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Home Variables as Predictors of Child Sexual Abuse among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State, Nigeria [I]

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ABSTRACT
The study examined home variables as predictors of child sexual abuse among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Three objectives, three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The target population of the study comprised of 197,428 male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size of the study is 399 male and female students of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The researcher used Taro Yamane to determine the minimum sample size. The multi-stage sampling technique was applied to select male and female students from nine public senior secondary schools, that is three public senior secondary schools selected from each senatorial district in Rivers State. The instruments for data collection was two structured questionnaires titled: Home Variables as Predictors of Child Sexual Abuse Questionnaire "(HVPCSAQ)" and Sexual Abuse Experience Questionnaire "(SAEQ)". The reliability of the instrument was analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) which established a reliability indices for (HVPCSAQ), as follows; family conflict (0.86), family structure (0.74), and presence of a non-biological adult in the home (0.79) respectively. The overall reliability index for (HVPCSAQ) was 0.80; while (SAEQ) had a reliability index of 0.82 respectively. The instruments were analyzed using multiple regression for the research questions, and regression analysis related to Anova, to test the hypotheses at 0.05% level of significance. Findings of the study indicated that family conflict, family structure, and presence of a non-biological adult in the home significantly predicted child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made; Family conflicts in the home should be resolved without delay , through effective communication, calm and open dialogue. There is a need for communal public initiatives that target dysfunctional families. Sex education should be added to nursery, primary and secondary schools curriculum as well as enlighten parents on the risk awareness of non- biological adults living in the home.
Keywords: child sexual abuse, students, public senior secondary schools

INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child without his/her consent, and this includes all sexual conduct between an adult and a child; sexual conduct between two children if there is a significant difference in age, development or size; and sexual contact with a child, that is accomplished by force or threat of force regardless of perpetrator's age. (Chicago Children Advocacy Center, 2025). World Health Organization WHO (2017) defines 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 and cannot give consent; or that which violates the laws and social taboos of society. These dimensions of sexual abuse from WHO implies that it is an activity the child lacks the consequential understanding to agree upon. Moreover, he/she is at the whims and caprices of the predator; and the activity is a violation of the law, and he/she is unfit physically, medically, emotionally, psychologically and socially to engage in it. (WHO, 2017). While National Child Traumatic Stress Network NCTSN (2019) also defines child sexual abuse as any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer; child sexual abuse is also described as the involvement of children (below 18 years) in sexual activities that violates the laws or social taboos of society which may or may not include physical contact that the children cannot understand, are not developmentally prepared for and therefore cannot give consent.

Sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviours. Touching behaviours may involve touching the vagina, penis, breasts or buttocks, oral genital contact, or sexual intercourse. Non-touching behaviours can include voyeurism (trying to look at a child's naked body), exhibitionism, or exposing the child to pornography. Abusers often do not use physical force, but may use play, deception, threats or other forms of coercion to engage children and maintain their silence (WHO, 2017). Abusers frequently employ persuasive and manipulative tactics to keep the child engaged. These tactics referred to as 'grooming' may include buying gifts or arranging special activities which can further confuse the victim. It includes sexual behaviours like vaginal or anal penetration (with a penis, finger or other objects), oral sex, touching the breasts or genitals, exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposing children or engaging them in pornography (Christensen, 2017).

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2022) states child abuse as the intentional, unintentional or well intentional acts which endanger the physical health, emotional, moral and the educational welfare of children. Child abuse is a global problem with serious life-long consequences. The World Health Organization WHO (2026) stated that child abuse includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment. It could also be commercial or other type resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Although most people think first of physical abuse when they hear the term child abuse; physical abuse makes up only a small percentage of reported cases than child sexual abuse (Daley & Gutovitz, 2026).

