

Community Parenting and the Concept of Child Abuse in Yoruba Culture

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Abstract: *The study investigated whether or not child abuse existed in the traditional Yoruba culture. The population consisted of all the secondary students and their parents in Ile-Ife metropolis. Purposive random techniques was employed in selecting 241 male and 259 female that made up of three sets of people (non-literate parents, literate parents and students) which comprises of 66 males and 84 females non-literate parents and 75 males and 75 females literate parents as well as 100 males and 100 females students that were selected from 10 secondary schools in Ile-Ife .using purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire titled "Parenting and Child Abuse Questionnaire" (PCAQ) was developed by the investigator to elicit information from both students and parents on the issue related to child abuse. The non-literate parents that could not read the questionnaire were made to respond as the investigator read in native language. The questionnaire was validated before use and the reliability coefficient yielded 0.85 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed statistically using percentages. Findings showed students do not see the type of training giving to them in the traditional setting as child abuse. Non-literate parents do not see fostering children as child abuse. Also the literate parents see child abuse as a fruit of western civilization. The paper concluded that child abuse should be examined within the context of culture. Practices with cultural undertones should not be condemned.*

1. Introduction

Culture according to Akinjogbin (2002) consists of all the items in the life of a group of a human beings which make them feel belong to one another and distinct from any other group around them. It comprises of their social system, economic system, their dresses and so on. It is therefore necessary to look at what parenting in traditional Yoruba cultural practice entails before justice could be done to the issue of child abuse in Yoruba culture.

Africans especially Yoruba are gregarious hence they dwell in a collection of apartments for individual families. This is known as "Agbo-ilé" (compounds). These families may be monogamous or polygynous. This is the smallest social unit, known as "Ebí" (relations). Akinjogbin (2002) asserts that the concept of "Ebí" does not stop at only a man and his wife or wives and children but extended to anybody with whom one could trace his affinity by blood to. Whether a family is monogamous or polygynous, the husband, wife or wives and children live under the same roof.

The peaceful co-existence within the "Ebí" sees the husband as the "Baálé", the first wife as the "Ìyáálé" while the second wife is the "Ìyàwó" The position of the second wife is not static; it will change as soon as her husband marries another wife. She then becomes "Ìyáálé" and the new wife is called "Ìyàwó". This arrangement follows the principle of first come first serve otherwise known as the principle or concept of "Àgbà" (elder). Within the extended family, the oldest wife is the overall "Ìyáálé" who had authority over all other wives and children in the families.

In African setting especially among the Yoruba, the "Ìyáálé" takes charge of all the children and ate with them from the same plate. It was generally believed that "A kíí fọmọ kẹmọ", "that is, people do not pamper their child at the expense of other children". Therefore, whatever power or authority wielded over any child by the "Ìyáálé" is never questioned or queried, not even the mother of the child. It is believed that all the children belong to her hence equal treatment is given to them all. Apart from blood relations, slaves are also acquired and live under the same roof with their masters. A person either male or female may be enslaved

due to debt, crime, capture in battle or in conquered towns, capture in raids, kidnapping for sale, being born by slave parents and self-condemnation.

With this background in our mind, parenting in African setting, Yoruba land in particular, is the concern of everybody in the family. If any of the wives resents criticism and kindly correction, people will ignore her and her children. This is disastrous because the training due to her children will not be given. In fact, Fadipe,(1970) confirms that such a woman asserts her independence at the price of foregoing the assistance, the cooperation and even the protection of the member of the "Ebí" except in critical situations.

2. Concept of Child Rearing in Yoruba Culture

According to McGehee (1984), discovering and becoming concerned with behaviours termed abusive of children is a function of how people understand the nature of children in the parent-child relationship, the goals and values of the society and the condition under which that society has to live. The African people especially the Yoruba, have their own views about existence, social arrangements, political values and judgements within the context of which their actions are taken. Therefore, the kind of education given to the children in Yoruba culture is an immediate induction into the social and a preparation for adulthood. This showed that African education emphasizes social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values (Fagunwa, 1974). Yoruba tradition stresses that parents are the first teacher of their children, instructing them in the proper way of relating to their elders and people of the same age group.

