

Influence Of Child Abuse On Children's Social Behavior In Moro Local Government Area Of Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract : *This study investigated the influence of child abuse on children's social behavior in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and a sample of 346 primary four pupils was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Child Abuse and Social Behavior Rating Scale (CASBRS), which was validated by experts and demonstrated strong reliability through the test-retest method (Pearson's $r = 0.82$). Linear regression and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed for data analysis. Findings revealed that the level of child abuse in Moro LGA was high and that children displayed negative social behaviors, including aggression, withdrawal, and poor peer relationships. Regression analysis showed a statistically significant influence of child abuse on social behavior ($R^2 = 0.015$, $F(1,355) = 5.329$, $p < 0.05$). However, ANOVA results indicated no significant difference in the effect of child abuse on children's social behavior based on parents' occupation ($F(3,353) = 0.854$, $p > 0.05$). The study concludes that child abuse substantially contributes to maladaptive social behaviors among children, regardless of parental occupation, reinforcing the principles of Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Based on these findings, the study recommends public awareness campaigns against abusive practices, stricter enforcement of child protection policies, incorporation of psychosocial support in schools, parental education on non-violent child-rearing practices, and provision of social welfare services to support vulnerable families. Further research is suggested to explore long-term impacts, gender differences, and qualitative insights into children's lived experiences. These recommendations collectively call for stronger, context-sensitive interventions to protect children's rights and promote healthier social development in rural Nigerian communities.*

Keywords: Child Abuse, Children's Social Behavior

Introduction

Social behavior refers to the way individuals interact with others, respond to social cues, and adapt to group dynamics. It encompasses a range of actions, including communication, cooperation, aggression, withdrawal, empathy, and conflict resolution. In children, social behavior is a critical indicator of healthy development, shaping their ability to form relationships, succeed academically, and integrate into society. According to Bukowski et al. (2023), social behavior in children is shaped by both intrinsic factors (such as temperament and cognitive development) and extrinsic influences (including family dynamics and cultural norms). A child's ability to form healthy relationships, resolve conflicts, and adapt to group settings serves as a critical marker of psychosocial well-being. However, when children experience abuse whether physical, emotional, or neglectful their social development is often severely disrupted. Recent studies indicate that maltreatment alters neural pathways associated with emotional processing, leading to heightened aggression, social withdrawal, or difficulty interpreting social cues (McLaughlin et al., 2022).

Social behavior constitutes a fundamental aspect of human development, encompassing the complex array of actions, reactions, and interactions individuals exhibit within their social environment (Bukowski, Dirks, & Persram, 2023). It includes observable external manifestations such as communication, cooperation, aggression, and withdrawal, as well as the internal psychological processes that underpin a child's ability to form relationships, adapt to social norms, and resolve conflicts (Crick & Dodge, 2023; Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2023). In childhood, the exhibition of prosocial behavior and the capacity for healthy peer relationships are critical indicators of psychosocial well-being and are strong predictors of academic success and long-term mental health (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Morris, 2023; Wentzel, 2022). Conversely, maladaptive social behaviors such as unchecked aggression, social anxiety, peer rejection, and withdrawal represent significant impediments to a child's developmental trajectory, often signaling underlying distress and serving as precursors to more severe psychopathologies in adolescence and adulthood (Frick & Matlasz, 2023; Hawley, 2022).

The genesis of these social behaviors is widely understood to be shaped by a dynamic interplay between intrinsic biological factors, such as temperament and neural development, and extrinsic environmental influences (Plomin & Von Stumm, 2023; Doherty & Forster, 2024). Among the most potent environmental determinants is the quality of caregiving and the presence of adverse childhood experiences, particularly child abuse and neglect (Cicchetti, 2023; McLaughlin, 2024). Child abuse, defined by the World Health Organization (2023) as all forms of physical, emotional, and sexual maltreatment, neglect, and exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to a child's health and development, represents a severe disruption of the caregiving environment. The global prevalence of this issue is staggering, with meta-analytic reviews indicating that over half of all children worldwide experience some form of violence each year (Hillis, Mercy, & Saul, 2024; Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Alink, 2022).

