

IMPACT OF CHILD TRAFFICKING ON MENTAL WELLBEING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing and academic achievement of secondary school students in Nasarawa state, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives, two research questions and correspondent null hypotheses. The study adopted a descriptive research design and the population of the study comprises of 21, 875 SSII students from two hundred and thirty-five (235) senior secondary schools in the state out of which a sample size of 378 respondents was obtained using Multi Stage sampling procedure. An instrument tagged “Child Trafficking, Mental Wellbeing and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (CTMW&AAQ)” was used as instrument for data collection. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions while the formulated hypotheses were however tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). Findings from the study revealed a significance relationship between child trafficking and mental wellbeing of secondary school students in Nasarawa state. The results also showed a significance relationship between child trafficking and academic achievements of secondary school students in the area. The study concluded that child trafficking as a form of modern slavery has long-term and repeated consequences on students’ mental wellbeing as well as their academic pursuit. The study therefore recommended among others that there is need for Nasarawa state Government to establish rehabilitation centres in each of the three senatorial zones of the state to handle and rehabilitate victims of child trafficking aim at restoring back their senses of belonging and mental wellbeing.

Keyword: Child trafficking, mental wellbeing, academic achievements, secondary schools

Introduction

All over the world, the birth of a child is a proud and a thing of joy. Children therefore occupy a special position in the life of any family or nation. In African tradition as well as Nigeria, the importance of children cannot be over emphasized. In the olden days, the task of caring and bringing up a child was not only that of the parents, but also the entire community. In those days parents and guardians treat their children with much love and affection (Kang-Yi, Mandell & Hadley, 2018). They catered for the children, give attention to their needs and aspirations, and also protect their interests in the cultural and social lives of the community. The aforementioned fact is without prejudice to the many forces and conditions in our society today, which violate the complete development of children and the unfolding of their potentials. One of these conditions that militate against the well – being of the child these days is child trafficking (Usang (2022) in Odigie & Chinenye, 2018). Child trafficking is a form of modern slavery, a rapidly growing, mutating and multifaceted system of severe human exploitation, violence against children, child abuse and child rights violations. Modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) represent a major global public health concern with victims exposed to profound short-term and long-term physical, mental, psychological, developmental and even generational risks to health (Cloitre, Courtois, Charuvastra, Carapezza, Stolbach & Green (2021).

Children with increased vulnerability to MSHT, victims (in active exploitation) and survivors (post-MSHT exploitation) are attending healthcare settings, presenting critical windows of opportunity for safeguarding and health intervention. Child trafficking is a phenomenon that is currently generating a lot of concern globally, in African countries like Nigeria and Nasarawa State in particular, where it is highly prevalent. It is the third largest criminal activity in the world today after arms and drug trafficking (Tola, 2018). In the last decade, child trafficking has considerably increased throughout the world and most especially in Nigeria. Every year, millions of children are misled or forced to submit to servitude. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2016), recognized children's rights, and has provided a legal basis to combat child trafficking. But their scope is limited by the lack of a clear and publicly accepted definition of child trafficking in West Africa, where the terms "trafficking", "abduction" or "Sales of children" have different meanings in different countries.

Child trafficking is the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of children, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (Casassa, Knight & Mengo, 2021). The United Nations Palermo Protocol (2016), with its definition of trafficking, provides useful guidelines for law reforms and the criminalization of this practice. According to Article 3 (a) of the protocol, child trafficking shall mean the illegal recruitment, transportation and transfer of children of less than 18 years for the purpose of exploitation. By this definition, child trafficking is therefore, envisaged as the transfer of a child by fraudulent means for exploitative purposes. Children are trafficked for the purpose of domestic services, prostitution and other forms of exploitative labour. There has been a serious concern about the causes of child trafficking in Africa as a whole, Nigeria as a country and Nasarawa State in particular. UNICEF (2017) has therefore identified poverty, large family size, and rapid urbanization among others as the major factors why many Nigerian children are vulnerable to trafficking. In recent times, child trafficking has come to be considered as a social problem of significant scope, which had attracted much international attention and interest. Child trafficking does not only exist in Nigeria, but is a global issue that has cut across all socio – economic groups as reported by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2017). Furthermore, the search for greener pasture or white-collar jobs in the cities resulted in a massive movement from rural areas to the urban centres, therefore, most parents engage in daily pursuit without regarding the conditions their children have been subjected to.