A young child is expected to obey the orders of his elders as soon as he/she is past the infant stage. There is the practice of handling of whip to the older and instructing him/her to use it on his/her junior whenever the latter first becomes offensive and insubordinate towards him/her to instil the lesson of respect and obedience into the heart of a rebellious junior (Fadipe, 1974). In the communal atmosphere of the traditional family, parents of children who behave in approved ways are equally approved as successful. In the same vein parents whose children misbehave are shamed and advised to put their houses in order (Babatunde, 1992).

Parents as the primary agents in the socialization of children make and enforce rules in the home and made clear to the children. Children are expected to behave in conformity with these rules. Hence children are punished appropriately if the rules are violated (Owolabi, 1999). The most usual form of punishment was flogging accompanied by a severe warning against recurrence. A recurrence of the offence was sometimes punished by flogging and rubbing of ground pepper into the weals left by the flogging. In some community according to Fadipe (1970), such a child had the back of his/her hand slashed with a knife after which pepper was rubbed into the wound.

Also, Adewale (1986) confirmed that parents in Yoruba tradition brought up their children ethically and in the knowledge of God. Children are therefore made to believe in reward and punishment potency of blessing and the efficacy of curses of spiritual beings. It then becomes the duty of adults in the society to take that child and create out of him/her a useful social being. The kind of person a child would be is determined by adults' interest and goals especially by parents and other adults in the family and the community.

It is a fact that the well-being of today's children is inseparable from the peace, progress and prosperity of tomorrow's world. It is therefore imperative that children be nurtured in an environmentally sustainable pattern to promote national and global peace and progress as well as the image of their family. Hence parents strive to train their children to become good ambassadors of their family wherever they find themselves. An age-long injunction says "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (proverbs 22:6). Parenting in African context is autocracy, not democracy especially during the formative years of a child (Owolabi, 1999).

3. Parenting and Yoruba Culture

Parents are the primary agents in the socialization of children. Hence the importance of guidance and counseling from parents to children cannot be overemphasized. As the child grows into adulthood, which involved the total attempt to adjust to new socio-psychological condition, absence of adequate guidance and counseling could be disastrous. Inappropriate counseling could lead to fatal destruction of a child's life that no one could be able to rectify again. In a general sense, one could say that since charity begins at home, home sets the pattern for the attitude of children towards people, things and instructions. The Yoruba have great overall principles of how to raise their children. These principles include the child having someone he/she sees as enforcer (onibèrù), emphasize on respect for elders, the belief that it takes a village to raise a child and the importance of education. In training the children, the Yoruba want their children to be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others (Awodele, 2006). The saying, 'spare the rod and spoil the child', is very much relative in Yoruba culture. Parents prefer to remain childless rather than have children who will bring shame and dishonor to the family. Hence, severe physical punishments e.g spanking is generally meted out to young offenders in the hope that it will serve as a deterrent to others. According to Babatunde (1992, 91), the flogging/spanking is seen as an act of kindness aimed at preventing the child from becoming a difficult person, or at protecting them from true danger. This attitude is expressed in the proverb, "*omo ò gbón à ní kó má kù ú, kí ní n pa omo bí kò se agò*". (When the child behaves foolishly, one prays that he may not die; what kills more quickly than foolishness?). Parenting in Yoruba culture also includes parents deliberately putting temptation in the way of the child to test honesty, perseverance and truthfulness to mention but a few. If any child falls into the trap, severe punishment is meted out to him/her. These type of training given to children they belief was functional and relevant to the needs of their society.

Parents especially the father pursues that desire with single-mindedness that his own father or grandfather married several wives who will produce many children to help him out at the farm. Hence, a farmer's sons from the age of six up to marriage assist their father in productive operations on the farm; girls on the other hand assist their mothers at whatever occupation they do (Fadipe, 1970). This is to stimulate them to industry. In fact a father allots a small part to a son while he is still young to work on during his spare time. It is after a son is married that his father allots him sufficient land for the needs of his own family.

For effective training, parents always apprenticed their children to the relatives, friends or competent craftsmen or mistress, if girls, to learn one form of trade or another since they are not free to choose trade on their own. The psychological reasons for sending children to be trained by other hands are: (i) to avoid sentiment in the training of the children (ii) to employ sterner measures to make the children more serious on their job (Fafunwa 1974). It was observed that those children who are trained by other people different from their parents did better and it was therefore regarded as the most successful form of education. In Yoruba culture, children remind parents of their lost opportunities. Hence, they see in their children the chance to re-live their lives by ensuring that their children better their achievement (Obiagwu, 1997).

