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PARENTAL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AS DETERMINANTS OF CHILD NEGLECT IN LAGOS STATE.

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile cases and other social vices that characterized our society today are traceable to child abuse and neglect. The study examined the socioeconomic status of parents as determinants of child neglect in Lagos state. The research design is descriptive while a sample of 273 participants was selected using a multiple sampling technique. A self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect relevant data. Two research hypotheses were formulated while data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that child neglect is mostly correlated with parent's occupation with correlation coefficient (r = 0.485), followed by parental income (r = 0.323) while level of education has the least coefficient (r= 0.02) and also insignificantly positively correlated with child neglect, furthermore, there was a joint significant relationship of independent variables parent's (occupation, income and level of education) on dependent variable child neglect. Finally, regression model revealed the relative contributions of each of the parental socio-economic status (occupation, income and level of education) to the dependent variable (child neglect). Parental occupation is the most significant predictor of child neglect (β =0.432, t = 16.825, p < 0.05), followed by parental income (β =0.140, t = 5.439, p < 0.05) and parental level of education (β =0.051, t = 2.160, p < 0.05) respectively. Furthermore, all the predictors have a positive influence on child neglect. The study recommended that parents should be given some form of orientation about what constitute child abuse and neglect. Teachers should sensitize parents on the importance of proper childcare and education and the negative effects of child neglect on children's education and development while offenders of child abuse should be sanctioned.

Keywords. Parental Socioeconomic Status, Child Neglect

INTRODUCTION

Family is the first social environment of a child and one of the strongest socializing forces in life. The process of nurturing and nurturing of a child to control unacceptable behaviour, delay gratification, and to respect the rights of others begins in the family (Cecilia,

Adewole & Edache, 2023). The legal and moral responsibility of parents extends beyond biological ties to include the fundamental duty of care, ensuring a child's safety, education, and overall well-being. Child neglect is defined as the persistent failure to provide for a child's basic needs, such as food, shelter, health care, supervision, and education. It remains one of the most common forms of child maltreatment globally. Child abuse and neglect are significant global problems, for example, in the United States, 1 in every 8 children is a victim of maltreatment by the age of 18 (Wilderman et al., 2014).

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also defines a child as "any human being below the age of eighteen years" (Human Rights Law in Africa, 2012). According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC, 2025) 86,633 child rights violations was recorded across Nigeria between January 2024 and January 2025. Data obtained from the Oyo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Inclusion revealed that between 2018 and 2022, more than 1,200 reported cases of child abuse occurred in Ibadan metropolis alone, a figure believed to be a fraction of actual incidents due to underreporting and community silence driven by stigma and fear (Oyo State MoWASI, 2022). These figures underscore the urgency of addressing root causes of child neglect.

Local studies and national reports from organizations like United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) indicate a significant prevalence. For example, the National Human Rights Commission reported that the most prevalent types of neglect often involve inadequate physical healthcare 48%, insufficient supervision (44%), poor nutrition, inadequate clothing, lack of hygiene, and failure to provide education. However, beyond neglect, six out of every ten Nigerian children experience some form of violence, indicating a pervasive issue of general child maltreatment that often includes neglect cases such as child labour, sexual abuse, trafficking, abandonment, and denial of education. Child abandonment was the most common violation reported against parents, who were identified as the main perpetrators in many cases. The commission also reported that parents were among the top offenders, only behind armed bandits and state actors.

Child neglect is significantly influenced by various factors such as poverty, family size, parental occupation, income, and educational levels etc. In Nigeria, particularly in Lagos State, the rapid rate of urbanization, unemployment, and increasing cost of living have made it difficult for most families to adequately care for their children. There is evidence to suggest that such families expect less of their children, spend less time monitoring them and use fewer effective techniques to discipline them (Udom, Anyanime, Nnabuk & Umuna, 2022). Other causes of neglect include poverty, illiteracy, and certain cultural norms (such as a belief that children are "miniature adults" who can handle significant responsibilities. Studies have also shown that increasing rate of child abandonment can be attributed to the socio-economic situation of parents in the country and that families with limited resources may be unable to meet their children's basic needs, thus increasing the risk of neglect.

