PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AS PREDICTORS OF PERCEIVED CHILD ABUSE AMONG PARENTS IN IDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Child abuse has become a perennial problem which cuts across cultural, economic and social fabrics of the society. Many studies have examined different predictors of child abuse with different results. The aim of this study was to examine parental attachment and social support as predictors of perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design while convenience sampling technique was used to gather data from 291 participants using three research instruments: Child Abuse Scale, Parental Attachment Scale and Social Support Scale. Data collected were analyzed using t-test of independent samples and multiple regression while three hypotheses were tested and accepted at a $p < 0.05$ level of significance. The result revealed that social support significantly influenced perceived child abuse [$t (279) = 2.11$, $p < .05$). Also, parental attachment and social support jointly predicted perceived child abuse [$R^2 = .04$, $F (2, 278) = 5.19$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, parental attachment ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) independently predicted perceived child abuse among the study participants. However, social support did not independently predict perceived child abuse among parents in the study population. The study concluded that social support and parental attachment are strong predictors of perceived child abuse. The study recommended that parents should offer the necessary supports to their children while reducing their emotional attachment on them.
Keywords: Ido Local Government Area, Parental attachment, Perceived child abuse,
Social support

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse has become a significant public health issue in Nigeria and the world at large which cut across ethnic, economic and religious groups. The World Health Organisation (2018) defines child abuse as any form of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial exploitation, or sexual abuse resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship, responsibility, trust or power. Child abuse causes physical, emotional, social, cognitive and behavioural problems faced by a child later in life (Chen et al., 2022; Lamis et al.2014).

Child abuse has a global prevalence. For example, Stoltenborgh et al. (2013) found a global child abuse prevalence of 17.7% (95% CI: 13.0% - 23.6%). When analysed by continents, they found 24% of child abuse in North America (54.8% in southern North America), 22.9 % in Europe, 16.7% in Asia, and 22.8% in Africa. Burton et al. (2015) reported 34% of physical child abuse, 16% of emotional child abuse and 20% of sexual child abuse amongst 15-17 years old age bracket in a South African study. In Nigeria, data on the prevalence of child abuse is difficult to obtain due to unreported cases. However, the 2014 survey on Nigeria Violence against children conducted by the National Population Commission (NPC)with

the support of the United States Centre for Disease Control and UNICEF revealed a high prevalence of violence against children across all states in Nigeria. The survey found that approximately 6 in 10 children experienced some form of violence, 50% of all children in Nigeria experienced some form of violence, 50% of all children in Nigeria experienced physical violence, while 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 5 boys experienced emotional violence by a parent, caregiver or adult relatives (NPC, 2016). This should be taken as a social problem in Nigeria. Many factors have been identified to influence perceived child abuse across countries, races and ethnic groups.

One factor considered in this study as the likely predictor of perceived child abuse is parental attachment which is described as a 'relatively long enduring tie in which the partner is important as a unique individual that is not interchangeable with another person' (Ainsworth, 1989, p.). Papalia et al. (2009) see attachment as a reciprocal relationship between two individuals each of whom contributes to the quality of the relationship. Whichever way attachment is defined, there is an agreement on the idea that attachment is essential for normal human development (Malekpour, 2007). Studies have found that lack of attachment in childhood can decrease confidence in unfamiliar situations, impair normal development, and influence later development (Christ et al., 2019; Cui & Liu, 2018; Krstic, 2016; Ojuope, 2021). For example, Ojuope (2021) found that adolescents' attachment to parents is a strong predictor of conduct disorder. Also, children who are physically abused by their parents have strong tendencies of showing behavioural problems in later life.

Apart from parental attachment, the second factor considered in this study as likely predictor of perceived child abuse is social support. Social support is defined as the perceived assistance given to an individual which could be emotional, tangible, or physical comfort by a network of people in an individual's physical and emotional environment (Li et al., 2020). It is when an individual believes that he/she is cared for, valued and has a network of mutual obligation for assistance (Bassey et al., 2012). Studies have found social support to be pivotal in child development which when absent would lead to child abuse (Brinker & Cheruvu, 2016; Kealy et al., 2020). For example, Kealy et al. (2020) found social support as an important buffer against family crises, resiliency and promotion of family recovery as well as a mediator of family distress. Mothers who perceive higher levels of informal and formal social support reported lower levels of depression, anger and anxiety which would have caused them to abuse their children. In general, both family and parental support improve adjustment for abused children which includes psychological adjustment and development in later life (Brinker & Cheruvu, 2016; Kealy et al., 2020).