Problem of unemployment did not arise in Yoruba land. This is because there was no question of existence without means of subsistence. Practically everyone was engaged in agriculture. Even craftsmen, who were first and foremost townsmen, had farms tended by slaves, peons and their sons as well. The Yoruba were not left out of the western civilization. They send their children to school and when they come back they run errand for their parents. It is not easy to dissociate completely from one's culture. Children were never regarded as parents' mere properties in Yoruba culture as Fawole (2003) pointed out, but they are cherished and given the best of training that could make them functional themselves and in the society at large. This study was therefore designed to examine the concept of child abuse within the context of Yoruba culture.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine whether or not there is child abuse in the traditional Yoruba culture.

5. Research Questions

1. Did students believe that child abuse exist in the type of training given to children in
2. the traditional Yoruba setting?
3. Did non-literate parents believe that sending out children for apprenticeship in traditional Yoruba setting connotes child abuse?
4. Did the literate parents believe that child abuse is a fruit of western civilization?

6. Methodology

The population consisted of all the secondary students and their parents in Ile-Ife metropolis. Purposive random techniques was employed in selecting 241 male and 259 female that made up of three sets of people (non-literate parents, literate parents and students) which comprises of 66 males and 84 females non-literate parents and 75 males and 75 females literate parents as well as 100 males and 100 females students that were selected from 10 secondary schools in Ile-Ife .using purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire titled "Parenting and Child Abuse Questionnaire" (PCAQ) was developed by the investigator to elicit information from both students and parents on the issue related to child abuse . The non-literate parents that could not read the questionnaire were made to respond as the investigator read in native language. The questionnaire was pre-tested for validity using a random sample of 20 non-literate people from Sekona market in Osun State. 15 students from Ife Oluwa Girls Grammar School. Osogbo and 20 literate people from Federal Polytechnic Ede. The test retest reliability co-efficient was 0.85 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. Data were collected, analyzed and findings reported in percentages as reflected in tables below:

Table 1. Educational Background of the Respondents

Items	Male		Female	
	No	%	No	%
Non-literate people	66	44	84	56
Literate people	75	50	75	50
Students	100	50	100	50

7. Results and Discussion

The following were the results of the data analyzed.

7.1 Research Questions 1

Did students believe that child abuse exist in the type of training given to children in the traditional Yoruba setting?

Table 2. Students view on Child Abuse in Yoruba Culture

S/N	ITEMS	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Do you hawk for your parents?	160	80	40	20
2.	Do you hawk in order to sustain the family?	60	30	140	70
3.	Do your parents provide for your needs?	180	90	20	10
4.	Do you leave school for hawking?	10	5	190	95
5.	Are you sent to hawk by your parents out of hatred?	-	-	200	100
6.	Is running errand for your parents' child abuse?	-	-	200	100
7.	Do you suffer any injury for running errand for your parents?	-	-	200	100
8.	Is learning a trade in pre-colonial period child abuse?	-	-	200	100

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondent 80% confirmed that they hawk for their parents while, 20% of them responded negatively. For item 2, a large number 70% of the respondents revealed that they hawk as a way of training them to be responsible. Only 30% said they hawk to sustain the family. It was revealed that parents provide the needs of about 90% of the respondents while the needs of only 10% were not met. Majority of the respondents (95%) confirmed that they did not leave school for hawking while only 5% responded otherwise. All the respondents (100%) revealed that, they were not sent out to hawk out of hatred; they did not see running errands for their parents as child abuse; they did not suffer any injury whether they run errands or not for their parents and that learning a full time trade in pre-colonial era was not a child abuse. From the above, it could be concluded that students did not believe that child abuse exists in Yoruba culture.

7.2 Research Questions 2

Did non-literate parents believe that sending out children for apprenticeship in traditional Yoruba setting connotes child abuse?

Table 3. Views of non-Literate Parents on Child Abuse

S/N	ITEMS	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Sending children to hawk in traditional Yoruba setting is not child abuse	140	93	10	7
2.	Parents do not send their children for apprenticeship out of cruelty?	120	80	130	20
3.	Parents leave their responsibilities for their children to bear in Yoruba culture			150	100
4.	Parents spank or cane their young children out of cruelty?	120	14	130	86
5.	Is sending children out for apprenticeship normal in Yoruba tradition?	145	97	5	3
6.	Parent inflict bodily injury on their children for not running errand	50	33	100	67
7.	Parents send their children for apprenticeship to boost the family's economy?	5	3	145	97
8.	The training given to children in Yoruba culture does not mount to child abuse.	130	86	20	14

Table 3 reveals that majority (93%) of the respondents confirmed that sending children to hawk is not child abuse in the traditional Yoruba setting. They also said that they did not inflict bodily injury on their children

and also that they did not send their children to learn a trade in order to boost family's economy. In fact all the respondents agreed that they did not leave their responsibilities to their children.