Finkelhor (2019) states that child sexual abuse includes the entire spectrum of sexual crimes and offenses in which children up to age seventeen are victims. The definition includes offenders who are related to the child victims as well as those who are strangers. It comprises offenders who are adults as well as those who are children. It includes certain kinds of non-contact offenses, such as exhibitionism and using children in the production of pornography, as well as statutory sex crime offenses, in addition to the sexual fondling and penetrative acts that make up a majority of the cases (Finkelhor, 2019). Child sexual abuse is generally defined as direct genital contact and indirect communications such as exposure to internet-based activity, for instance, sending pornographic pictures to children. American Psychological Association APA (2024) stated that the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act stated that child abuse is any current act or inability to act by the parents or guardian, resulting in death, severe physical or emotional damage, sexual abuse, or failure to take action that results in imminent risk of serious damage. APA added that sexual abuse is the use of a child, persuading or forcing a child to engage in sexual acts or actions related to it.

Chiesa and Goldson (2017) stated that child sexual abuse CSA, is one of the most challenging forms of child maltreatment encountered by pediatric clinicians. It is a highly emotional topic in our society.

Although the legal and medical definitions appear to be relatively straightforward, it is very difficult to operationalize them in real life circumstances. High profile cases with sports figures as well as their spread through the internet, social media, and access to sexualized imagery have not only raised awareness of this phenomenon, but has also added to its complicity. As a matter of fact, child sexual abuse is a severe oppression and a torment on the victims, leaving behind anger and grief on its trail.

Choudhry (2018) stated that child sexual abuse comprises of varieties of activities such as asking a child to touch or be touched sexually, fondling, child prostitution, sexual intercourse, exposure to pornography and online child luring by cyber-predators. The foregoing definitions of child sexual abuse do not only point to a degrading and manipulative desecration of a child, but is also an injustice to the rights of the child.

Child sexual abuse has been a global social and health issue that is dangerous to adolescents in Nigeria and other developing nations. It goes unreported in places where control mechanisms are lax, corruption levels are high and where fear of reprisal makes it difficult for victims. Sexual abuse and violence are the second most lucrative crimes in the world, estimated to affect up to 5% of the child and youth population worldwide, with increasing numbers detected globally during the past decades. The recurrent cases of sexual abuse such as rape, trafficking, exploitation, harassment, child labour, among others continues to increase in spite of prohibition act against such negative behaviours (United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, 2015).

Akaninyene et al. (2024) stated that due to lack of supporting spouse in the upbringing of children, that single parenting may have challenges in playing parental roles on children and this will no doubt have negative impact on the children. Studies revealed that children from single-parent homes usually experience abuse, especially sexual abuse. The results showed among others, that leaving children to caregivers and neighbors, illiteracy, children going on errands alone, exposure to pornography, visiting people for assistance in times of need etc. contribute to child sexual abuse in single parents families.

The presence of a non-biological adult in the home is also a contributing variable to CSA. Literature posits that rape or sexual abuse is usually at home and because it is at home such sexual abuse exploitation goes on unhindered, unabated, for multiple times until their doom.

Maduebe and Osuji (2019) stated that the majority of the abusers of children are well known individuals who held trust and responsibility to these children such as close relatives, friends, neighbors and employers. Radford et al. (2015) reported that sexual abuse and exploitation involve situations where the child is sexually abused by a relative or caregiver at home; raped or sexually molested on the way to or at school by a non-biological adult, a gang or a peer group living in the community; groomed online by an older man and lured into sex acts, exhibitionism or producing indecent images. These evidences suggest that child sexual abuse is very offensive and disgusting by the accepted standards of morality and decency expected in the society.

