

CHILD ABUSE IN IGBOLAND OF NIGERIA: INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON PARENTING STYLES

Benedict Chidi UGWUANYI¹,
Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma,
ototo4u@yahoo.com

Zbigniew FORMELLA, Ph.D.,²
Department of Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Pontifical
Salesian University of Rome - Italy
formella@unisal.it

Krzysztof SZADEJKO³
Istituto Superiore di Scienze dell'Educazione e della Formazione
“Giuseppe Toniolo”, Modena,
sciadeico@libero.it

Abstract: *Child abuse is an international problem that happens everywhere including Igboland of Nigeria. Nigeria has three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Igbo parents are known for their love for children but there are cases of child abuse in different families in Igboland. This research explains the ugly phenomenon of child abuse and the concepts that surrounds the problem. The goals of this study were to explore how Igbo culture influences parenting and how some parenting styles can cause child abuse and neglect. A research was carried out within Igboland of Nigeria. A sample of 510 Igbo parents voluntarily completed an anonymous questionnaire. The results reveal the fact that culture influences both the parental styles and the parental perception of child abuse. The issue of child abuse and neglect was expounded in the light of ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner.*

Keywords: *Child abuse; culture; ecological systems theory; Igbo parents; Parenting Styles*

¹Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma, ototo4u@yahoo.com

²Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma, formella@unisal.it

³Istituto Superiore di Scienze dell'Educazione e della Formazione “Giuseppe Toniolo”,
Modena, sciadeico@libero.it

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Gordon in his famous book *Parent effectiveness training* stated that “when people become parents, something strange and unfortunate happens. They begin to assume a role or act a part and forget that they are persons. Now that they have entered the sacred realm of parenthood, they feel they must take up the mantle of parents. Now they earnestly try to behave in certain ways because they think that is how parents should behave” (Gordon, 1970, 13). Notwithstanding the fact that parenting job seems to be difficult and challenging, it is expected that a parent should show love and affection to the child. Parental love, care and affection, play a big role in the psychological development of the child. Parents are supposed to make the home the safest place for the child (Formella& Ricci, 2010). Unfortunately, some parents abuse their child (Ugwuanyi&Formella, 2018; 2019).

Therefore, the purpose of this research work is to see the link between culture, parenting styles and child abuse. We will explain how it influences each other by using UrieBronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory as our principal theory of reference. We will equally present the research that was carried out in Igboland of Nigeria. This will serve as a holistic approach to the problem of child abuse in Igboland of Nigeria. The child in Igboland lives within the environment and UrieBronfenbrenner repeated in most of his works that “the psychological development of the child is enhanced through his involvement in progressively more complex, enduring patterns of reciprocal contingent interaction with persons with whom he has established a mutual and enduring emotional attachment” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, 34).

The theory sustains that “the ecological environment is conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. These structures are referred to as the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, and *macrosystems*” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 22). It was later that he added another system by name chronosystem. In a nutshell, *microsystem* involves the structures and processes taking place in an immediate setting containing the developing person; *mesosystem* comprises of the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person, *exosystem* encompasses two or more settings that do not involve the developing person, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person, *macrosystem* refers to the pattern of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Chronosystem on the other hand, “permits one to identify the impact of prior life events and experiences, singly or sequentially, on subsequent development” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, 83).

The child makes the first contact with the parents in the microsystem and other systems especially the macrosystem which dwells on culture, directly or indirectly influences the parent-child relationship. A poor parent-child relationship leads to abuse. Within the ecological systems theory, there are other aspects like acceptance of physical punishment, unwanted pregnancy, socio-economic status, Igbo family tradition, etc., which affects the relationship between the parent and the child (Ayinmode&Adegunloye, 2011). Understanding child abuse (Wolfe, 1999) especially from the ecological perspective helps one to see the context in which child development and child abuse take place (Ugwuanyi&Formella, 2019).

