

## Child Abuse and Locus of Control among Senior Secondary School Students in Cross River State, Nigeria

Ajake, U.E. PhD.<sup>1</sup>

Essien M. I. PhD<sup>2</sup>

A.E. Omori<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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*Survey data collected from 2,000 Senior Secondary Two Students (SS II) in Cross River State, Nigeria were analysed to determine the influence of child abuse on the students' locus of control. Four dimensions of child abuse such as: Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect were considered in the study. Contingency chi-square ( $X^2$ ) was used to determine the influence of child abuse on students' locus of control at 0.05 Alpha levels. The result obtained showed a significant influence of child abuse on students' locus of control. In other words, more students with high level of abuse were externally controlled than expected. Based on the finding, recommendations were made.*

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**Keyword:** Locus of control, Child abuse, Cross River, Secondary schools

### 1. Introduction

Locus of control is an essential ingredient for individual's growth and personality development. Rotter (1986) introduced the concept of locus of control to represent the degree to which people accept personal responsibility for what happens to them. People classified as internally controlled feel responsible for their own successes or failures believing that ability and action largely determine the outcome of events affecting their lives. Persons classified as externally controlled believe that forces beyond their control-chance, luck and fate of God, determine their successes or failure. Thus, Loci of control can be defined as "internal control referring to the perception of positive and/or negative events as being a consequence of one's own actions and thereby under one's control, but "external control" refers to the perception of positive and or negative events being unrelated to one's own behaviour in certain situations and therefore beyond one's control. The belief in "internal control" of reinforcement is a believe in personal competence to run one's affairs. People from lower social class are naturally and realistically external in their orientation since luck, fate and other people do appear to play a high role in determining their quality of reinforcement.

Odebumi (1989) maintains that a belief in external control of reinforcement results in apathy, fatlings (fate), unwillingness to work hard for long term goals and feelings of incompetence.

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of Education. University of Calabar, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education. University of Calabar, Nigeria.

Locus of control means the powerlessness that some people feel in the face of threats, discomfort, frustration, anxiety and the like. When an individual feels considerably alienated and without the strength to control his destiny, he is said to manifest external locus of control.

Good parental care usually serves to guarantee the development of healthy personality. Hence it is important for parents or caregivers to give adequate attention, love and care to their offspring or wards (Isangedighi, Ajake and Bisong 2009). Hence the United Nations, in the Universal declaration of human rights (UNICEF, 2001 and 2003) proclaimed that “childhood is entitled to special care and assistance”. It also adds that, “the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality characteristics, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. The paradox of this is that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, some parents and care givers still see relationship with their children as the paradigm of the old concept of spare the rod and spoil the child. Today childhood still face a great danger. The child is still vulnerable to several attacks from within and outside the family. Thus, parents and caregivers are seen maltreating, neglecting, or even failing to provide the necessary love care and attention necessary for the child’s normal healthy personality development. Human history is littered with stories of adult brutality and wickedness to children. These attacks range from physical abuse, exploitation, deprivation (neglect), exposure to certain adverse conditions, sexual abuse and child trafficking (Isangedighi, Ajake and Bisong 2009).

For centuries, child abuse has been recorded in literature, art and science in all parts of the world. There are untold stories of variety of violence against children, child mutilation, child murder, child ritual, torture, infanticide and other forms of cruelty. Records abound showing how malnourished, weak and unkempt children were traded away by parents or family members for economic gains, or as a sheer means of getting rid of them. For example, Ebigbo (1990) reveals that the international labour organization declared that not less than 10 million African children under the age of 15 years are abused. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also confirm that about 16 million African children of about 13 years work. These children work for long hours, being underfed and underpaid. The International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999 estimated that about two hundred and fifty million children between the ages of 5 and 14 years are engaged in odd jobs. Sixty-one percent (61%) found in Asia, thirty -two percent (32%) in Africa and seven percent (7%) in Latin America. The official number of child labourers is about 5.5 millions in United States.

Reports also abound on heart breaking stories of children being highly abused even to a point of death by family members or caregivers. For example, Femi (2004) carried out a survey of prevalence of child abuse and neglect as perceived by parents and guardians in Okene, Kogi State, Nigeria. An average of 3 cases are reported per year, however, these cases are not the total number of cases taken to the court yearly. The average age of the victims was 7 years, while that of the assailants was 26 years. Child abuse has many side effect such as attributing lack of success or failure to others, distress and trauma. This study was therefore carried out to establish if child abuse influences student’s locus of control.