Based on this finding, it could be concluded that the non-literate parents do not see sending out children for apprenticeship with other people in the traditional Yoruba setting as child abuse.

7.3 Research Question 3

Did the literate parents believe that child abuse is the fruit of western civilization?

Table 4. views of literate parents on child abuse in yoruba culture

S/N	ITEMS	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Taking male children to work on their fathers' farm in Yoruba setting is child abuse?	20	14	130	86
2.	Is there any difference in the cultural settings of the Yoruba people and that of the western people?	150	100	-	-
3.	Unemployment that causes child abuse today exists in Yoruba culture?	50	33	100	67
4.	Does the traditional Yoruba culture allow the type of freedom children have today?	120	80	30	20
5.	Children in the Yoruba traditional set up are morally sound than children of today?	135	90	5	10
6.	Do we enjoy the type of peaceful society we have today in the traditional Yoruba culture?	125	83	25	17
7.	Do you think western civilization brings child abuse to Yoruba culture	130	86	20	14

As shown in table 4, majority of the respondents 86% affirmed that taking children to work on the fathers' farms in Yoruba setting was not child abuse. All the respondents agreed to differences in Yoruba and western cultures. 86% of the respondents confirmed that western civilization brought the wave of child abuse into Yoruba culture. 90% of the respondents affirmed that children in the traditional Yoruba setting were as morally sound as children of today.

Based on these findings, it was concluded that literate parents were of the opinion that western civilization brought child abuse to Yoruba culture.

8. Discussion

The results of the study showed that the students did not believe that child abuse existed in Yoruba culture, considering the type of training given to them. According to McGehee (1984) ways by which children may be raised are legion. In spite of the fact that children are not always raised or trained in the same way does not make them vagabonds. In fact, countless number of children grows up every day and become productive members of the society.

The findings of research question two shows that non-literate parents do not see the practice of sending out children to another person for apprenticeship as a form of child abuse. This finding corroborated the assertion of LeVine & LeVine (1981) that fostering children with other families facilitate training the child for family economic roles and also developing a sense of responsibility. This finding also debunked the submission of Fawole (2003) that children were sent to other members of the extended family to face hardship.

Research question three indicates that the literate parents believed that child abuse is one of the fruits of western civilization. To support this view, Fraser & Kilbride, (1980); Haditono, (1981); and Okeahialam (1984)

confirmed that child abuse pointed to the consequences of the disruption and decline of the family in the face of modernization, urbanization and industrialization.

9. Conclusion

The issue of child abuse borders on the method by which a child is to be socialized. The question of how children should be raised becomes imperative. According to Kobrin, (1981), three levels of considerations are suggested. They are (1) practices which are viewed by one culture as abusive and by another as acceptable; (2) detrimental environmental and economic conditions not related to cultural practices and (3) idiosyncratic abuse which falls outside all social definitions to understand child rearing as opposed to child abuse, there should be a distinction between seeing an act from participants point of view and the broader trans-societal point of view.

An adage says, one man's meat is another man's poison. Some practices that reflect cultural value may be harmful in another culture, for example a Nigerian father resident in the United States might be afraid to cane his child for the child can phone the police or relevant authorities to complain of being abused. But here in Yoruba land, the police will wave it off by saying that the father is teaching the boy a lesson so as to behave well in future. Child abuse should be examined within the context of cultures. Several works on child abuse like (Fawole, 2003; Kempe, Siherman, Steele, Droetje, & Silva (1962; Keep Kid Healthy, (1999) have contributed in no small measure in bringing to lime light many important facts regarding the African perception of child rearing. Moreover, the centre piece of these scholarly writings in many instances is totally out of harmony with the African reality of child rearing as it has been subjected to Eurocentric interpretations (Moloye, 1999). Punishing a child mildly in an honest way sets him/her on the right path. This is part of Yoruba culture which should not be misunderstood by people from other cultures.

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