Parental socioeconomic status (SES) measured by income level, educational attainment, and occupational status has been widely acknowledged as a major determinant of child welfare outcomes. Parents with low socioeconomic status often struggle to provide adequate care and support, which may lead to neglect. In Lagos State, a city characterized by significant economic disparities, many families live below the poverty line, especially in informal settlements. These conditions can contribute to child neglect in the form of poor nutrition, inadequate supervision, and limited educational opportunities.

In Nigeria, child neglect is classified into several key types, all of which are prohibited under the Child Rights Act of 2003. These types of neglect involve a failure by a caregiver to provide basic necessities and care, which can result in harm to the child's health, development, or dignity. There are various categories of neglect such as: physical neglect, medical neglect, environmental neglect, emotional neglect, and educational neglect, which results in intellectual, physical, social, psychological and developmental problems for children. The Child Rights Act, 2003 specifically prohibits the neglect of children while addressing the right to dignity of the child, among several other provisions. This shows that neglecting children infringes on their right to dignity of the human person, which is also protected under the Nigerian Constitution. The primary types of child neglect identified in the Nigeria are:

- **Physical Neglect:** is one of the most widely recognized forms of neglect. Physical neglect is the failure of a caregiver to provide shelter, food, clothing, supervision and education. This involves the failure to provide a child with basic necessities such as adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Examples include abandonment, inadequate hygiene, and disregard for the child's physical safety in the home. Children who were physically neglected were usually left under the care of other people. They are often undernourished, and lacked appropriate clothing without healthcare.
- **Medical Neglect:** This is the inability or refusal to seek timely and appropriate medical or mental healthcare for a child's serious health problems, which any reasonable person would recognize as needing professional attention such as failing to present a child for timely immunization or inattention to persistent skin disorders.
- **Emotional Neglect:** This is an act or omission that results in impaired psychological, social, or emotional functioning or development. It includes a lack of adequate affection and nurturance, constant criticism, isolation, or exposure to family violence.
- **Educational Neglect:** This involves a caregiver's failure to provide a child with education or a means of education, such as allowing chronic truancy, failing to enroll the child in school, or inattention to their special educational needs.
- **Supervisory Neglect:** This includes leaving children without safe and adequate supervision, such as leaving them with someone unsafe or without a safe home to return to, which exposes them to various dangers, including physical and sexual abuse.
- **Environmental Neglect:** This relates to failing to provide a safe living environment, such as a home with significant hazards or unsanitary conditions.

Despite government efforts and legal frameworks of child protection such as the Child Rights Act (2003), cases of child neglect remain prevalent in Nigeria. Reports by UNICEF (2024) and the Lagos State Ministry of Youth and Social Development indicated that many children suffer neglect due to poverty, unemployment, and low educational attainment of parents. Though precise, nationally uniform statistics are difficult to ascertain due to underreporting and data collection challenges.

In Nigeria, few people are aware that child neglect is a form of abuse, which has life-long implications on children. For example, *the Punch Newspaper,* on the 26[4h] of July, 2016, reported that a nine-year-old boy, was discovered in chains by security operatives on the premises of a church in Ogun State. The boy had been in chains for nine months, it was found out. The strange part of the report was that the boy was put in chains by his biological father. My father and step-mother only fed boy twice a day. Some days, he was not given any food. In Northern Nigeria, the case is even deplorable as many of the street children are Almajiri - young children sent out from their homes to receive a traditional Koranic education, but whose teachers often make them beg or carry out menial jobs (Adekunte et al., 2024). Despite the

domestication of child protection laws in Oyo State, enforcement remains ineffective due to poor institutional capacity, limited awareness, and resistance from traditional and religious authorities (Adewole, Ogedengbe, Oluwagbemiga & Oyebade, 2022).

While numerous studies have examined general child abuse in Nigeria, fewer have specifically focused on how parental socioeconomic factors determine the likelihood of neglect. Furthermore, empirical research regarding child neglect indicated that neglect is more prevalent than abuse and can result in more serious physical and psychological injury to children (Adeoti, Adewole & Amarachi, 2020). In spite of these data, society seems to be more tolerant of neglect as evidenced by the focus of research, policy, and practice regarding maltreatment of children on abusive, not neglectful, families. The unique socioeconomic structure of Lagos comprising both affluent and poor populations make it necessary to explore how these variations influence parental care of the children. This study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating the relationship between parental socioeconomic status and child neglect in Lagos State, identifying the key socioeconomic factors that predict neglect, and suggesting policy interventions to mitigate the problem.

