child undergoes, it equally exposes the child to unwanted pregnancies, prostitution, smoking, robbery, truancy and poor academic performance.

## **The Social and Psychological Implications of Child Abuse**

### **Denial of Fundamental Human Rights**

Abuse against children are recognized as a violation of fundamental human rights enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended and also, contrary to Child Right Acts of 2003. UNICEF (2000) decried that children human rights are denied and their lives are stolen from them by the ever-present threat of violence. Bazza (2009) is of the opinion that:

*Rape incidence on young girls is on the increase. It denies the fundamental right of girls to private and family life guaranteed in section 37 of the 1999 Nigerian constitution. Inducement of young girls into prostitution is an act that violates the constitutional guarantee rights of personal liberty, right to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement as is contained in section 35, 40 and 41 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (p.6).*

According to UNICEF (2000), child abuse is one of the most pervasive of human rights violations, denying children equality,

security, dignity, self-worth, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. UNICEF (2009) opines that the child prostitution is one of the various forms of gender-based discrimination and violence that girls face that impede their full and equal participation in all aspects of political, civil, economic social and cultural life. Children may generally lack the power of adults, but they nevertheless are social, economic and political beings-even if they cannot directly participate in political processes. This further will impede their ability to develop their full potentials in the near future. Child abuse may furthermore discourage and deny active participation of the child in various societal activities that are development oriented.

### **Lack of Access to Education, Truancy and Poor Academic Performance**

Poverty and insecurity have dealt a big blow to girl child education in Nigeria. Most poor families give their children out to people from wealthy homes living in big cities so that they can send them to school since they cannot afford to train their children in school. But most times reverse is the case as some people willingly fail to send the children they are living with to school rather send them out to work or hawk various wares in motor parks, markets and so on. According to E. Nnemeka (personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2024) when she was living with her aunt, the aunt could not send her to school. Later her uncle came and took her under the pretense to train her till she finishes her secondary school. Unfortunately, this was only a fake promise as she remained at home, hawking goods in the market every day. K. Ugochukwu. (personal communication, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2024) reports that she had poor academic performance during her primary education, as a result of her uncle's wife not allowing her to study but rather sent her to hawk wares.

Nnabuchi (2013) states that working children are in many cases totally or partially deprived of primary and/or secondary schools



education. Totally because they are taken out of school permanently, and partially because they go to school but are absent some days to work or go to school every day but have little or no time to study at home due to their work hence, such children will experience poor academic performance. Alabi, Bahah and Alabi (2014) states that in rural areas, social and cultural patterns combined with relatively poor quality of schooling place girls, their education and development in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position. Girls bear the heaviest burden for household responsibilities, including care of sick parents and siblings, and are first ones to drop out of school.

### **Lack of Self Esteem and Inability to Socialize**

Children exposed to child labour which is a form of abuse against children leads to lack of self-esteem and inability to socialize. Nnabuchi (2013) observe that the working children have very little time to play and socialize with others as a consequence they may not develop to be productive and they will always feel inferior where others are. Also young girls who are physically abused or called all sorts of evil names or falsely accused of wrong doing at home or in public places, make them to feel less important among their peers. Children who have witnessed abused exhibit anger or show aggression which could lead them to be violent towards their peers. They may find it difficult and hard to develop close and positive friendships at school, church, market and other public places. They may try to run away from their peers or disassociate themselves from their peers due to the psychological trauma of child abuse. Invariably their peers could distant themselves from them simply because of their aggressive or violent behaviour. Hence, this could lead them to develop low self-esteem and inability to socialize with people around them.

E. Ahunnanya (personal communication, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2024) states that her uncle would not allow her to socialize with her peers, he

would instruct her to always stay at home and avoid making friends. If any of their neighbour's children come to visit her in the house, he will scold the child and warn the child not to visit her again. This really affected her even while she was selling goods at the market, hardly associated with other fellow hawkers. K. Chioma (personal communication, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2024) states that despite that she and her aunt's family were living in a public compound, she could not afford the time to socialize with other children due to strenuous home chores she carried out after returning from school. She will fetch water, wash school uniforms, sweep the house, and write her assignments as well assist her aunt's children in doing theirs. Before finishing all these duties, it is almost 6:30pm and the next would be to prepare supper. That was always her routine. J. Ihechukwu (personal communication, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2024) states that she had no time to socialize with her peers in the neighbourhood as she was always busy hawking even on Sundays.