For the sake of clarity, it is important to state that “parenting style can be described as all strategies (behaviours, attitudes and values) parents use to interact with their children and influence their physical, emotional, social and intellectual development”(Darling & Steinberg, 1995, 488). *This work recognises four parenting styles which are described in as follows:* “authoritative parents are high on both demanding and responsiveness; authoritarian parents are high on demanding but low on responsiveness measures; indulgent parents are high on responsiveness and low on demanding measures; and uninvolved parents are low on both demanding and responsiveness measures” (Ayinmode&Adegunloye, 2011, 60). Having explained our theory of reference and other key concepts, let us approach the methodology of our research.

METHOD

The main objective of our research was to explore how Igbo culture influences parenting and how some parenting styles can cause child abuse and neglect.

The target of the research was the Igbo parents in Nigeria. The parents were chosen because the first impact of the child is in the microsystem of the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979). The parents happens to be the major persons to influence the child in this setting. We were not excluding other systems in his theory because they are considered as external influences on the child. Parents influence on the children are seen in the family, schools were they serve as teachers and guardians in the community (Formella, 2019). It is worthy to note that parents create the environment where the child is raised. Therefore, the parent can equally abuse the child for some reasons; parenting style, parent having a history of child abuse, cultural influence, etc. To this effect, approved questionnaires were used to accomplish and realize our subject matter.

Measures and procedure

Our research instrument was composed of different tools; the first is the socio-demographic profile. The second includes the questionnaire that studies perception and childhood experience of maltreatment (*PCHEMQ- Perception and Childhood Experience of Maltreatment Questionnaire*). It is used to measure the five types of child abuse and neglect; (Physical abuse, Emotional/Psychological abuse, Sexual abuse, Child neglect and Child labor) (Bammeke&Fakunmoju, 2016). The third tool is PS-FFQ (*Parenting Style Four Factors Questionnaire*). It is an empirical tool which aims at identifying four parenting styles like authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive and Uninvolved (Shyny, 2017). The fourth is the questionnaire that studies the Igbo culture. We constructed the questionnaire and it was based on the culture of Igbo people.

The questionnaires were distributed in Igboland, it was not done through computer assisted techniques. Even though it is a good means to reach to a lot of people. Though some factors like limited access to internet were considered before adopting manual distribution. Basically, we distributed the questionnaires with the help of four other Nigerian professors teaching in different universities. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaires with either a pencil or a pen because it was a paper type. By this we mean that the questionnaires were printed on paper. Again, the study population did not encounter much problem in responding to the questions. In fact, they responded within a short period of time. It took majority of the respondents 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaires but they were others that took up to 15-40 minutes to complete.

Subjects

Our sample was composed of 509 parents: 248 are males (48,7%) while 261 were females (51,3%). The age group in our questionnaire was distributed according to the following ages: 20-30 years (25%), 31-40 years (36%), 41-50 years (16,7%) and those over 51 years (22,4%). The Igbo people are the ethnic group of South-eastern Nigeria. The geopolitical zone is currently made up of five states: Abia (11,8%), Anambra (17,3%), Ebonyi (12,2%), Enugu (47,2%), and Imo states (11,6%). The number of children for each family was divided in these groups: 1 child (20,6%), 2-3 children (42,4%), 4-5 children (27,1%), 6-7 children (9,4%), and over 8 children (0,4%).

RESULTS

Differences in social demographic profiles of the sample

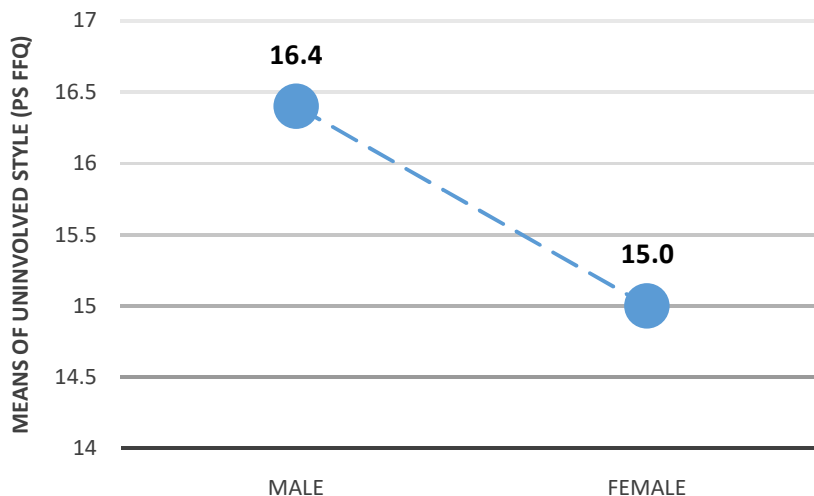
During the data analysis, one of our first questions concerned the presence or absence of differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. With regards to gender, our curiosity aimed to understand if