Statement of the Problem

Child maltreatment is a broad term used to describe all forms of child abuse; be it physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and neglect perpetuated by adults or youths that results in actual or potential harm to a child 's health, survival, development or dignity. Child sexual abuse CSA, is a global public health problem that takes place in homes, schools and neighborhoods. Child sexual abuse affects children academically, emotionally, socially, psychologically and behaviourally. The consequential short term or long-term effects can impair children's ability for personal development and academic achievement. It has been observed that in Rivers State, the rate of sexual abuse among senior secondary school students is on the increase, particularly with unhindered access to internet and mobile phones. Although statistics on the number of children who have experienced sexual abuse in Rivers State is unavailable, but the prevalence of CSA is quite disturbing. Moreover, literature has shown that child abuse is a public health emergency that calls for all stakeholders, parents, teachers, school administrators, professional counsellors, policy makers, government and religious organizations to take decisive actions against this social menace. There are consequences of CSA academically, emotionally, socially and psychologically on the victim. Having identified the following variables namely: family conflict, family structure, and the presence of a non-biological adult in the home, which have been employed in this study. Knowledge of

these variables and how they affect children will enable parents, guardians, school administrators, religious organizations, government, policy makers, counsellors and the general public to plan intervention strategies that will curb the prevalence of child sexual abuse to its barest minimum.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine home variables as predictors of child sexual abuse among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of this study include, to:

1. determine if family conflict predicts child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.
2. evaluate if family structure predicts child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.
3. ascertain if the presence of a non-biological adult in the home predicts child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the relationship between family conflict and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between family structure and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05% level of significance:

HO1: Family conflict does not significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

HO2: Family structure does not significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

HO3: The presence of a non-biological adult in the home does not significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted correlational research design. This is a qualitative method of research in which the researcher has two variables from the same group of participants and tries to determine if a relationship between the two variables (Obipi, 2020) This design was considered appropriate for the study because it sought to evaluate the home variables as predictors of child sexual abuse among students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised of 197, 428 male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size of the study was 399 male and female students from nine public senior secondary schools, that is three public secondary schools selected from each senatorial district in Rivers State, these were: Ikwerre, Obio/Akpor and Port-Harcourt LGAs for Rivers East Senatorial District; Ahoada East, Ahoada West and Degema LGAs for Rivers West Senatorial District, finally, Oyibo, Tai and Gokana for Rivers South-East Senatorial District respectively. The instrument for data collection was two structured questionnaires titled: Home Variables as Predictors of Child Sexual Abuse Questionnaire "(HVPCSAQ)" and Sexual Abuse Experience Questionnaire "(SAEQ)". The questionnaire consists of Section A and Section B. Section A sought background information of male and female respondents who were within 14-17 years of age. While section B contains relevant information about the respondent's assessment on home variables as predictors of child sexual abuse among students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State. It consists of variables such as; family conflict and child sexual abuse, family structure and child sexual abuse and the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse.. The response pattern of "(HVPCSAQ)" consists of a 4-point scale of Very high extent (VHE) =4points, High extent (HE)=3points, Moderate extent (ME)=2points and Strongly low Extent (LE)=1points respectively. While the response pattern of "(SAEQ)" is ; Very often = 4points, Often = 3points, Rarely = 2 points, Never = 1point. Cronbach Alpha

method was used to ensure internal consistency. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics was employed in the analysis, which established reliability indices for (HVPCSAQ) as follows; family conflict (0.86), family structure (0.74) and the presence of non-biological adult in the home (0.79) Data collected was analyzed using multiple regression analysis for the research questions and multiple regression analysis related to Anova was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05% level of significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Questions One: *What is the relationship between family conflict and child sexual abuse among male and female senior secondary school students in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Relationship between Family Conflict and **Child Sexual Abuse among Male and Female Student**s of public **senior secondary school in Rivers State.**

Model Summary[b]										
				Std. Error	Change Statistics					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.731[a]	.535	.521	49.47118	.535	37.923	1	33	.000	1.647
a. Predictors: (Constant), CSA										
b. Dependent Variable: FC										

In Table 1 above shows the summary of multiple regression analysis of the relationship between family conflict and child sexual abuse among male and female students of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The multiple adjusted regression square change value of 0.521 showed that family conflict predicted child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The relationship was positive and significant at 0.05% level of significance. 52.1% of the respondents agree that family conflict predicted child sexual abuse among male and female students of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions Two: *What is the relationship between family structure and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Relationship between Family Structure **and Child Sexual Abuse among Male and Female Students of Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.**

