



Awareness And Perceived Effect Of Sexual Abuse Among Secondary School Adolescents In Rumuolumini, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Sexual abuse amongst children and adolescents has been identified as the major cause of low self-esteem and stigmatization; therefore, families, communities, societies and the nation at large are not left out of the resultant effect. The aim of this study is to assess the awareness and perceived effect of sexual abuse among students attending Rumuolumini Secondary School in Obio-Akpor Local Government. The study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional survey research design with a target population of 371 students within the age group of 10 – 18 years. The calculated sample size was 211, multi-stage sampling technique was used and the instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation was used for descriptive statistics while regression and ANOVA test were used for inferential statistics. The findings of the result showed there is a high level of awareness (2.96 ± 0.8) with much perceived effect on the students. Also, there was a significant positive relationship between age and the awareness of sexual abuse among students ($p < 0.05$). In conclusion, the consequences should be stressed during teaching to strengthen students' ability to withstand abuse. The recommendations made, school authorities should ensure that the perpetrators of this crime around the school premises should be publicly punished to serve as a deterrent to others and students should be bold to report such acts anytime it happens.

Keywords: Awareness, Perceived, Effect, Sexual Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Despite the damaging effect of child sexual abuse on the individual, family and the society, it is not certain if the various categories of people are knowledgeable about this menace and its effect on the abused children and adolescents. According to Townsend and Rheingold (2013), sexual abuse is a traumatic experience that involves any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other. It could also be forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act, which might be non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or internet. Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face with the most serious array of consequences, but only few people realize this.

The 2006 World Report on Violence against Children estimated that in 2002, approximately 150 million girls and 73 million boys were subject to contact Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) worldwide, including 1.2 million trafficked children and 1.8 million exploited through prostitution or pornography (Pinheiro, 2006; WHO, 2006; Andrew et al., 2004). The foregoing is true even as Townsend (2013) posited that about one in 10 children would be sexually abused before their 18th birthday; about one in seven girls and one in 25 boys would be sexually abused before they turn 18. In low and middle-income nations like Nigeria, children and adolescent sexual abuse is often underestimated, underemphasized and most times not reported. Its negative toll on the various parts of the child's development—which includes physical, emotional and social functioning—is devastating.

Sexual abuse amongst children and adolescents has been identified as the major cause of low self-esteem and stigmatization; therefore, families, communities, societies and the nation at large are not left out of the resultant effect (Manyike et al., 2015). Goodwin (2015) posited that a syndrome of nightmares, anxiety, depression, ego constriction, aggression and re-enactment of the abuse are found in children that are victims. Sexual abuse contributes immensely to poor school performance, substance abuse, delinquency, prostitution, sexual dysfunction, mental illness, suicide, and transmission of abusive behaviour to subsequent generations. Hiltrec (2015) opined that learning about sexual abuse prevention is necessary and thus the first step towards ensuring the safety of children. A history of child sexual abuse significantly increases the chance of dropping out of school. Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, delinquency, crime, and teenage pregnancy were all found to be the resultant effects of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012).

Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem faced by children and with the most serious array of consequences. About one in 10 children would be sexually abused before their 18th birthday (Daigneault, et al, 2017). There are claims that sexual abuse is on the rise in Nigeria. And these abuses also commonly happen in schools. Interestingly, these claims are supported with statistics. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in its report explained that one in four girls and one in 10 boys in Nigeria had experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. In addition, six out of 10 children in Nigeria experience emotional, physical or sexual abuse before the age of 18, with many experiencing physical violence.