## **Remedial Approaches towards Curbing Child Abuse**

### **Family**

The family is the foundation of the society. Family plays a vital role in the upbringing of a child. The family nurtures the child so that he or she will be balanced psychologically and in every aspect of their well-being. The child's relationship within the family in Awka is not limited only to his parents and sibling but extends to friends, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other members of the extended family. Unfortunately, some of these children come from poor families and as such experience child neglect or other type of child abuse. Regrettably, the poor families where the children are living cannot afford three square meals a day. Imagining what a child in Awka will be experiencing by living in a family that has constant shortage of food. Strengthening economic support for poor families will go a long way in reducing child abuse in these families. According to Hinds and Giardino (2017) "Policies that strengthen

household financial security by improving the socio-economic conditions of families tend to have largest impact on reducing child abuse by improving parent's ability to satisfy children's basic needs" (p. 136). Again, Mokomane (2014) states that:

*The strengthening of families is based on family economic success which focuses on helping individuals improve self-sufficiency through expanded opportunities to work, earn a living wage that provides for the basic needs of the family and build assets that grow the family over time, such as home ownership and retirement accounts; family support system which stress on building appropriate and adequate system of support for healthy family development that encompasses: health care, child care, education, and other essential components of strong families. (p. 173).*

When this is achieved, it will help the poor families especially the parents to cope more effectively with the child's pressure and actions and equally reducing the destructive elements in the family and society that contributes to child abuse.

### **Schools**

The importance of school in the lives of children cannot be over-emphasized. Apart from the fact that it is a formal education which prepares children for the future, it equally helps them to interact with their peers and teachers. Meadows (2010) remarks that

Children spend a large proportion of their working hours in school, and interact with many other social persons there to play a range of social roles. The school contains many microsystems within which children engage with others who are often of great emotional and practical significance for them. It is also perhaps the part of their childhood where there are strong macro system influences focusing most obviously and explicitly on children: the

culture demands that children should have formal education, requires them to learn specific things in school. (p. 206).

With regards to child abuse prevention, schools should provide policies, procedures, and supervision for employees so that opportunity for abusive is limited.

### **Society**

The problem of child abuse is a remarkable and an outstanding problem facing the Igbo society especially Awka. The impact of child abuse does not end only with the effects it has on the abused children. Rather, it negatively affects the society directly or indirectly in different ways. In Awka, every aspect of child abuse affects not only the abused child but equally the family, the people around and the society. The effect on the people includes the emotional stress, financial strain, work, social relationships, among others. To this effect, Igbo society especially Awka considers public awareness as an important tool in preventing child abuse. Public awareness is an important aspect of preventing child abuse and at the same time improving the quality of life of the child in the community. One good thing about public awareness is that it teaches the masses what to do and at how to avoid child abuses.

### **Christian Response to Child Abuse in Awka**

In Awka, the Christian response to child abuse is seen in the effort of the Church in protecting the vulnerable and upholding the dignity of every child. Churches and Christian organizations play a crucial role in raising awareness, providing support, and advocating for justice. All these are grounded in biblical teachings that emphasize the sanctity of life and the call to defend the oppressed, these communities actively engage in efforts to educate the public, support victims, and collaborate with legal authorities to address and prevent child abuse. Their response is a reflection of the

Christian call to embody God's love and care for all, especially the most defenseless. Some of them would be discussed as follows:

### **Church and Government Advocacy for Child Protection in Nigeria**

There is need to make adequate laws that will protect children especially young girls from molestation. This has led to Child Right Acts 2003. According to Nzarga (2016), Child Right Acts 2003 was passed into law by the National Assembly of Nigeria, it defines a child as one who is below the age of eighteen years. It categorically provides that such a child's best interests shall remain paramount in all considerations. A child shall be given such protection and care as is necessary for its well-being, retaining the right to survival and development also to name and registration at birth. There are numerous reasons that hinders the smooth adaptation of Child Rights Acts among the federating states of Nigeria which among includes political reason, protest by Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria, religious practices among others. Nzarga (2016) observed that the Child Rights Acts in its rights-responsibilities approach, is culturally sensitive, compatible, relevant and above all in the best interest of the Nigerian child and every child at that. It is hoped that the stakeholders instrumental to the governance of our Nation will take a bolder step in the implementation of this Acts in all the states of Nigeria.