Model Summary[b]										
				Std. Error	Change Statistics					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.647[a]	.618	.598	40.57858	.598	23.724	1	33	.000	1.613
a. Predictors: (Constant), CSA										
b. Dependent Variable: Family Structure										

In Table 2 above shows the summary of multiple regression analysis of the relationship between family structure and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The multiple Adjusted Regression Square Change value of 0.598 showed that family structure predicted child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The relationship was positive and significant at 0.05% level of significance. 59.8% of the respondents agree that there was a positive relationship between family structure and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions Three: *What is the relationship between the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Relationship between the Presence of a Non-Biological Adult in the Home and Child Sexual Abuse among Male and Female Students of Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Model Summary[b]										
					Change Statistics					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.776[a]	.735	.676	45.18490	.676	27.803	1	33	.000	1.585
a. Predictors: (Constant), Child Sexual Abuse										
b. Dependent Variable: The presence of a non-biological adult living in the house										

In Table 3 above shows the summary of multiple regression analysis of the relationship between the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse among male and female students of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The multiple Adjusted Regression Square Change value of 0.676 showed that the presence of a non-biological adult in the home predicted child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State . There relationship was positive and significant at 0.05% level of significance. 67.6% of the respondents agree that there was a positive relationship between the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance between Family Conflict and Child Sexual Abuse among Male and Female Students of Public Senior Secondary School in Rivers State

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Family Conflict

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	151092.235[a]	9	16788.026	18.667	.000	168.001	1.000
Intercept	5570.170	1	5570.170	6.194	.020	6.194	.667
Child Sexual Abuse	86480.553	1	86480.553	96.159	.000	96.159	1.000
Control	58280.361	8	7285.045	8.100	.000	64.803	1.000
Error	22483.765	25	899.351				
Total	2025076.000	35					
Corrected Total	173576.000	34					

a. R Squared = .870 (Adjusted R Squared = .824)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Hypothesis One:. Family conflict does not significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

The result of the analyzed data in table 4 above showed that the F calculated value is 96.159 while the F table at (8,34) is 3.27 at degree of freedom of 0.05. The Multiple regression value Adjusted R squared value is 0.824 is above 0.05. Since the F calculated value is greater than the F-table value and The Multiple regression value Adjusted R squared value is 0.824 is above 0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted which showed that Family conflict does significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Hypothesis Two: Family structure does not significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance between Family Structure and Child Sexual Abuse among Male and Female Students in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects								
Dependent Variable: Family Structure								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	73929.148[a]	9	8214.350	10.545	.000	.792	94.908	1.000
Intercept	3.037	1	3.037	.004	.951	.000	.004	.050
Child Sexual Abuse	32672.399	1	32672.399	41.944	.000	.627	41.944	1.000
Control	34864.669	8	4358.084	5.595	.000	.642	44.758	.995
Error	19473.824	25	778.953					
Total	1424668.000	35						
Corrected Total	93402.971	34						
a. R Squared = .792 (Adjusted R Squared = .716)								
b. Computed using alpha = .05								

The result of the analyzed data in table 5 above showed that the F calculated value is 41.944 while the F table at (8,34) is 3.27 at degree of freedom of 0.05% level of significance. The Multiple regression value Adjusted R squared value is 0.716 is above 0.05. Since the F calculated value is greater than the F-table value and The Multiple regression value Adjusted R squared value is 0.716 is above 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted which showed that Family structure does significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Hypothesis Three: The presence of a non-biological adult in the home does not significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 6: Analysis of Variance between the Presence of a Non-Biological Adult in the Home and child sexual abuse among Male and Female Students in Public Senior Secondary School in Rivers State.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects								
Dependent Variable: The Presence of a Non-Biological Adult Living in the House								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	107204.701[a]	8	13400.588	20.573	.000	.864	164.588	1.000
Intercept	188.151	1	188.151	.289	.596	.011	.289	.081
Child Sexual Abuse	47158.910	1	47158.910	72.401	.000	.736	72.401	1.000
Control	50440.097	7	7205.728	11.063	.000	.749	77.439	1.000
Error	16935.185	26	651.353					
Total	1551472.000	35						
Corrected Total	124139.886	34						
a. R Squared = .864 (Adjusted R Squared = .822)								
b. Computed using alpha = .05								