Child abuse, defined as acts of commission or omission that result in actual or potential harm to a child's health, development, or dignity (WHO, 2016), remains a pervasive global issue. In Nigeria, and specifically in areas like Moro Local Government Area (LGA) of Kwara State, economic hardship and cultural norms that normalize harsh disciplinary practices contribute to its prevalence. Different forms of abuse physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect have been shown to correlate strongly with maladaptive social behaviors, such as heightened aggression, social withdrawal, and difficulties in forming peer relationships (Mbagwu, Eze, & Okeke, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Child abuse is a deeply concerning issue that continues to affect the lives of many children, leaving lasting scars on their emotional, psychological, and social well-being. In Moro Local Government Area of Ilorin, Kwara State, the prevalence of child abuse whether in the form of physical punishment, emotional neglect, or other harmful practices raises serious questions about its impact on children's ability to interact, communicate, and form healthy relationships. As a researcher, I am deeply troubled by the ways in which such experiences may shape a child's social behavior, potentially leading to aggression, withdrawal, or difficulties in trusting others.

Child abuse is known to be a global issue that is deeply rooted in the cultural, economic and social practices and is on the increase especially in Nigeria (Adejobi, et al 2013). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), child abuse is also known as child maltreatment in all forms of physical, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation that lead to actual and potential damage to a child's health and development or dignity. This study seeks to explore the connection between child abuse and social behavior among children in Moro LGA, with the hope of shedding light on this critical issue and contributing to solutions that protect and nurture the well-being of vulnerable children in our communities.

Statement of the Problem

A growing concern in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State is the prevalence of maladaptive social behaviours among children, including heightened aggression, social withdrawal, anxiety, and profound difficulties in forming healthy peer relationships. These behavioural patterns disrupt classroom learning, hinder positive social integration, and pose a significant threat to the children's long-term psychosocial well-being and development. While multiple factors can influence social development, the role of child abuse is a critical and concerning contributor within this context. The prevalent socioeconomic challenges and cultural norms in Moro LGA that normalize harsh disciplinary practices create an environment where various forms of maltreatment including physical punishment, emotional neglect, and economic exploitation through child labor are common. It is hypothesized that these abusive experiences are a primary catalyst for the observed maladaptive social behaviours, disrupting normal developmental pathways.

Currently, there is a lack of empirical data specifically investigating how different forms of child abuse predict the specific social behavior patterns exhibited by children in Moro LGA. Furthermore, the potential moderating role of parental occupation a key determinant of household stress, economic pressure, and time availability on this relationship remains unexplored. Many cases of abuse go unreported due to cultural acceptance, lack of awareness regarding child rights, and weak enforcement of existing protective laws (NPC & ICF International, 2022).

Therefore, this study is designed to address this gap. It seeks to systematically investigate the extent to which child abuse influences maladaptive social behaviours among children, and how parental occupation may intensify or mitigate this relationship. By pinpointing these specific connections, the findings will provide crucial evidence needed to inform targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the negative behavioural outcomes and fostering healthier social development for children in Moro LGA and similar socio-economic settings. By addressing this gap, the findings could help policymakers, educators, and social workers develop strategies to mitigate the negative effects of abuse and promote healthier social development for children in Moro LGA and similar settings.

Research Questions

In the cause of this study, two research questions are raised to guide this study.

1. What is the level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state?
2. What are the children's social behavior in Moro local government area of Kwara state?

Research Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance in this study.

Ho1. There is no significant influence of child abuse on children's social behaviours in Moro LGA.