male respondents, as compared to female respondents, were more involved in sexual abuse. ANOVA analysis was performed to test whether or not the means of several groups are equal or they differ significantly.

Table 1. ANOVA table. Gender differences (p<.05)

	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Physical Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	,083	,774
Child Neglect Opinions (PCHEMQ)	,060	,807
Psychological Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	,051	,822
Sexual Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	1,157	,283
Child Labor Opinions (PCHEMQ)	,089	,765
Authoritarian Style (PS FFQ)	,825	,364
Uninvolved Style (PS FFQ)	7,175	,008
IGBO as value	,004	,948
IGBO Parent transmitters of culture	,042	,839
IGBO Permissive style in IGBO culture	,599	,439

Graphic 1. Mean plot. Gender differences: Uninvolved style (PS FFQ) (p<.05)



As can be seen from the graph, there is a significant difference between males and females. In the case of observed variable, it appears that in "Uninvolved style" males are significantly more "uninvolved" than females. The graph gives us a clear picture of the result. Graph 1 shows that males have 16.4 and the females have 15.0. In this case, the males have

significantly higher mean than the females. Therefore, the males are more associated with uninvolved style. Male have higher score in uninvolved style comparing to female.

Table 2. ANOVA table. State differences (p<.05)

	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Physical Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	,682	,605
Child Neglect Opinions (PCHEMQ)	1,825	,123
Emotional/Psychological Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	1,158	,328
Sexual Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	1,019	,397
Child Labor Opinions (PCHEMQ)	,559	,692
Authoritarian Style (PS FFQ)	1,595	,174
Uninvolved Style (PS FFQ)	3,622	,006
IGBO as value	1,378	,240
IGBO Parents transmitters of culture	1,534	,191
IGBO Permissive style in IGBO culture	2,040	,088

Graphic 2.Mean plot. State differences: Uninvolved style (PS FFQ) (p<.05)

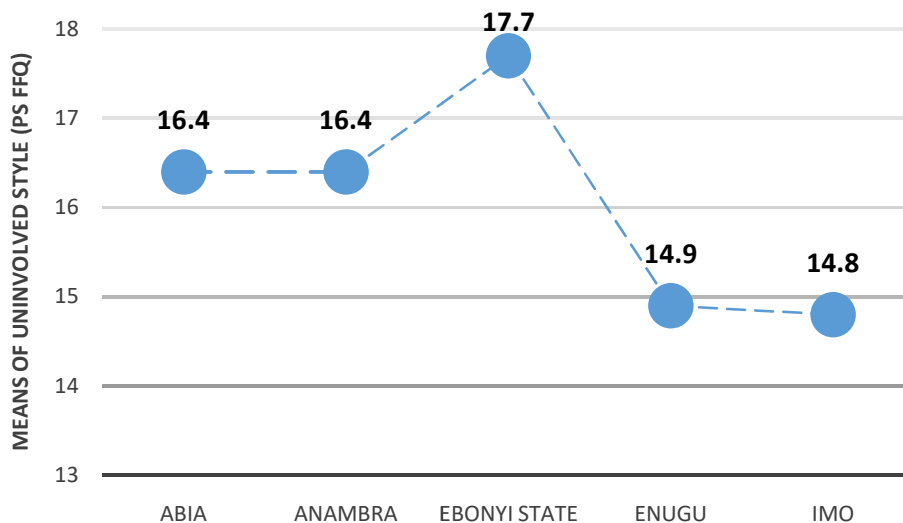


Table 2 shows that only uninvolved style of parenting is statistically significant. As can be seen from graph 2, there is a significant difference between Ebonyi state and two states, Enugu and Imo. In the case of observed variable, it appears that in "Uninvolved style" parents from Ebonyi state are significantly more "uninvolved" than parents from Enugu and Imo state.