For full implementation of Child Right Acts, the following should be done according to Nzarga (2016):

- 1. More advocacies for the passage of the Child Rights law should be done in the states that are yet to pass the law. Nigerian government should also pay emphasis on the need to accelerate implementation of the law not just at the national and state levels but at the Local Government level which forms the grassroots of our government system in Nigeria.*

2. *Unification of all our laws should be done so that what is applicable in one state is also applicable to the other.*
3. *Government should make funds available for the proper implementation of the Childs Rights Acts.*
4. *The Human Rights commission should work on strategies/modalities ensure enforcement of the Childs Right Acts in all states that are unwilling to domesticate it. If the above viewpoints are adhered to by the Nigerian government, it will help in adequate protection of girl children in the society.*

### **Christian Teaching on Love, Tolerance and Empathy for Children**

Jesus during his earthly ministry showed love to children. As Luke 18; 15-16 says now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. He further commanded believers to love one another John 15: 12-15. Love and care for one another is most basic teaching of the church, yet it could be observed that children experiencing domestic violence need love, protection and care the most. The church should call for awareness and aid in this issue. Children are the future of the society and yet we find ourselves in a society where children are abused, forced into child pornography, drug trafficking, prostitution, forced into early child marriage, trafficked and sold as slaves. Children are meant to be nurtured and loved. The church cannot allow the future of these young girls, the future of our country to wither and die away as a result of domestic violence meted out to them.

Hence, the Church should continue in teaching on love and care of children. Religious leaders should educate Christian wives or homes who employed the services of young girls popularly known as maids or house help to treat them well as if they are their own children. The Golden Rule ideology and philosophy should be inculcated into them. This will make them to avoid molesting their house helps rather show love to them. Also the church should stress the importance and value of young children in the Christian community. Love is expressed in action and in deeds 1John 3:18. The fact that children are God's heritage Psalm 127:1-3 are the main reason to love and care for them. It is worthy of note that God will require anyone who is in charge of children whether as biological children or house help to give account on how he/she treated them on the last day. This is another point that should motivate people to do good to them.

### **Church Partnership with Government on Child Abuse Orientation**

Seminars and workshops should be organized for the purpose of alerting people on the need to put an end to abuse on children and to educate people about the consequences and ways by which victims can be helped. Adeyemo and Bamidele (2016) is of the opinion that, for the states that have laws already, people should be educated as to the existence of these laws and where they can get help if they are victimized. Government should also ensure the parents from rural areas are enlightened on the need to educate and reduce the bias toward the child. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as well as government agencies should step up the efforts in educating the public on the importance of child education and the inherent dangers of early child marriage. UNICEF (2000) points that community elders and religious leaders have the responsibility to enlighten community members and congregants on the need for protection of children against abuse. Religious leaders should



reexamine doctrines and cultural practices that impede girl children's development and violation of their rights. Creating awareness by community elders and religious leaders about the impact of child abuse would be very much significant in preventing such violence against children.

The government should organise feasible and pragmatic programmes directed at increasing child rights, privileges, and opportunities should be aggressively pursue by individuals, organizations and government agencies. Such programmes may include free and compulsory education for children, organizing children's movement, child's forum, and gender sensitive activities that tend toward promoting the rights and privileges of children. Umana and Willie (2020) report that the violence against Persons Prohibition Act of 2015 has highlighted the human rights of those molested and has printed a lot of manuals which was given out free of charge to educate the people for better understanding of their inalienable rights with the aid of community chief and leaders as well as influential men to spearhead the fight against violence and protect children using the social media as well. This is commendable and other social welfare aims of government should follow suit.

Lastly, the attention of Nigerian government should be drawn to the importance of consulting with children and involving them meaningfully in efforts to prevent and address domestic violence meted out against them in the society. Doing this requires a safe and supportive environment that is accessible to children of various backgrounds and to adults who recognize children as social actors. This should include involvement of children in local, regional and national consultations. UNICEF (2009) points to the following examples:



*Children's participation in a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) advisory panel for the United Nations Secretary-General's study in 2008. Also, close to 300 children and adolescents actively participated in World Congress III, providing their own recommendations to end sexual abuse and exploitation of children (p.31).*

Feinstein and O'Kane (2009) report that in Bangladesh, the process of developing the National Plan of Action against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (2001–2002) was led by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, but it involved an inter-agency core group representing UNICEF and International Labour Organization (ILO), as well as several International Non-Governmental Organization (INGOs) (including Save the Children) and NGOs. The process involved civil society, including children, in research to determine and assess the situation and in preparing the plan and its implementation. Children were also meaningfully involved in developing the country's National Plan of Action for Children (2004-2009). Borrowing a leaf from the above examples, Nigerian government through her agencies could incorporate children in social welfare and child developments programmes, this could enable them to fashion out strategies to curb abuse against children. According to Bhandari (2009), these include; empowering parents to protect their children from sexual exploitation; providing sex education in school curricula for children starting at age 10; teacher training to ensure that sex education is effective; improved legislation and education to stop child marriage (which participants viewed as related to sex exploitation and abuse); and greater awareness by and discussion in the media on the issues. All these would contribute immensely in ameliorating abuse against children in Awka.