Nigerian society is plagued with prevalence of child abuse, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, amongst others. Child abuse has become a major risk factor for many problems both in the short term and in later adult life. Because few studies have been done in developing countries such as Nigeria on perceived child abuse by their primary caregivers, there exist gaps in knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine parental attachment and social support as predictors of perceived child abuse among parent in Ido Local Government Area in Oyo State, Nigeria. The following specific objectives were stated: (1) to determine whether parental attachment would independently predict perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area; (2) to examine whether social support would independently predict perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area; and (3) to investigate whether parental attachment and social support would jointly predict perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area.

This study would provide fresh insights into the psycho-social predictors of perceived child abuse among parents in a community setting. Also, the study would offer practical recommendations to discourage child abuse among current and potential perpetrators in the society. Finally, policy makers and Non-Governmental Organisations interested in child protection rights would tap into the results of this study in the implementations of policies on child abuse laws.

Theoretical concepts
This study was anchored on two theoretical concepts.
Social Learning Theory This theory was postulated byBandura and has been revised over the years (Bandura et al., 2001) and has received many revisions and modifications over the years. The main thrust of the theory is that individual do things by observing and imitating what other people do. Bandura demonstrated that from observing others, individuals form an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura et al., 2001). For example, an adolescent who gets exposed to violence is likely to react and do what is observed. The environment in which a child is brought up is likely to determine future behaviour of that child. A child

living in unplanned settlement like slums where crime and illicit drug use are common would likely practise similar behaviour while growing into adolescence and adulthood.

Attachment Theory The second theory used in this study was the attachment theory. The theory suggests that the responsiveness of the caregiver and the experience of the individual's relationship whether secured, anxious/ambivalent, anxious/avoidant, or disorganized would create mental representations (or 'working models') for how the individual think and behave in future relationships through the process of internalizing norms (Ainsworth, 1989). These working models would lead an individual to develop expectations for future relationships that would be based on the attachment experience between the infant and caregiver (Wilbowo & Wimbarti, 2019). Secure attachment can be displayed during infancy as the ability to use the parent as a secure base from which the infant can move away without anxiety to explore and learn about the surrounding environment ((Wilbowo & Wimbarti, 2019). Using this logic, a child who has a secured attachment to a responsive caregiver is likely to have a working model that establishes a belief that others would be there for them.

Hypotheses
H1 Participants with high level of social support would significantly report lower perceived child abuse compared to those with low social support among parents in Ido Local Government Area.
H2 Participants with high level of parental attachment will significantly report lower perceived child abuse compared to those with low parental attachment among parents in Ido Local Government Area.
H3 Parental attachment and social support would jointly and independently predict perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area.

METHOD

Design
This study adopted cross-sectional survey design using validated questionnaires to gather data from the sample of population in Ido Local Government Area in Oyo State, Nigeria. The independent variables were parental attachment and social support while the dependent variable was perceived child abuse.

Setting
The study was conducted in Ido Local Government Area in Oyo State. It is one of the 21 LGAs in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Sampling Technique
The study utilized purposive sampling technique to select Ido Local Government Area in Oyo State while convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study.

Participants
Descriptive statistics showed that 176 (62.6%) of the participants were females while 105 (37.4%) were males. Also, age distribution of participants was between 26 and 59 years old with average age being 39.54 (*SD* =10.32). Family background showed that 189 (67.3%) participants were from monogamous family while 92 (32.7%) were from polygamous family. In addition, 202 (79%) of the participants were married, 47(16.7%) were divorced/separated, while 32 (11.4%) were single parents.