Cultural influence on parenting styles

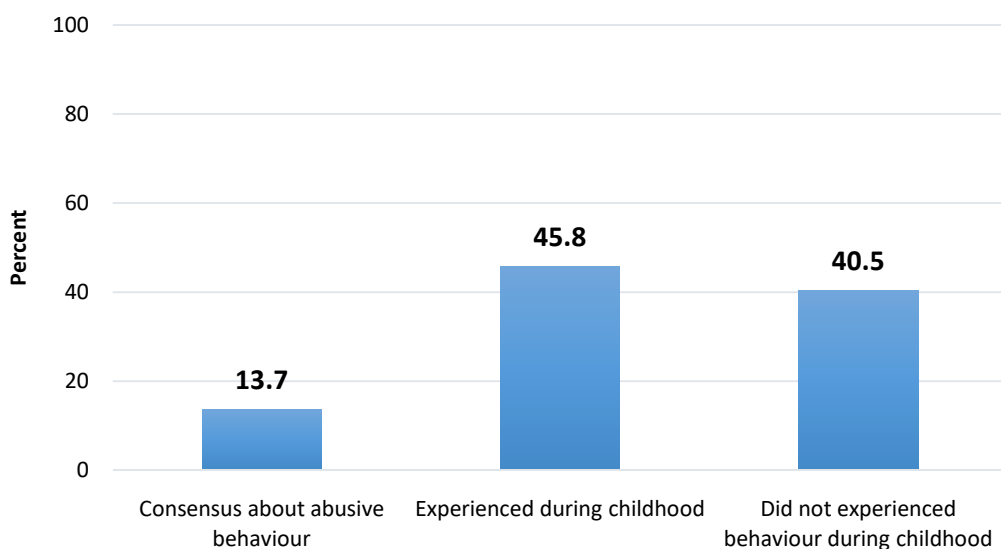
Our research did not dwell only on the differences in socio-demographic profile, we formulated also the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Parents who experiences verbal abuse during childhood are more likely to abuse their child verbally and physically.

In verifying this hypothesis, we concentrated on the experience that Igbo parents had during childhood and the possible effect it is having on them as parents. It's like looking at the past and comparing it with the present. This is possible because in the questionnaire, there were measures where respondents were expected to state their experience during childhood. For a better understanding of the verification of the hypotheses, we will present below diagram, ANOVA table and the mean plot.

The diagram presents the distribution of Perception and childhood experience of maltreatment (PCHEMQ).

Diagram 1. Distribution of answers: “Verbally abusing, cursing, or calling a child horrible names” during childhood



The diagram shows that parents who gave their consensus that it is an abusive behavior were 13,8% of our sample, those who experienced it were 45,8%, while those who did not experience it were 40,5%. In the case of observed variable, it appears that in the measured variable "verbally abusing, cursing, or calling a child horrible names", the percent of those who experienced it during childhood was higher.

Subsequently, the differences between the two groups were verified: those that experienced a particular abuse during childhood and those who did not experience any abuse during childhood. Here our focus was on the

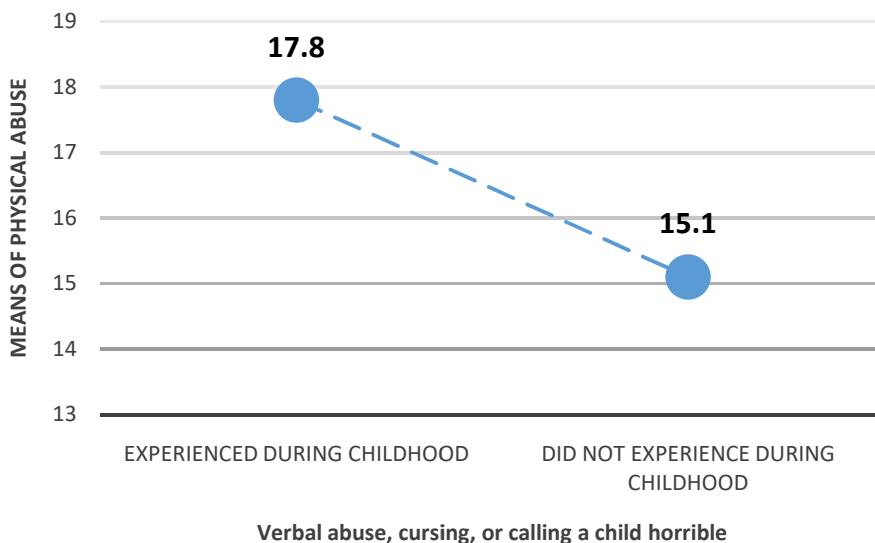
experience of verbal abuse, cursing or calling a child horrible. The ANOVA analysis was performed.