### **Promotion of Girl Child Education**

With the advancement in science and technology in our present world, formal education should be prioritized by the government of the day and an avenue should be made available for all children to acquire the basic fundamentals of formal education for a better tomorrow. Education is an effective means of nurturing the human conscience through proper moral upbringing and the need training that could help one develop the society. Education is an important tool in liberating and correcting the societal and institutional injustice and discrimination against girl-children. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and which will help them to be productive and play vital role in the family and society at large.

In enhancing child education, a wholesome approach must be taken, starting from the family attitude. Alabi, Bahah and Alabi (2014) states that in the case of South Africa having changed their curriculum to be responsive to the demands of their nation after the post-apartheid era, the Nigerian value and education system must change to suit the educational need of a child. The South African curriculum is child-centred, no more teacher-centred approach. This idea could be borrowed by other African countries especially Nigeria. Like in Kenya, where the government took some initiatives in promoting the children's education by enshrining this right in the Children's Acts, 2001; the same must be done in Nigeria. Alabi, Bahah and Alabi (2014) further state that the Kenyan Children Acts created a department for children to deal with their rights and welfare. Application of such laws as, imprisonment of any person found guilty of negligence in this case, knowingly and wilfully causing a child to become in need of care and protection has helped towards the promotion of the children's right to education.

The Nigerian government should promulgate such laws so as to improve access to education of the girl-child. Educational

programmes that equip girls with self-esteem and negotiation skills, and enhance participation of girls in leadership roles should become part of the school curriculum in Nigeria. All round child empowerment through education from the grass root level is another way out of child education in Nigeria. It is worthy of note that Kano State government under ex-governor Rabi'u Musa Kwakwaso made child education compulsory with its subsequent free education for children.

### **Conclusion**

Child abuse remains a significant social problem in Awka, with far-reaching effects on both the victims and the society at large. This study has established that child abuse in Awka is deeply rooted in socio-economic and cultural factors. The consequences of child abuse are devastating, leading to physical and psychological harm, perpetuating crime, and contributing to the breakdown of societal norms. Addressing this issue requires an approach involving families, schools, religious institutions, government agencies, and the wider community. The critical conclusion of this study is that preventing child abuse is not just the responsibility of one group or sector; it requires collaborative efforts. The church, as a moral and social institution, has a significant role to play in shaping attitudes and behaviors through advocacy, education, and partnership with relevant organizations. At the same time, effective policies and law enforcement by the government, coupled with community awareness and engagement, are essential to achieving a child-friendly environment in Awka.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a. Families should be supported through community-based programs that provide education, counseling, and financial assistance to alleviate poverty and reduce the stressors that

- contribute to child abuse. Parents and guardians should be sensitized on positive parenting techniques and the detrimental effects of physical and emotional abuse.
- b. Awareness campaigns should be intensified in schools, churches, and communities to educate people on the rights of children, the harmful effects of child abuse, and the importance of child protection. These campaigns should also focus on encouraging reporting of abuse cases to appropriate authorities.
  - c. The government should enforce existing laws against child abuse and introduce stricter penalties for offenders. It is also essential to provide adequate funding for child welfare services, rehabilitation centers, and support for abused children. Law enforcement agencies should be trained to handle cases of child abuse with sensitivity and urgency.
  - d. Religious organizations should continue to advocate for child protection and partner with NGOs and government agencies to support victims of abuse. Churches should organize seminars and workshops on child abuse prevention and promote family values that protect children.
  - e. Ensuring that girls receive a proper education is essential to breaking the cycle of child abuse. Schools should implement policies that safeguard the rights of all students and provide a safe environment for learning.
  - f. Community leaders should be actively involved in identifying and addressing cases of child abuse. They should encourage community members to speak up against abuse and support initiatives that promote the welfare and rights of children.

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