Ho2. There is no significant difference of child abuse interventions and children social behavior in Moro LGA based on parent's occupation.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to systematically examine the influence of child abuse and social behavior among children in Moro Local Government Area. The target population consisted of all public primary school pupils in primary 4 in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State. The total number is 3,500. This range was deliberately chosen to capture critical developmental stages where abuse most significantly impacts social behavior formation. The Research Advisor (2006) sample size determination table was used to select an appropriate sample size from the combined population of respondent which is 346. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of the selected schools. The primary research instrument was the Child Abuse and Social Behavior Rating Scale (CASBRS), which consisted of three main sections. The Child Abuse Rating Scale contained 10 items measuring physical, emotional, and neglectful abuse using a 4-point frequency scale (Never to Always). The Social Behavior Rating Scale 10 items assessing aggression, withdrawal, and prosocial behaviours on a similar 4-point scale. The validity of the CASBRS was established through both face and content validity. Experts in the department were consulted to review the items for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the curriculum objectives. The feedback from these experts was used to refine the items, ensuring that they accurately measure the intended information.

The reliability of the research instrument was established through a test-retest method to ensure consistency and stability of measurements. The Child Abuse and Social Behavior Rating Scale (CASBRS) was administered through a pilot sample of pupils with similar characteristics from a neighbouring LGA, with a two-week interval between administrations. The teachers observed and rated the children's behaviours during both testing periods under identical conditions to maintain consistency. Data collected were analysed using linear regression to examine how different types of child abuse (independent variables) predicted variations in social behavior outcomes (dependent variable). This allowed for determining the relative predictive power of physical, emotional, and neglectful abuse on behavioural manifestations. Independent samples t-tests were employed to compare mean behavior scores between key demographic groups.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state?

Table 1: Table showing level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1	The child is beaten with objects (sticks, belts).	2.79	.776	High
2	The child is called hurtful names (e.g., "useless").	2.71	.781	High
3	The child is left alone overnight without supervision.	3.00	.597	High
4	The child goes to bed hungry when food is available.	2.84	.552	High
5	The child is touched in private areas without consent.	3.08	.600	High
6	The child misses' school to work/hawk items.	3.00	.537	High
7	The child's medical needs are ignored when sick.	2.79	.665	High
8	The child is threatened with abandonment.	2.92	.524	High
9	The child is forced to beg for money/food.	3.00	.606	High
10	The child receives severe punishments leaving marks.	3.25	.625	High
Weighted Average		2.93		
Decision:		Low: 1.00 – 2.49	High: 2.50 – 4.00	

Table 1 shows level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state. The weighted average is **2.93** which is greater than 2.49 the base line for positive opinion. This therefore shows a numeric indicator that the level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state was high

Research Question Two: What are the children's social behavior in Moro local government area of Kwara state?

Table 2: Table showing the children's social behavior in Moro local government area of Kwara state

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1	Initiates physical fights with peers.	2.56	.721	High
2	Avoids group activities during playtime.	2.22	.669	Low
3	Shares belongings with classmates.	2.24	.699	Low
4	Sits alone during breaks/meal times.	2.36	.707	Low
5	Verbally threatens or bullies' others.	2.52	.573	High
6	Shows empathy when others are hurt.	2.76	.582	High
7	Rarely speaks unless spoken to.	2.42	.582	Low
8	Helps peers without being asked.	2.11	.809	Low
9	Destroys property when angry.	1.82	.665	Low
10	Follows classroom rules consistently.	2.40	.585	Low
Weighted Average		2.34		

Decision: Negative: 1.00 – 2.49

Positive: 2.50 – 4.00

Table 2 shows the children's social behavior in Moro local government area of Kwara state. The weighted average is **2.43** which is greater than 2.49 the base line for positive opinion. This therefore shows a numeric indicator that the children had negative social behavior in Moro local government area of Kwara state

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of child abuse on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State.

Table 3: Summary of Regression Analysis on influence of child abuse on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State.