Table 3. ANOVA table. Differences between Parents who experienced and who did not experience "verbal abuse, cursing, or calling a child horrible", during childhood(p<.05)

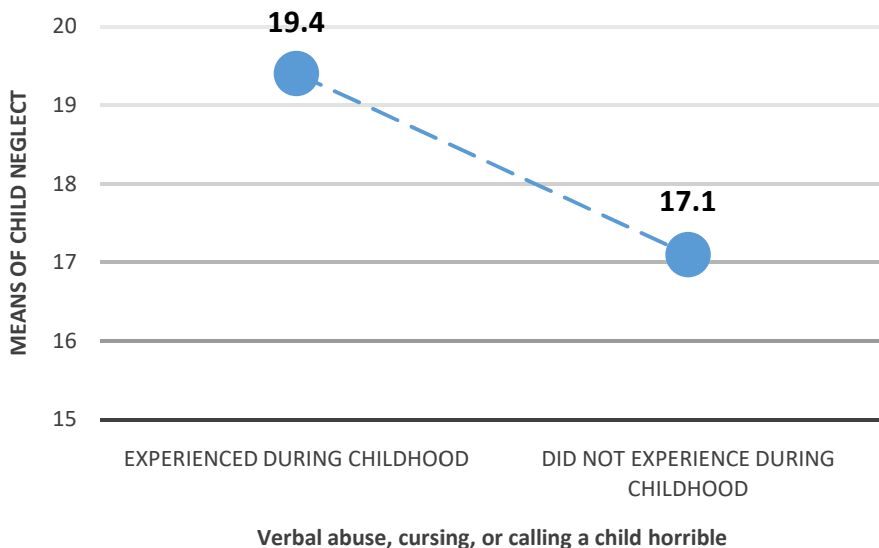
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Physical Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	33,221	,000
Child Neglect Opinions (PCHEMQ)	17,182	,000
Emotional/Psychological Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	55,808	,000
Sexual Abuse Opinions (PCHEMQ)	1,990	,159
Child Labor Opinions (PCHEMQ)	16,144	,000

As emerged from the analysis, statistically significant differences have emerged in four variables: Physical abuse, Child neglect, Emotional/psychological abuse and Child labor. The graphs below represent the differences between two groups.

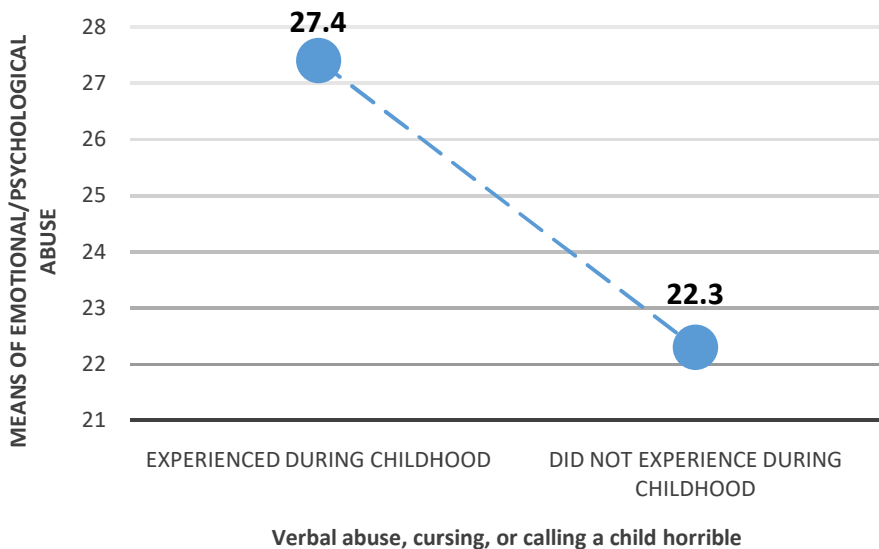
Graphic 3. Meanplot. Differences between parents who experienced and those who did not experience “verbal abuse, cursing, or calling a child horrible” during childhood: Physical abuse (p<.05)