## **2. Literature Review**

Several authors have attempted the definition of child abuse in different ways. Kemp (1980) defined child abuse as a situation in which a child is suffering from serious physical injury inflicted upon him by a person in a way other than accidental. An example is a child suffering harm by reason of neglect, malnutrition, sexual abuse, growing without necessary and basic care or is growing up under condition which threatens his physical and emotional survival. Ebigbo (1990) defines child abuse as the intentional, unintentional or well intentional acts which endanger the physical, emotional, moral and the educational welfare of the child. These acts are those unacceptable normally to the community.

In some cases, however, such acts include behaviour that may be acceptable by the community but may endanger the well being of the child, although the child may or may not perceive those acts as abuse.

According to Crises Hot-line (CHL) (2004), every abused child is a human tragedy, but the number of children suffering from abuse points to an immense societal problem. Over 3.1million children are abused or neglected each year nationally. There are also over 90,000 incidents of child sexual abuse reported each year, 2,000 children die annually from child abuse and neglect nationwide.

It is important to note that every child whose home environment allows for the development of trust, love and self confidence is the one who will develop internal locus of control. Hence children who spend their earlier years of their lives in family situation where they are constantly battered or punished, criticized or left without being provided for may have external locus of control.

Researches of locus of control have been conducted primarily with adults and school children. Most of these researches have focused on the relationship between locus of control and school achievement. The relationship between child abuse and locus of control has been somewhat neglected.

Working on locus of control and manifest anxiety for a sample of emotionally disturbed subjects, Finch and Nelurs (1974) used the Nowieki-Strickland and Gozale –Bialar Scales to find out that there is a correlation between those who have internal locus of control and lower self-reported state and trait anxiety among the subjects. The relationship between locus of control and a sense of self have also been found for adult samples in their studies (Lombardo and Berzonsky, 1975). One conclusion of this study was that the individuals' belief that "they can affect their own environments and features" was an important determinant on task performance. Powell (1971) found that people with internal locus of control earned better grades in course performance. However, a child who is abused sexually, physically, emotionally or even neglected may have a reduced mental capacity as a result can develop an increased sense of of insufficiency and insecurity which can hinder performance. (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Walls 1978).

McDonald (1971) replicated the Davis and Phare's results using Rotter Scale with a large sample of four hundred and twenty seven (427) adult subjects, externality was again found to be associated with parental behaviour that encouraged a belief that reinforcement is externally controlled (over protection, deprivation of previledges, effective punishment).

The relationship between child abuse and adult psychopathology tended initially to be conceptualized in terms of a chronic form of post-traumatic stress disorder (Lindberg and Distad 1985, Bryer; Nelson, Miller & Krol 1987; Craine, Hension & Colliver 1988). This model focused on trauma-induced symptoms, most particularly dissociative disorder such as multiple personality. This explains why those subjects with external locus of control could not disclose possible information about themselves and also has less in terms of academic achievements.

### **3. Methodology**

**3.1 Subjects:** A total of two thousand students randomly selected from twenty secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria were used for the study. The subjects (1000 males and 1000 females) ranged in age from 15 to 17 years.

**3.2 Instrumentation:** An instrument captioned students Opinion Questionnaire (SOQ) was used for data collection. The research instrument had three sections: A –C.

Section 'A' elicited from the respondents their demographic information such as age, sex, school type and class.

Section 'B' was a 20 –item Likert-type scale that measured the prevalence of child abuse such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect. Section 'C' was a 10 –item Likert-type scale that measured the respondents' locus of control. A total of 2000 copies of questionnaire were administered, out of this number, 1,973 were properly filled and returned.