Trafficked children are exposed to a range of health-related problems. During captivity, they experience physical violence, sexual exploitation, psychological abuse, poor living conditions and exposure to a wide range of diseases, which may have long lasting consequences on their physical, reproductive and mental health (Chambers, Gibson, Chaffin, Takagi, Nguyen & Mears-Clark, 2022). Mental health is best thought of as the way a young person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors affect his or her life and it is a spectrum. In the same way that every individual experience physical health as a continuum from 'well' to 'ill', every individual has a mental health experience. As with physical health, mental health changes at different points in individuals' lives based on

both biological and environmental factors (Kang-Yi, Mandell and Hadley, 2018). Many young people enjoy mental wellness, meaning that they have positive regard for themselves, enjoy positive relationships with the people who are important to them, and are generally resilient when faced with challenges in their lives at home and school. When mental health deteriorates substantially, mental illness may be involved. A mental illness is a condition that impacts a young person's thinking, emotions, and mood such that it interferes with his or her daily functioning at home and school (National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2016). Child trafficking has an impact on the individuals it victimizes in all areas of their lives. Every stage of the trafficking process can involve physical, sexual and psychological abuse and violence, deprivation and torture, the forced use of substances, manipulation, economic exploitation and abusive working and living conditions. Unlike most other violent crime, trafficking usually involves prolonged and repeated trauma. Documentation and research describe how men, women and children are abused in specific exploitative conditions and the short- and long-term physical injuries, disabilities and deaths that may result. For a number of specified reasons, trafficked victims are at great risk of HIV infection (Cloitre, Courtois, Charuvastra, Carapezza, Stolbach & Green (2021). The trauma experienced by victims of trafficking includes post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, alienation, disorientation, aggression and difficulty concentrating. Studies indicate that trauma worsens during the trafficking process and may persist far beyond the end of any exploitation. The stigma attached to them as victims has been shown to have a significant and ongoing impact on their lives, including in the trauma experienced by the individual victim as well as the possibility of physical rejection by family and/or community.

