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TOPIC: AN ESSAY ON CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is known to be one of the major problems which drive an attention of many nations. Many organizations had been founded because of this issue. In modern society, it takes different forms and includes psychological and physical abusing treatment of children. According to the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), (42 U.S.C.A. §5106g) the child abuse is defined as:

“Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

Child abuse in Nigeria negatively affects the future of children and destroys the image of the country. Children suffer from various forms of abuse such as child marriages, molestation, child labor, kidnapping, and neglect, among other forms. Many laws and policies were put into place with the purpose of protecting children from abuse. However, they have not been effective for many reasons including poor enforcement mechanisms, poverty, corruption, lack of rehabilitation of sexual offenders, negative attitude of parents, and inefficient judicial processes. Section 277 of the Child Rights Act of 2003 defines “a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years.”² From conception, children bring joy and delight to their family and those around them. When they grow up, they serve an essential role within their community as they become the future leaders of the nation. However, despite the joy associated with the birth of children many remain victims of abuse, violence, and exploitation. They are easy victims of violence because they are weaker in size, stature, and mental capabilities. In this essay paper on child abuse effects and causes, I will examine types of child abuse and examples and consequences of child abuse.

Child abuse cases can be subdivided into four forms: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. According to the latest researches, the most common abuse type is neglect. Neglect means that caregivers or parents fail to provide sufficient attention and care to their children. Usually ignoring is noticed when a child is dressed in dirty or old clothes, lacks of hygiene, frequently absent at school, ill with no medical assistance and isolated from others. Neglect is usually reported by the people who are close to the child: teachers, doctors, nurses or neighbors. There are three forms of negligence: physical, emotional and educational.

Physical neglect is the most widely noticed among children. Physical neglect is represented by careless actions of parents, including not providing adequate food, clothes, the place to live, medical care or treatment. Emotional neglect lies in inattention to child's emotional needs, like support, communication, love, refusal to provide a psychological or medical assistance when a child with mental problems needs it, expect from the child more than he can in his age or development level. Educational neglect connected with parents' refusal to provide essentially for the child learning: frequent absence at school or failure to enroll a child in school.

Physical abuse is the second type of abuse. It is connected with a noticeable physical effect on the child. Usually, it is related to children punishment when they are doing something wrong, but there are a lot of registered cases of physical abuse without any apparent reason. Physical abuse is often reported by doctors and teachers, on rare occasions by neighbors who notice different signs of severe physical injuries on the child body.

Emotional abuse is the third type of child abuse, and it is very hard to identify this sort of ill-treatment. It occurs when parents are ignoring their child, isolating it from others, assaulting child, rejected his/her value or request, expect from child more than she/he can provide. As a result of emotional abuse, a child can have speech problems, physical development lags, disruptive or hyperactive behavior.

Sexual abuse is the fourth type of child abuse, and the least frequency reported type. It is connected with forcing the child to different sexual activities, including different kind of sexual contacts and manipulations with genitals, either adults' or child.' A child who is experiencing this type of abuse will show different physical disorders and signs, not normal for his or her age. Sexual abuse consists of abuse that can either be child marriage, molestation, or female genital mutilation. Child marriage is the practice in which children are married to adults.⁹ A variety of rights are violated by child marriage including the right to equality on grounds of sex and age, the right to marry and start a family, the right to life, the right to the highest attainable standard of health. and the right to education.¹⁰ Child marriage is more common in rural communities because such communities tend to have traditional attitudes deeply entrenched in customs, which are not easily altered by external influences.¹¹ Nigeria is no exception to the prevalence of child marriage in rural communities, especially in the country's Northern states.¹² Female children are given away in marriage at a young age to increase the wealth of family members through the payment of bride prices. Another factor is the high value placed on a girl's virginity.¹³ Child marriage exposes children to adverse health effects and deprives them of the childhood-time that is necessary for them to develop physically, emotionally, and psychologically.¹⁴ The Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003, provides that a marriage entered into with a girl younger than eighteen-years-old is null and void.¹⁵ However, Section eighteen of the Marriage Act¹⁶ provides that a child below the age of twenty-one can get married if consent is obtained from the parents. The implication of this provision is that children as young as fifteen can get married once their parents' consent, which conflicts with the clear provisions of Section 21 of the Child Rights Act of 2003

It is important to understand causes of child abuse to prevent it. According to the specialists in this area, there are three causes of child abuse: environmental causes, child problems, and parental causes. Familial causes are usually connected with young parents, who more likely will neglect child's needs either then take care of him/her. In this group, we can also include parents who suffered from abuse and violence in their childhood and can reproduce only such behavior. Also, some parents are not differentiating discipline from physical abuse and trying to use violent methods to teach children right things. And the last subgroup parents with different psychological disorders, which are not able to make right decisions themselves.

Ecological causes are connected with alcohol and drug usage by parents or relatives. Drunk parents are not able to think about their children's needs. Another environmental cause is poverty. People who are poor and don't have much money are not able to provide their children with needed care, things, education. Parents with marriage problems or divorced couples can hate their children because they changed the life of the couple, this usually leads to emotional abuse. Abusive mothers don't care about their kids and annoy them. In the majority of cases, abusive parents expect their children to make them happy. And if a child is not able to meet such demands, parents start physically abuse their children.

The last cause of child abuse is child problems. They are usually connected with child psychological or physical disorder. It is very difficult to take care of such child, and some parents are ignoring this child needs which results in an abuse of child's rights.

It doesn't matter what causes child abuse; each case affects a child in some way. The end effect of child abuse depends on its type: some of them have physical signs, and all of them have psychological results. According to the studies, the most harmful effect on the child has sexual and emotional abuse. The effects of child abuse depend on its type and can be divided to long term effects and short term. Short term effects of abuse can be registered quickly and can include signs of injuries, aggressiveness, fear of going home, fear of parents, isolation in class, difficulty in speech and communication and many others effects of child maltreatment.

As for long-term effects of child abuse, it is almost not possible to register them. Usually, they appear in adult age if the individual has not got medical and psychological help. Such effects can include difficulties in relationships, unexplained fear, depression, and anxiety. These effects can result in alcohol and drug addiction, in rare cases suicide.

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In the end, I can say for sure that child abuse is a worldwide problem. There are four different types of abuse which include sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse and neglect. The leading causes of child abuse can be divided into three groups: parent, environment, and child problems. Based on causes and type of abuse child can be affected physically and emotionally, additionally, there will be issues with social development and adaptation. It is critical to detect the signs of child abuse on early stages and save the child from after-effects.

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