Child sexual abuse appears to be more common in females than males. In the Nigerian School, it usually occurs in settings the child is familiar with, and most abusers are known to the children before the onset of the abuse. Circumstances associated with such abuse include poverty, ignorance, poor education, and unstable home environments. In the African setting, some of these factors are enhanced by the erosion of cultural values and the extended family safety nets, as a result of rapid urbanization and westernization. Adverse physical and psychological consequences of Child Sexual Abuse include physical trauma, acquisition of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, teenage pregnancy and its associated adverse sequelae, development of anti-social behavior, and inability to have a satisfying sexual relationship in the future. These consequences have negative impact not only on the child but also on the family and the society at large.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of literature that investigated these variables in the south western part of Nigeria. On this note that the researchers find it necessary to assess the awareness and perceived effect of sexual abuse among adolescents. The study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness on sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents?
2. What are the common forms of sexual abuse known to the secondary school adolescents?
3. What are the perceived effects of sexual abuse known by secondary school adolescents?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between age and the awareness of sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents.
2. There is no significant difference between the awareness of sexual abuse and the perceived effect of sexual abuse among secondary school adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive, cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The target population for this study consists of three hundred and seventy-one (371) female and male students within the age group of 10-18years in Community Secondary School, Rumuolumini. The sample size for the study was 203 which was selected using the stratified random sampling technique. A self-structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.65 was used for data collection. The data was analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation for descriptive statistics while regression and ANOVA test was used for inferential statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented below in Tables:

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristic of Respondents (n = 203)

S/No	Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentages (%)
1. Gender	Male	56	27.6
	Female	139	68.5
	Missing System	8	3.9
	Total	203	100
2. Age	10 – 12yrs	25	12.3
	13 – 15yrs	87	42.9
	16 – 18yrs	91	44.8
	Total	203	100
3. Class	JSS 1	8	3.9
	JSS 2	60	29.6
	JSS 3	94	46.3
	SSS 1	37	18.2
	Missing System	4	2.0
	Total	203	100
4 Type of perpetrator:	Neighbour	49	24.1
	Stranger	42	20.7
	Family member	39	19.2
	Peer	22	10.8
	Teacher	24	11.8
	School mate	27	13.3
	Total	203	100
5. Religion	Christianity	179	88.2
	Islam	24	11.8
	Total	203	100

Table 1 depicts the result of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The result shows that, of the 203 respondents, majority of those abused were female 139(68.5%), while the male was 56(27.6). Most of the respondents were between the ages of 16 – 18yrs 91(44.8%) followed by those of age 13 – 15yrs 87(42.9%). The greater number of the respondents 94(46.3%) were in JSS 3 while the least 8(3.9%) were in JSS 1. Most of the perpetrators of this act were neighbours 49(24.1%), then strangers 42(20.7%) and followed by family members 39(19.2%). Of all the respondents, most of them 179(88.2%) are Christians while only 24(11.8%) are of Islamic religion.

Table 2: Level of awareness on sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini Sec. Sch.

S/n	Item Questions	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
6.	I have heard about sexual abuse	137(67.5%)	50(24.6%)	13(6.4%)	3(1.5%)	3.53	.66
7.	From family members	27(13.3%)	107(52.7%)	51(25.1%)	18(8.9%)	2.70	.80
8	Heard about sexual abuse on radio & TV	55(27.1%)	94(46.3%)	23(11.3%)	31(15.3%)	2.85	.98
9	Friend/Classmate discussed it with me	43(21.2%)	65(32.0%)	71(35.0%)	24(11.8%)	2.62	.94
10	Class teacher taught me sexual abuse as topic	108(53.2%)	67(33.0%)	14(6.9%)	14(6.9%)	2.75	1.10
11	Have read about sexual abuse on newspaper	68(33.5%)	54(26.6%)	44(21.7%)	37(18.2%)	3.32	.88
Grand Mean						2.96	0.89

Criterion mean = 2.50. Decision: <2.50 is poor, ≥2.50 is good

The table above 2 represents the result of the level of awareness students in Rumuolumini Secondary School have on sexual abuse. Of the 203 respondents, 187 (92.1%) (SA & A) have heard of sexual abuse while 16(7.9%) (D & SD) have not heard of sexual abuse. The respondents 107(52.7%) attested that they heard it through their family members, 94(46.3%) heard of it on radio and television, 108(53.2%) of them said it was taught by the class teacher as a topic, majority of them read about it on newspaper. Many of the students 35.0% said that they not discussed the issue of sexual abuse with their classmate. The summary of the result shows that there is a high level of awareness of the students on the issue of child sexual abuse as the criterion mean is 2.96 ± 0.89 , indicating high level of awareness.

Table 3: Forms of sexual abuse related to Students in Rumuolumini Secondary School.