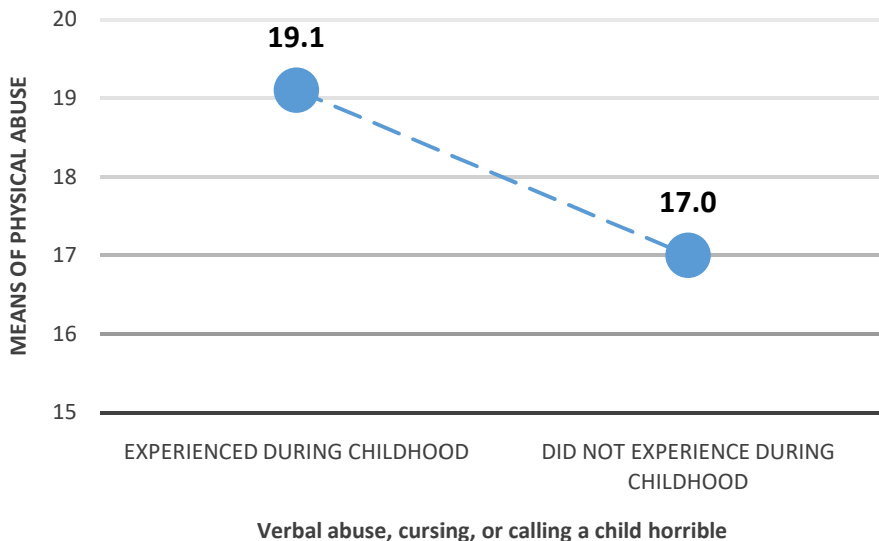
Graphic 4. Mean plot. Differences between parents who experienced and those who did not experience “verbal abuse, cursing, or calling a child horrible” during childhood: Child Neglect (p<.05)



Graphic 5. Mean plot. Differences between parents who experienced and those who did not experience “*verbal abuse, cursing, or calling a child horrible*” during childhood: Emotional/Psychological abuse ($p < .05$)



Graphic 6. Mean plot. Differences between parents who experienced and those who did not experience “*verbal abuse, cursing, or calling a child horrible*” during childhood: Child labor ($p < .05$)



From the ANOVA analysis, emerged statistically significant differences between those who experienced and those who did not experience verbal abuse, cursing, or calling a child horrible during childhood. As can be seen from the graphs, in all four variables those who experienced this abuse during childhood had a higher mean than those who did not experience it. Therefore, we can confirm the hypothesis that parents who experienced verbal abuse during childhood are more likely to abuse a child verbally and physically.

We proceeded with the analysis, performing the correlational analysis. The goal was to establish whether there are possible connections among Authoritarian and Uninvolved style and variables of Perception and Childhood Experience of Maltreatment Questionnaire (PCHEMQ).

This second specific hypothesis stated that:

Hypothesis 2: The authoritarian and uninvolved styles used by parents increase the risk of psychological abuse, sexual abuse and child labor.

Two questionnaires were used to test this hypothesis: *Parenting Style Four Factors Questionnaire (PS-FFQ)* and *Perception and Childhood Experience of Maltreatment Questionnaire (PCHEMQ)*.