**3.3 Data Analysis and Results:** The data generated were analysed using contingency chi-square ( $X^2$ ). The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

**Hypothesis:** Child abuse does not significantly influence the locus of control of Senior Secondary School students.

**Table 1: Results of chi-square of Influence of child abuse on locus of control of Senior Secondary School Students.**

| Variables       | Groups   | Internal locus control | External locus Control | Total       | Cal X2  |
|-----------------|----------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------|
| Physical Abuse  | Low      | 430<br>(209)           | 91<br>(312)            | 521         | 580.99* |
|                 | Moderate | 256<br>(306)           | 508<br>(458)           | 764         |         |
|                 | High     | 104<br>(275)           | 584<br>(413)           | 688         |         |
| Sexual Abuse    | Total    | 790                    | 1183                   | 1973        | 313.37* |
|                 | Low      | 293<br>(203)           | 215<br>(305)           | 508         |         |
|                 | Moderate | 372<br>(274)           | 312<br>(410)           | 684         |         |
| Emotional Abuse | High     | 125<br>(313)           | 656<br>(468)           | 781<br>1973 | 710.95* |
|                 | Total    | 790                    | 1183                   | 1973        |         |
|                 | Low      | 525<br>(276)           | 142<br>(400)           | 667         |         |
| Child Neglect   | Moderate | 214<br>(263)           | 442<br>(393)           | 656         | 717.83* |
|                 | High     | 51<br>(260)            | 599<br>(390)           | 650         |         |
|                 | Total    | 790                    | 1183                   | 1973        |         |
| Child Neglect   | Low      | 528<br>(269)           | 114<br>(403)           | 642         | 539     |
|                 | Moderate | 190<br>(216)           | 349<br>(323)           | 539         |         |
|                 | High     | 72<br>(305)            | 690<br>(457)           | 762         |         |
| Total           | 790      | 1183                   | 1973                   | 717.83*     |         |

\* Significant at .05 level; Critical  $X^2 = 5.99$

The result presented in table 1 show chi-square value of 580.99, 313.37, 710.95, and 717.83 for physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and child neglect respectively. Each of these was higher than the critical  $X^2$  value of 5.99 at .05 level of significant with 2 degree of freedom. With these results, the null hypothesis was rejected in each of the four instances.

This implies that there is a significant influence of each of the four forms of child abuse on locus of control status of Senior Secondary School students that is,

- i. Physical abuse significantly influences locus of control (internal or external) status.
- ii. Sexual abuse significantly influence internal- external locus of control status;
- iii. Emotional abuse significantly influence internal-external locus of control status;
- iv. Child neglect significantly influences internal-external locus of control status of the students sampled.

In each of the four instances, the significant differences between observed and expected frequencies were in the low and high level groups. In other words, more students with high level of abuse were externally controlled than expected.

#### ***4. Discussion***

The study revealed that there is a significant influence of child abuse, physical abuse, sexual, emotional and child neglect on locus of control. This implies that, the higher the level of child abuse, the more externally controlled the individual becomes. Research on locus of control has been conducted primarily with adults and school children. Most of these studies have focused on the relationship between locus of control and school achievement. The relationship between locus of control and child abuse has some what been neglected.

Working on locus of control and manifest anxiety for a sample of emotionally disturbed subjects, Finch and Nehurs (1974) used the Nowieki-Strickland and Gozale-Bialar Scales to find out that there is a correlation between those who have internal locus of control and lower self reported state and trait anxiety among the subjects. The relationship between locus of control and a sense of self have also been found for adult samples in their studies (Lombardo and Berzonsky 1975). This was supported by Powell 1971; Ainsworth etal 1978; Lindberg and Distad 1985; Bryer etal 1987; Craine, etal 1988).

The study shows that the higher the level of abuse the more externally controlled an individual becomes. This is so because, child abuse may occur during a period of life where complex and hopefully ordered changes are occurring in the child's physical, psychological and social being. Hence, a state of flux leave the child vulnerable to sustaining damage that will retard or prevent developmental processes. That being the case, the impact of the abuse is likely to be modified by the developmental stage at which it occurs. (Isangedighi; Ajake & Bisong 2009). A child who already has a problematic family background to cope with or prior emotional abuse, will be more vulnerable to the additional blow of child sexual abuse.

#### ***5. Conclusion and Recommendation***

From the findings, one may conclude that child abuse of any form has a significant influence on the locus of control status of the individual. In view of this, there is need for the government to carry out an awareness campaign on the influence of child abuse on the locus of control status of individuals. Also, school guidance counselors should be encouraged to assist abused children so as to help them develop internal locus of control. Parents should also stop abusing their children so that they will not develop external locus of control.

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