S/n	Item Questions	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
12	Can be sexually abused verbally	111(54.7%)	56(27.6%)	32(15.8%)	4(2.0%)	3.34	.81
13	Forced penetration with finger or object	71(35.0%)	76(37.4%)	50(24.6%)	6(3.0%)	3.04	.84
14	Attempted oral, vaginal penetration due to abuse	35(17.2%)	69(34.0%)	64(31.5%)	35(17.2%)	2.51	.97
15	Force victims to watch pornography	93(45.8%)	71(35.0%)	24(11.8%)	15(7.4%)	3.19	.91
16	Offenders forces one to see naked body	69(34.0%)	91(44.8%)	21(10.3%)	22(10.8%)	3.01	.93
Grand Mean						3.01	0.89

Criterion mean = 2.50. Decision: <2.50 is poor, ≥2.50 is good

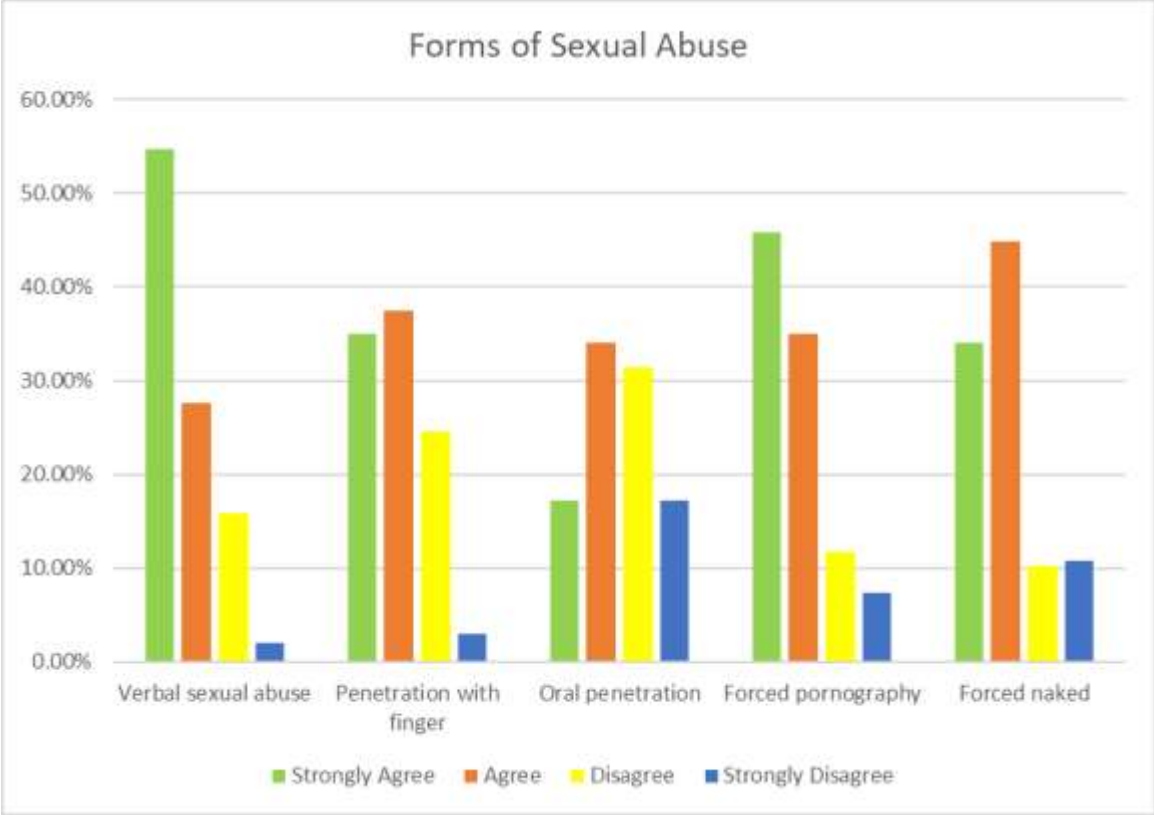


Fig. 1: Bar Chart showing Forms of Sexual Abuse

Table 3 discusses forms of sexual abuse related to students in Rumuolumini secondary school. Most of them, 111(54.7%) stated they can be sexually abused verbally, while 32(15.8%) of them disagreed. On forced penetration with finger or object, 71(35.0%) strongly agreed of that and 76(37.4%) agreed of it. Majority was on the positive side of strongly agree and agree 93(45.8%), and 71(35.0%), on the perpetrators forcing their victims to watch pornography. This shows that there are different forms of sexual abuse as indicated by the respondents.