Instruments
Perceived Child Abuse This was measured using the Perceived Child Abuse Scale developed byFakunmoju and Bammeke (2013). The scale was developed to measure the extent to which individual perceives that a child is being abused. It is a 34-item scale presented on a 5-point Likert's format that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale has 6-subscales: emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child neglect, child labour, physical abuse, and the overall perceived child abuse. Samples item are: 'Letting a child younger than 14 years old to engage in manual labour meant for adults instead of going to school' and 'Verbally abusing, cursing, or calling a child horrible names'. The scale developers reported Cronbach's alphas that ranged between 0.71 and 0.81. In this study, the following Cronbach's alphas were obtained for the sub-scales: Emotional abuse (0.95), Sexual abuse (0.96), Child neglect (0.89), child labour (0.95), and Physical abuse (0.94). For this study, a composite Cronbach□ s alpha ($\alpha = 0.86$) obtained was used for the analysis.
Parental Attachment This was assessed using a 25-item parental attachment scale developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987). The scale is presented on a 5-point Likert's response format ranging from 1-Almost

never or never true, 2-Not very often, 3-Sometimes true, 4-often true and 5-Almost always or always true. Samples item include: 'I like to get my friend's point of view on things I'm concerned about' and 'I respect my child feeling'. High scores indicate high parental attachment, while low score indicates low parental attachment. The scores were computed by adding up the total of all responses (score ranges from 25-125). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale as reported by Armsden and Greenberg (1986) was 0.92. In this study, the scale was found to have Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

Social Support: This was determined using a 12-item Multidimensional Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988). It is a 7-point rating scale ranging from Very strongly disagree '1' to 'Very strongly agree (5). The scale has 3 subscales: family support, friend support, and significant others. A two reliability tests was conducted in this study: split-half coefficient part 1= 0.63 and part 2= 0.74; Spearman-Brown coefficient= 0.74, and Guttman split-half coefficient = 0.69 and the authors reported the scale Cronbach's alpha of 0.72. In this study, the scale Cronbach's alpha was 0.82.

Procedure

A formal Letter of Introduction was collected from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan to identify the researchers to the potential participants. Each potential participant was told the purpose of the study and the consent to participate in the study was asked for. Potential participants who agreed to participate in the study were given the questionnaires to complete which took less than 15 minutes to fill. A total of 289 questionnaires were distributed in the course of the data collection of which 284 were retrieved (i.e., 98% response rate). Three questionnaires that were incompletely filled were removed leaving with 281 questionnaires that were used for the final analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected were analysed using SPSS version 23. Hypotheses one and two were tested using t-test for independent samples while hypothesis three was tested using multiple regression analysis. All hypotheses were accepted at a $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

RESULTS

H1 Participants with high level of social support would significantly report lower perceived child abuse compared to those with low social support. This was tested using t-test for independent samples and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
T-test for Independent Samples showing Influence of Social Support on Perceived Child Abuse among the Study Participants

DV	IV	N	M	SD	t	df	p
	Social Support						
	Low	111	83.14	35.81			
Child Abuse					2.11	279	<0.05
	High	170	74.01	35.18			

DV = Dependent Variable,   IV = Independent Variable

The result revealed that social support had significant influence on perceived child abuse [t (279) =2.11, p <.05]. Further, it is shown that participants with low level of social support reported higher on perceived child abuse (M =83.14, SD =35.81) compared to those with high level of social support (M =74.01, SD =35.18).

H2 Participants with high level of parental attachment would significantly report lower perception of child abuse compared to those with low level of parental attachment among parents in Ido Local Government Area. This was tested using t-test for independent samples and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
T-test for Independent Samples showing the Influence of Parental Attachment on Perceived Child Abuse among the Study Participants

Dependent Variable	Parental Attachment	N	M	SD	t	df	p
	Low	144	80.08	40.76			
Child Abuse					1.19	279	> 0.05
	High	137	75.04	29.26			

Table 2 indicated that parental attachment had no significant influence on perceived child abuse [t (279) = 1.19, p>.05] among parents in Ido LGA. However, the result revealed that participants with low level of parental attachment reported high on perceived child abuse (M =80.08, SD = 40.76) compared to those with high level of parental attachment (M=75.04, SD = 29.26).