Table 4. Correlation table

	Physical Abuse	Child Neglect	Emotional/ Psychological Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Child Labor
Authoritarian style	-	-	.11*	.10*	.09*
Uninvolved style	-	.16**	.14**	.17**	.19**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

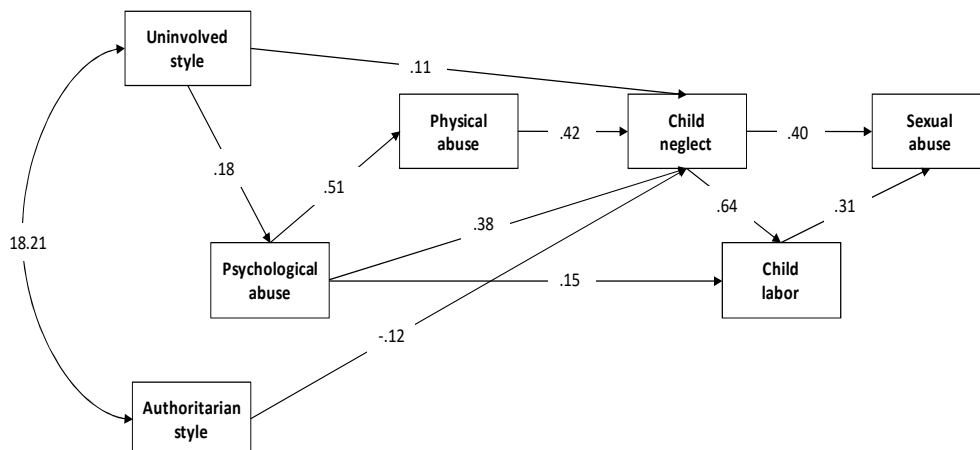
A significant positive correlations were found between Authoritarian style and Emotional/Psychological abuse ($r = 0.11$, $p < .05$), Sexual abuse ($r = 0.10$, $p < .05$) and Child Labor ($r = 0.09$, $p < .05$). Correlations were slightly higher for Uninvolved style and Child neglect ($r = 0.16$, $p < .01$), Emotional/Psychological abuse ($r = 0.14$, $p < .01$), Sexual abuse ($r = 0.17$, $p < .01$) and Child labor ($r = 0.19$, $p < .01$). No significant relationships were noted between Physical abuse and both Authoritarian and Uninvolved style, and between Authoritarian style and Child neglect.

Even if the correlations were not very high, results can confirm that there is link between variables of *Parenting Style Four Factors Questionnaire* (PS-FFQ) and *Perception and Childhood Experience of Maltreatment Questionnaire* (PCHEMQ), except Physical abuse.

Path Analysis. Link between uninvolved parenting style and child abuse

Here our scope is to test, estimate the direction and intensity of the links between both parental Authoritarian, Uninvolved styles, the risk of Psychological abuse, Child labor, Sexual abuse, and above all, to provide information on the causal processes. To this effect, structural equation models (SEM) have been constructed (Graphic 7). AMOS software (the SPSS additional package) was used in the construction of the models. The models were tested using the maximum likelihood criterion. The multi-equation approach was chosen because it is more suitable for providing a representation of real processes, even if there are simplified. Each of these equations expresses the causal link between the exogenous variables (Uninvolved style and Authoritarian style, $Covariance = 18.21$) and the endogenous variables (Physical abuse, Child neglect, Psychological abuse, Child labor, Sexual abuse).

Graphic 7. Path analysis. Structural Equation Model (SEM)



On the Graphic 7, each vector indicates the direction of the influence of one variable on another and its standardized coefficient B describes the weight of this bond.

The model reported the following values: Chi-square = 14,0 (df = 10, p = .17); Good Fit Index (GFI) = .990; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .993; Relative Fit Index (RFI) = .986; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .998; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .028. The last one, RMSEA coefficient, is one of the most sensitive indicators of the goodness (stability) of the model. It is generally assumed that an RMSEA value of approximately .05 or less indicates a good stability of the model in relation to the degrees of freedom. Statisticians claim that a value of about .08 results in a reasonable approximation error, but also suggest not to assume a model with the RMSEA value greater than .10. Furthermore, the values GFI, NFI, RFI and CFI indicate a very good model when they approach 1 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). In our model, the RMSEA coefficient is <.05 and values of the model fit coefficients are very high, therefore it can be assumed that it has reached its capability to effectively express theoretical concepts with good stability.