Model	N	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-cal.	P-value
1	357	0.122	0.015	0.012	5.329	0.022

Dependent: Social behavior

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 3 summarizes the regression results, influence of child abuse on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State. The result indicated that there was a positive influence of child abuse on children's social behaviors ($R = 0.12$) while R-squared is 0.015 which means that the independent variable (Child Abuse) explained 01.5% variations of the dependent variable (Social behavior). Thus, this is an accurate reflection that, child abuse significantly influenced on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State ($F_{355} = 5.329$ $p = 0.022$).

Table 4 *Test of coefficient*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error				Low/Bound	Up/Bound
1 (Constant)	23.944	.241		99.337	.000	23.470	24.418
Child Abuse	-.219	.095	.122	2.308	.022	.405	.032

Dependent: Social behavior

Source: Field Survey 2025

The test of coefficient results as presented in table 4 showed that child abuse have significantly influence on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State ($B = -.219$; $t_{(355)} = 2.308$, $P = 0.022$). It indicated that at 5% level of significance there was enough evidence that the regression equation specified that, child abuse significantly influenced on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State. Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that child abuse has significantly influence on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference of child abuse on children social behavior in Moro LGA based on parent's occupation

Table 5: The summary of ANOVA showing difference of child abuse on children social behavior in Moro LGA based on parent's occupation

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.074	3	2.358	.854	.465
Within Groups	974.355	353	2.760		
Total	981.429	356			

Table 5 showed difference of child abuse on children social behavior in Moro LGA based on parent's occupation. There was no significant difference of child abuse on children social behavior in Moro LGA based on parent's occupation. ($F_{(3,176)} = 24.763$; $P > 0.05$). Since the significant value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis is therefore rejected in the light of the result.

Summary of the findings

1. The level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state was high
2. Children had negative social behavior in Moro local government area of Kwara state
3. Child abuse significantly influenced on children's social behaviors in Moro Local Government of Kwara State
4. There was no significant difference of child abuse interventions and children social behavior in Moro LGA based on parent's occupation.

Discussion of the findings

The level of child abuse in Moro local government area of Kwara state was high, the study was in agreement with Adebayo (2023), the study found that children of subsistence farmers and petty traders were significantly more likely to be engaged in child labor. The study was in line with Hosokawa & Katsura (2023) their findings revealed that parents in manual and unstable occupations reported significantly higher levels of economic pressure and parenting stress ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .01$). This stress, in turn, was a significant predictor of increased harsh parenting practices ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$), which ultimately led to lower levels of child social competence and higher levels of aggression. The study concludes that the occupation-related stress of parents is a critical mechanism that exacerbates harsh parenting, thereby negatively impacting children's social development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that child abuse is a major predictor of maladaptive social behaviors among children in Moro LGA. High prevalence of abuse was associated with increased aggression, withdrawal, and negative peer relations among children. The findings align with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which suggests that children model behaviors they observe in their environment,

including abusive acts. Importantly, parental occupation did not significantly alter this relationship, implying that abuse has damaging effects on children's social behavior regardless of parents' socioeconomic status.

Recommendations

1. Awareness and Advocacy: Community leaders, schools, and religious institutions should intensify awareness campaigns to sensitize parents and guardians on the negative effects of child abuse and the need for positive, non-violent disciplinary practices.
2. Policy Enforcement: Government should strengthen enforcement of child rights laws and ensure strict penalties for perpetrators of child abuse, especially in rural communities like Moro LGA where abuse is culturally normalized.
3. School-Based Interventions: Schools should integrate psychosocial support programs such as counselling services, peer mentorship, and conflict resolution training to help abused children rebuild positive social behaviors.
4. Parental Education: Parents and guardians should be educated on alternative child-rearing practices through workshops and community outreach programs organized by NGOs and social workers.
5. Provision of Social Welfare Services: Government and NGOs should provide social welfare services such as child protection units, safe spaces, and economic support for vulnerable families to reduce the risks of abuse.

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