H3 Parental attachment and social support would jointly and independently predict perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis showing Parental Attachment and Social support as joint and Independent predictors of Perceived Child Abuse among the Study Participants

Criterion	Predictors	β	t	p	R	R²	F	p
	Parental attachment	.13	2.10	<.05				
PCA					.19	.04	5.19	<.05
	Social support	.12	2.07	<.05				

PCA = Perceived Child Abuse

The result in Table 3 indicated that parental attachment and social support jointly predicted perceived child abuse [R^2 = 0.04, F (2,278) =5.19, p < 0.05]. Collectively, parental attachment and social support accounted for about 4% variance in perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area in Oyo State. Also, parental attachment (β = 0.13, t =2.10, p < 0.05) and social support (β = 0.12, t =2.07, p< 0.05) independently predicted perceived child abuse among the study participants.

Discussion
The study investigated parental attachment and social support as predictors of perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area (LGA) of Oyo State. Three hypotheses were generated and tested. The result shows that social support had significant influence on perceived child abuse. Furthermore, participants with low level of social support reported higher on perceived child abuse compared to those with high level of social support. This finding lent credence to previous results that social support has a direct effects on level of abuse that would originate from the primary caregivers (Brinker & Cheruvu, 2016; Kealy et al., 2020). Parents who reported higher level of social support tends to be at peace with themselves to take care of their children. This helps to reduce the level of possible abuse that would have been transferred to their children.

Two, the hypothesis that participants with high level of parental attachment would significantly report lower in perceived child abuse compared to those with low level of parental attachment was not supported. However, the mean difference of participants with low level of parental attachment reported higher on perceived child abuse compared to those with high level of parental attachment. This finding supported previous studies that adolescents' attachment to parents is a strong predictor of growing into a stable, secured life in later life compared to children who did not received adequate parental care and attachment in their early developmental phases (Ojuope, 2021). On the other hand, children with dismissing, unsecured, and unorganised attachment tended to go into adults life unsecured with high tendencies of encountering behavioural problems in later life (Christ et al., 2019; Cui & Liu, 2018).

Finally, parental attachment and social support were found to jointly predict perceived child abuse among parents in Ido LGA. Collectively, parental attachment and social support accounted for about 4% variance in perceived child abuse among the study participants. This study supported Chen et al. (2022) who found that parental violence and abuse were predictors of poor behaviour in children. Social support serves as one of the protective factors that buffer children from the impact of early negative experiences such as lack of adequate attachment and abuse (Brinker & Cheruvu, 2016; Chen et al., 2022). There is need to provide extra-familial supports for the adolescents as they are growing up. However, other studies provide mixed or contrasting findings to the present findings (Bizzi et al., 2018; Ensink et al., 2019).

Conclusion Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. First, social support has a significant influence on perceived child abuse. When social support is low, there is higher level of child abuse among the study participants. Also, parental attachment and social support jointly predicted perceived child abuse, meaning these two variables are good predictors of perceived child abuse among parents in Ido Local Government Area.

Recommendations of the Study The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study: First, it was found that when social support is high, there is reduced level of

perceived child abuse. It is therefore recommended that parents should offer the necessary support for their children. Second, it was revealed that parental attachment significantly predicted child abuse. Therefore, it is recommended that parents should establish strong bond with their children from the childhood so as to develop a healthy lifestyle in later life. This, to a large extent, would ensure that children are less prone to being abused emotionally, physically and sexually.

imitations and suggestions for further study The following limitations need to be mentioned and addressed in further studies. The study was carried out in only one Local Government Area in Oyo State. This reduces generalizability of the findings to other local government areas within and outside Oyo State. Also, the study was limited to parents which make it difficult to generalize the findings to other population such as unmarried persons. Furthermore, self-reported questionnaires were used for data collection which does not rule out response bias; therefore, further studies should include focus group discussion and in-depth interview to validate data collected from questionnaire method. Finally, only two variables were investigated. Additional variables such as personality traits, self-esteem and loneliness should be added to the present variables and investigated in the further studies.

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