Research Hypotheses

i.   There is no significant relationship between independent variables (level of education, income and occupation) and child neglect
ii. There is no relate and joint significant relationship between the independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation) and dependent variable (child neglect)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Descriptive research provides an accurate and valid representation of the variables that are relevant to the hypotheses. This design describes the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, the researcher collects the necessary data needed for the study in order to draw inferences about the variables under study.

Population of the Study

The population for the study consists of adolescents in secondary schools in Lagos, State.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Two local government were purposively selected from twenty local government in Lagos state. (One in Lagos Island and one from Lagos Mainland). Five schools were randomly selected from each of the selected local government. Thereafter, respondents were randomly selected in the selected secondary schools. At the end two hundred and seventy-three respondents selected were used as participants for this study.

Research Instrument

A standardized questionnaire was adopted for this study; this questionnaire was divided into three sections:

Parent Level of Education

This section measured parent level of education. This variable was measured using 7 items self-constructed questionnaire to assess the level of education of the parent.

Income

This section measured income of the parent. This variable was measured using 7 items self-constructed questionnaire to assess the income level of the parent.

Occupation

This section measured occupation of parent. This variable was measured using 7 items self-constructed questionnaire to occupational level of the parent.

Child Neglect

This variable was measured using 15 items adapted from the Childhood Experience of Care and Abuse Questionnaire (CECA.Q) developed by Bifulco, Bernazzani, Moran & Jacobs (2005) to assess child neglect from significant adult such as parents and caregivers. The items were rated on a four-point scale from (4) 'strongly agree' to (1) 'strongly disagree'.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The validation of the instrument was ascertained through constructive criticisms and modification of the instrument while split-half reliability method was used to determine the reliability.

Data Analysis

Demographic data was analysed using frequency count. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Regression Analysis was used to test hypotheses. All hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Null hypothesis One (H₀1): There is no significant relationship between three related parent's (level of education, income and occupation) and child neglect

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation matrix between three related parent's **(level of education, income and occupation) and child neglect (N = 273)**

Variable	Child neglect	Level of education	Income	Occupation
Child neglect	1			
Level of education	.021	1		
Income	.323**	-.091**	1	
Occupation	.485**	.413**	.354**	1
Mean	52.33	39.76	49.99	38.42
Standard Deviation	9.45	6.26	4.90	3.16

*** Significant at .05,*

The correlation matrix result in table 1 shows correlation coefficients between the three related parental socio-economic status (level of education, income and occupation) and child neglect. The result in the table showed child neglect is mostly correlated with Parent's Occupation with correlation coefficient (r = 0.485). This showed that parental occupation is perceived as the dominant of parental socio-economic status variables and is significantly positively correlated with child neglect. Parental income (r = 0.323) is also significant and positively correlated with child neglect while level of education is with the least coefficient (r= 0.02) and also insignificantly positively correlated with child neglect. Hence child neglect is associated with occupation and income.

Null hypothesis Two (H₀2): There is no relative and joint significant relationship between the independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation) and dependent variable (child neglect)

Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis of the significant contribution of independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation) on dependent variable (child neglect)

.R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate			
0.867	0.935	0.934	1.680			
SUMMARY REGRESSION ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P	Remark

Regression	1025.866	3	341.955	23.681	0.000	Sig.
Residual	3884.409	269	14.440			
Total	2619.761	272				

Table 2 showed there was a joint significant relationship of independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation) on dependent variable (child neglect). That is child neglect correlated positively with the independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation). The table also shows a coefficient of multiple correlations (R) of 0.867 and a multiple R square of 0.935. This means that 93.5% (R^2=0.935) of the variance in the child neglect is accounted for by the independent variables, when taken together. The significance of joint relationship was tested at $p<0.05$ using the F- ratio at the degree of freedom (df =3/269). The table also showed that the analysis of variance for the regression yielded F-ratio of 23.681(significant at 0.05 level).