Table 4: Perceived effects of sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini Sec. School

S/n	Item Question	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
17	Do not concentrate in class, so, want to stop school	41(20.2%)	80(39.4%)	67(33.0%)	15(7.4%)	2.72	.86
18	I find it hard to actively participate in class	51(25.1%)	103(50.7%)	25(12.3%)	24(11.8%)	2.89	.91
19	It has made me to have unwanted pregnancy	61(30.0%)	76(37.4%)	29(14.3%)	37(18.2%)	2.79	1.06
20	Has led to my poor performance academically	107(52.7%)	68(33.5%)	18(8.9%)	10(4.9%)	3.33	.83
21	Experience inner tension due to the abuse	165(81.3%)	20(9.9%)	15(7.4%)	3(1.5%)	3.70	.66
22	It has made me to always desire sex	48(23.6%)	73(36.0%)	79(38.9%)	3(1.5%)	2.81	.80
23	Feel depressed, guilt and shame due to the abuse	116(57.1%)	73(36.0%)	11(5.4%)	3(1.5%)	3.48	.67
24	Suicidal thinking occupies my mind because of it	36(17.7%)	60(29.6%)	93(45.8%)	14(6.9%)	2.53	.86
25	Sexual abuse has caused me to have infection	87(42.9%)	77(37.9%)	22(10.8%)	17(8.4%)	3.15	.92
Grand Mean						3.04	0.84

Criterion mean = 2.50. Decision: <2.50 is poor, ≥2.50 is good

Table 4 is showing the perceived effects of sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini secondary school, as the criterion mean is 3.04 ± 0.84 , it shows that the issue of sexual abuse has a high effect on the students. However, 80(39.4%) agreed that it makes them not concentrate in class, so, want to stop school, 67(33.0%) disagreed, that they do concentrate in the class. 76(37.4%) agreed that it leads to unwanted pregnancy, 37(18.2%) said it does not. Of the 203 respondents, 107(52.7%) expressed that it has led to their poor performance in the class academically. About 165(81.3%) opined that they experience inner tension due to the abuse. There is a close range of agreement and disagreement on the desire for sex afterwards. 73(36.0%) said that it makes them to always desire sex while 79(38.9%) said it does not make them desire for sex. On the issue of suicidal thinking, majority 93(45.8%) said that it does not make them think of committing suicide. Most of the respondents 116(57.1%) feel depressed, guilt and shame after the incidence and majority also said that it has led to infection.

Table 5: Regression table showing the relationship between age and awareness level of sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini Secondary School

Model	R	R-Square	F – value	P - value	Decision
1	.952	.907	1964.316	0.00	Ho Rejected

***Significant: $p < 0.05$**

Table 5 is showing the regression analysis of relationship between age and awareness. The result showed that there was a significant positive relationship (r – value = 0.952, $P < 0.05$). Thus the null hypothesis is

rejected. The result equally showed that age (independent variable) contributed 90.7% to the awareness (dependent variable) level of sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini Secondary School.

Table 6: ANOVA test showing significant difference between the awareness of sexual abuse and the perceived effect of sexual abuse

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Decision
Between groups	37.46	17	2.204	20.098	0.00	Ho Rejected
Within Groups	20.28	185	110			
Total	57.74	202				