The result of the analyzed data in table 6 above showed that the F calculated value is 72. 401 while the F table at (8,34) is 3.27 at degree of freedom of 0.05% level of significance. The Multiple regression value Adjusted R squared value is 0.824 is above 0.05. Since the F calculated value is greater than the F-table value and The Multiple regression value Adjusted R squared value is 0.822 is above 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted which showed that the presence of a non-biological adult in the home does significantly predict child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Family Conflict and Child sexual abuse

Analysis of research question one shows the summary of multiple regression analysis of the relationship between family conflict and child sexual abuse among male and female students of public senior secondary school in Rivers State. The result showed that the relationship between family conflict and child sexual abuse was positive and significant among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Similarly, hypothesis one showed that family conflict significantly predicted child sexual abuse at 0.05% level of significance among among male and female students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers state. This finding is in line with Bukoye and Adeoye (2020) who found that family conflict is a predictor of child sexual abuse. It implies when parents, guardians and other significant family members were engaged in family conflict, it prevents them from paying attention to their children.

Family Structure and Child Sexual Abuse

Analysis of research question two shows the summary of multiple regression analysis of the relationship between family structure and child sexual abuse among male and female students of public senior secondary school in Rivers State. The result showed that the relationship between family conflict and child sexual abuse was positive and significant among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State. Similarly, hypothesis two showed that family conflict significantly predicted child sexual abuse at 0.05% level of significance among male and female students of public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

This finding is in line with Scot (2023) who found that family structure significantly impacts the risk of intra-familial child sexual abuse.

The Presence of a Non-Biological Adult in the Home and Child Sexual Abuse

Analysis of research question three showed the summary of multiple regression analysis of the relationship between the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse among male and female students of public senior secondary school in Rivers State. It showed that the relationship between the presence of a non-biological adult in the home and child sexual abuse was positive and significant among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State. In the same vein, its corresponding hypothesis three showed that the presence of a non-biological adult in the home significantly predicted child sexual abuse at 0.05% level of significance among male and female students of public senior secondary school in Rivers State.

This finding is in line with Greenberg et al. (2015) they found that biological fathers were significantly less sexually aroused by their children than stepfathers.

CONCLUSION

This study examined home variables as predictors of child sexual abuse among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The independent variable was home variable while the dependent variable is child sexual abuse among male and female students in public senior secondary school in Rivers State. The scope of the study is children who are 14 - 17 years of age. Two theories guided the study which are family systems theory by Murray Bowen 1990 and Attachment theory by Bowlby 1973. The study is anchored on attachment theory, this theory has contributed to establishing the fact that early emotional bond between parents and their children are important for their survival, emotional regulation and lifelong rational patterns. From the analysis, it revealed the following;

52.1% of the respondents predicted that family conflict can lead to child sexual abuse. From the result, it has been determined that family conflict significantly predicts child sexual abuse among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

59.8% of the respondents predicted that family structure can lead to child sexual abuse. From the result, it has been evaluated that family structure significantly predicts child sexual abuse among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

67.6% of respondents predicted that the presence of a non-biological adult living in the home can lead to child sexual abuse. From the result, it has been ascertained that the presence of non-biological adult in the home significantly predicts child sexual abuse among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Family conflicts in the home should be resolved without delay, through effective communication , calm and open dialogue.
2. There is a need for communal public initiatives that targets dysfunctional families.
3. To add sex education to nursery, primary and secondary school curriculum as well as enlighten parents on the risk awareness of non-biological adults in the home.

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