Table 3. Relative contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variables (Test of significance of the regression coefficients)

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig
	B	Standard Error	β	Rank		
(constant)	30.786	3.148			9.781	.000
Level of Education	.093	.043	.051	3rd	2.160	.031
Income	.326	.060	.140	2nd	5.439	.000
Occupation	.1.565	.093	.432	1st	16.825	.000

The regression model in table 3 revealed the relative contributions of each of the parental socio-economic status (level of education, income and occupation) to the dependent variable (child neglect). The table reveals that parental occupation is the most significant predictor of child neglect (β =0.432, t = 16.825, $p < 0.05$), followed by parental income (β =0.140, t = 5.439, $p < 0.05$) and parental level of education (β =0.051, t = 2.160, $p < 0.05$) respectively. Furthermore, all the predictors have a positive influence on child neglect.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one sought to know significant relationship between three related parent's (level of education, income and occupation) and child neglect. However, finding revealed that child neglect is mostly correlated with parent's occupation. In essence, parental occupation is perceived as the dominant of parental socio-economic status variables and is significantly positively correlated with child neglect. For example, parental occupation is linked to child neglect through factors like unemployment, long work hours, and low income. For example, Judd., et al (2023) found out that when parents unemployment has adverse consequences for families and can put children at risk of neglect. Unemployment, particularly among fathers, is significantly associated with an increased risk of neglect and other forms of child maltreatment.

Similarly, parental income is also significant and positively correlated with child neglect. For example, low-income families may be unable to provide basic needs, which can lead to neglect that is a direct result of inability rather than intent. In the same vein, families with low income are more likely to be reported for neglect due to their financial struggles, while others argue that poverty and neglect are spuriously correlated, with another factor driving both. Parental low-income status is often correlated with other risk factors, such as parental depression, which are known to increase the probability of both poverty and child neglect (Emma, 2020). Low-income families are at a disproportionately high risk of child maltreatment, and living in poverty is associated with poor parenting and child outcomes (Kim & Drake, 2018).

Families living in poverty and experiencing social disadvantage, namely low social class, and socioeconomic status, face a slew of stresses that can trigger the risk of child abuse and neglect (van IJzendoorn et al., 2020). The difficulties of poor parents, stem from the fact that they have to deal daily with scarce economic resources, inequality in access to educational, financial, and community resources, with insecurity, criminality, unhealthy housing, and job insecurity, among other factors that compromise the quality of the relationship with their children and the care they provide to them, as well as parental functioning (Chandler et al., 2022, Roskam et al., 2022). Although, level of education has the least contribution and also insignificantly positively correlated with child neglect, however, it also contributed to child neglect. Educated parents will ensure that their children also go to school because they know the importance of education.

Hypothesis two revealed the relative and joint significant relationship between the independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation) and dependent variable (child neglect). The regression model revealed the relative contributions of each of the parental socio-economic status with parental occupation the most significant predictor of child neglect followed by parental income and parental level of education respectively. Furthermore, all the predictors have a positive influence on child neglect. This finding is in line with the finding of Olusegun & Adegbite (2017) that economic reality in Nigeria is one of the reasons for child neglect particularly in cases where both parents are employed in paid job, for the purpose of increasing the income in the family. Sometimes parents leave home in the morning, only to come back at night when the children are sleeping. In some households, women are the main earners and have to juggle their work with the needs of their children with no quality time with the children (Adewole & Fatoye, 2020). Thus, the extent to which societies protect families from economic hardship is likely to have a direct effect on child rearing.

Conclusion

Child neglect and abuse represent critical threats to the physical, cognitive, and emotional development of children. The study concluded that child neglect is positively correlated with parental socio-economic status with occupation as the dominant variables, followed by parental income and parental level of education. There was also a joint significant relationship of independent variables parent's (level of education, income and occupation) on dependent variable (child neglect) while regression analysis revealed parental occupation is the most significant predictor of child neglect. To combat child neglect, efforts must include strengthening family support systems and addressing socio-economic disparities through comprehensive strategies, as supported by organizations like the United Nation Children Fund (UNICEF) and others.

Recommendations

i. Government should intensify efforts to improve the economy, provide social security, and redistribute national wealth can help alleviate poverty to assist parents with low socio-economic status.
ii. They should also ensure universal access to free and quality education, especially at the primary and secondary levels, this will ensure the cycle of poverty and neglect is minimized.
iii. There is the need to ensure that the child rights laws is effective and operational in all states of the federation while those who offenders should be sanctioned.
iv. Education institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) should sensitize parents on the importance of proper childcare and education and the negative effects of child neglect on children's development as some parents may not be aware that neglect is a form of child abuse.

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