***Significant: p<0.05**

Table 6 showing the ANOVA test of difference between awareness and perceived effect on sexual abuse among students in Rumolumeni Rivers State. The result showed that there is a significant difference between the two variables [f (17, 185) = 20,098; P = 0.00]. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between awareness and perceived effect of sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini Secondary School was rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the level of awareness students in Rumuolumini Secondary School have on sexual abuse shows that there is a high level of awareness of the students on the issue of child sexual abuse as the criterion mean is 2.96 ± 0.89 , indicating high level of awareness. This was in agreement. This study which stated that the students have high level of awareness 187 (92.1%) was at par with the study conducted by Rojina et. al (2020) on awareness of child sexual abuse among secondary school students in Kathmandu district. They opined that most of their respondents have heard of sexual abuse. It also agreed with this study that most of them heard it from a television station, as this study indicates that 140.9(65.5%) heard it from a television station. This study was equally similar to that of Bukola et. al (2021), on their study on knowledge and perceived effect of sexual abuse among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Mushin local government, Lagos. Their result reviews that 50.5% of the adolescents had good knowledge about sexual abuse, 33.9% had fair knowledge about sexual abuse while just 15.9% had poor knowledge. This study was at variance with that of Muse (2013) who stated that the respondents 41.3% (n= 130) had little awareness about child sexual abuse while 4.1% (n = 13) participants had very much awareness about child sexual abuse. On the forms of sexual abuse, most of them, 111(54.7%) stated they can be sexually abused verbally, while 32(15.8%) of them disagreed. On forced penetration with finger or object, 71(35.0%) strongly agreed of that and 76(37.4%) agreed of it. Majority was on the positive side of strongly agree and agree 93(45.8%), and 71(35.0%), on the perpetrators forcing their victims to watch pornography. This shows that there are different forms of sexual abuse as indicated by the respondents. This study was supported with that of Duru et. al (2018), on a study they carried out on Sexual Abuse among Female Undergraduates in Tertiary Institutions in IMO State, Southeast Nigeria: Prevalence, Pattern and Determinants. Duru et. al (2018) revealed that, the major forms of sexual abuse ever experienced were; Fondling/Grabbing of body parts/kissing, (56.5%), rape, (40.7%), sex for favour, (29.6%), degrading sexual comment, (28.6%), exposure to pornography/internet sex, (15.4%), incest, (13.2%), penetration with digits, (11.0%), and oral sex (9.9%). Also in agreement with the present study is that of Johnson et. al (2019), who revealed that the forms of sexual abuse reported included verbal abuse, inappropriate touching, kissing, intercourse due to enticement and rape.

Moreover, on the issue of perceived effects of sexual abuse among students in Rumuolumini sec. school, the criterion mean is 3.04 ± 0.84 , showing that the issue of sexual abuse has a high effect on the students.80(39.4%) agreed that it makes them not concentrate in class, so, want to stop school, 76(37.4%) agreed that it leads to unwanted pregnancy. Of the 203 respondents, 107(52.7%) expressed that it has led to their poor performance in the class academically. About 165(81.3%) opined that they experience inner tension due to the abuse. On the issue of suicidal thinking, majority 93(45,8%) said that it does not make them think of committing suicide. Most of the respondents 116(57.1%) feel depressed, guilt and shame after the incidence and majority also said that it has lead to infection. This study was comparable with that

of Jordan et al. (2014) who upholds that, 10.6% of participants with a history of sexual assault prior to starting college had a GPA below 2.5, while only 3.0% of participants who did not have a history of sexual assault reported GPAs below 2.5. Moreover, 14.9% of participants who experienced sexual assault in high school reported a GPA below 2.5 at the end of their second semester of college compared to 5.6% of those without a report of sexual assault. This study also agreed with Kaufman et al. (2019) who maintained that 34.6% of those who had been sexually assaulted at university experienced academic consequences such as dropping a class, inability to complete assignments, and drop in grades. Also in agreement was that of Bukola et. al (2021) who said that the effects of sexual abuse are depression (76.3%), guilt and shame (75.3%), unwanted pregnancy (70.5%), fear (64.2%), suicidal thinking (68.7%), but was at variance with this study on suicidal thinking as respondents 93(45,8%) said that it does not make them think of committing suicide.

CONCLUSION

This study proved that the students were well aware of sexual abuse. The awareness was made possible by the teachers who taught it as a topic in class and some heard of it through the family members and on television. They were equally able to identify the different forms and the consequences of the abuse. Therefore the consequences should be stressed during teaching to strengthen students ability to withstand abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation made here were based on the findings of the study and it includes:

To the School Authorities

- They should ensure that the perpetrators of this crime around the school premises should be publicly punished to serve as a deterrent to others.
- There should be school policies instructing that perpetrators should be expelled or sacked from work.

To the Parents

- They should be watchful on their children and teach them early enough, sexual abuse.
- They should be friendly to their children so that their children will be open enough to tell them their daily experiences with people so as to recognize early signs of abuse.

To the Students

- They should learn to say no to suspicious advances.
- They should be bold to report such acts anytime it happens

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