From Path Analysis, it can be deduced that Uninvolved style has a direct impact on Psychological abuse and Child neglect. The Child neglect variable was found to be a mediator variable between two parenting styles and Child labor as well as Sexual abuse. Child labor also appears to be a mediating variable between Psychological and Sexual abuse.

All the elements contained in the SEM model reveal the presence of a psychological mechanism, which describes that the two parenting styles, in particular the uninvolved one, can affect the abusive treatment of the child. In other words, it seems that the parents of our sample, who experienced an abusive behavior from the parents during their childhood and currently are inclined to emotional indifference towards their children, are more likely disposed to adopt abusive behavior towards them.

CONCLUSION

The issue of child abuse was expounded in the light of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory is an analytical tool for understanding individual development within complex social systems. Every child develops within many deeply interconnected rings of influence, much like the way a stone dropped into water is connected to and surrounded by concentric rings. The interconnected rings encircling the developing person includes the five systems proposed by the ecological theory (Kraus, 2008).

The empirical study was addressed to investigate the problem of child abuse in relation to the experience of parents during their childhood. We found that parents who experienced verbal abuse during childhood are more likely to abuse their own child verbally and physically. It was also found that parental Authoritarian and Uninvolved styles can increase the risk of psychological, sexual abuse and child labor.

We are aware that this study has both strengths and limitations. However, considering it as an exploratory study, we have identified some new open questions. We are concerned to know if we will get the same result in the other ethnic groups in Nigeria. We have to bear in mind that Nigeria is made up of three major ethnic groups, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo and over 250 other ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own language, culture and unique way of life. It would be interesting to carry out the same research in Yoruba and Hausa land, and see if the results would be the same or different from what we have in Igboland. The outcome of each research will help the psychologist to suggest some possible ways of preventing child abuse. However, true child protection starts with you. It comes from awareness, garnering knowledge of what comprises child abuse. Having a good understanding of child abuse and neglect. Again, it comes from the willingness to act when we see or suspect abuse (Daly & Wright, 2017).

References:

- Ayinmode, T.&Adegunloye, O. (2011). Parenting style and conduct problems in children: A report of deliberate self-poisoning in a Nigerian child. *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, 17(2), 60-63.
- Bammeke, F.&Fakunmoju, S. (2016). Childhood maltreatment and perception of child maltreatment among respondents in Nigeria. *Psychology and developing societies*, 28 (1), 73-100.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human. Bioecological perspectives on human development*. London: Sage Publication.

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of human development. Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Browne, M.W., Cudeck, R. (1993). *Alternative ways of assessing model fit*. In: Bollen, K.A., Long, J.S. (eds). *Testing Structural Equation Models*, pp. 136–162. Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Daly, E.& Wright, J. (2017). *Child abuse prevention through understanding*. Miami: Parker Publishing Inc.
- Darling, N.& Steinberg, L. (1995). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113(3), 487-496.
- Formella, Z. (2019). Intervento psico-educativo alla luce della teoria bio-ecologica di Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Teologia i Moralność* 14(25) 1, 211-221. doi: 10.14746/tim.2019.25.1.12.
- Formella, Z.& Ricci, A. (2010). *Educare insieme. Aspetti psico-educativi nella relazione genitori-figli*. Torino:Elledici.
- Gordon, T. (1970). *Parent effectiveness training*. New York: Peter H. Wyden, Publisher.
- Kraus, K. (2008). *Lenses applying lifespan development theories in counselling*. California: Cengage Learning.
- Shyny, T. (2017). Construction and validation of PS FFQ (Parenting style four factor questionnaire). *International Journal of Engineering Development and Research*, 5 (3), 426-437.
- Ugwuanyi, B. C. & Formella, Z. (2018). Child abuse in Igboland of Nigeria: v Series VII: Social Sciences – Law, 12(61) 2, 197-208, explanations, psychological implications and ending the silence. *Journal Plus Education*, XIX(1), 40-54.
- Ugwuanyi, B. C. & Formella, Z. (2019). Child abuse in Igboland of Nigeria: context and characteristics. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov* doi/10.31926/but.ssl.2019.12.61.2.2.
- Wolfe, D. (1999). *Child Abuse: Implications for Child Development and Psychopathology*. London: Sage Publication.