In addition, children who are victims of human trafficking often experience multiple forms of trauma, referred to as poly victimization, including adverse experiences like witnessing criminal activity, war, or death; displacement as a result of natural disaster or conflict; loss of resources and income; encountering violence; lack of educational opportunities; and neglect or abandonment of a caregiver. This intersection of multiple traumas leads to complex trauma, making children more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers through means such as psychological control, threats of or actual physical abuse, withholding food, or emotional and sexual abuse (Levine, 2017). Children who have been victims of human trafficking may have also experienced addictions, injuries from violence and dangerous jobs, and forced pregnancies, as well as chronic health conditions such as increased likelihood of medical complications, somatic symptoms, impaired sensorimotor development, and hand-eye coordination problems, further adding to their trauma. In his submissions, Usang (2022) in Muthigani (2015) pointed out that child trafficking may affect pupils' academic achievement, but it also affects or disrupt teaching and learning in schools. Victims of child trafficking may also show or display habits such as withdrawal, excessive aggression shy or one form of maladjustment or the other. Hence, there is a need for these children to be properly rehabilitated and re-integrated into the school system because their successes in negotiating these challenges predict school success. Child trafficking may affect students' academic adjustment, which may lead to total disruption of teaching and learning in school. Victims of child trafficking may also show or display habits such as withdrawal, excessive aggression, shy or one form of maladjustment or the other. Hence, there is need for these children to be properly rehabilitated and re-integrated into the school system because their successes in negotiating these challenges predict school success.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, child trafficking is a phenomenon that is currently generating a lot of concern globally, in African countries like Nigeria and Nasarawa State in particular, where it is highly prevalent. It is the third largest criminal activity in the world today after arms robbery and drug trafficking. In the last decade, child trafficking has considerably increased throughout the world and most especially in Nigeria. Every year, millions of children are misled or forced to submit to servitude. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2016) recognized children's rights and has provided a legal basis to combat child trafficking in West Africa, where the term "trafficking" "abduction" or "sales of children" have different meanings in different countries. Personal interaction and experience have revealed that victims of child trafficking are not always willing to go back to school after they have been rescued and recovered from the trafficking, the villagers disclosed that victims when recovered from the traffickers exhibit certain unpleasant characteristics which were not common to them before they were trafficked such characteristics they said include; social exclusion intolerance, sadness, despair and lack of interest and pleasure in nearly everything that would ordinarily excite young individual. They also noted that even if these victims are kept in school, some of them may withdraw (have drop-out tendencies) on their own. Based on this observation and revelation from these individuals, the researcher is prompted to embark on investigating the phenomenon. If researchers and educationists understand the level of impact child trafficking had on mental wellbeing and academic achievement of secondary school students, ways and means could be devised to boost the academic achievement of the victims and enhance their level of achievement in school so that they would be able to stay in school for proper education and reintegration into the society. Based on the aforementioned, the researcher was therefore prompted to investigate the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing and academic achievements of secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. examine the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state;
2. determine the impact of child trafficking on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state?
2. What is the impact of child trafficking on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were also formulated and tested at a significance level of 0.05

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between child trafficking and mental wellbeing

of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between child trafficking and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive survey research design is a design which is aimed at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features and facts about a given population. This study is only interested in describing certain variables in relation to the population. It is considered suitable for this work because it will help in the collection of data and establish the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing and academic achievements of secondary school students in Nasarawa State. The target population for the study is 21875 SSII students from all the public senior secondary schools in Nasarawa State. There are 235 public senior secondary schools spread across the thirteen Local Government Areas of the State. These schools are distributed across the three Senatorial zones of the state. The population of the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Population of the Study

S/N	Zone	No. of schools	No. of students
1	Nasarawa South	105	7813
2	Nasarawa North	60	4389
3	Nasarawa West	70	9673
	Total	235	21,875

Source: Nasarawa State Ministry of Education, 2024/2025 Session

The sample size for the study comprises of 378 SS II students from the public senior secondary schools in Nasarawa State. The sample size was adopted using a table for determining sample size for research activities by Paul C. Boyd, Educational and Psychological Measurement (2006). The study adopted multi-stage stratified random sampling. The schools for the study were clustered into three (3) Senatorial zones, Nasarawa South, Nasarawa North and Nasarawa West. A non-proportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used to draw four (4) schools from each zone and a total number of twelve schools were drawn to represent the entire schools. A proportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used to select 378 students from the twelve (12) sampled schools. The sample of the study is also presented in Table3.1.

Table 2: Sample Size of the Study

Senatorial Zones	Schools	No. of Students	Sample
Nasarawa South	GSS Lafia	256	52
	GSS Keana	75	15
	GSS Akurba	161	33
	GSS Obi	145	29
Nasarawa North	GSS Akwanga Cent.	120	24
	GSS N/Eggon	206	42
	GSS Andaha	63	13
	GSS Gudi	119	24
Nasarawa West	GSS Karu	84	17
	G.C Nasarawa	358	72

GSS Yelwa Keffi	105	21
GSS Garaku	180	36
Total	1872	378

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023

An instrument tagged “Child Trafficking, Mental Wellbeing and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (CTMW&AAQ)” was designed by the researcher to obtain data from the respondents in the area. The instrument which consists of five (5) items was designed based on 4- point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA= 4), Agree (A= 3) Disagree (D= 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD= 1). It was clustered in to two segments of impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing and then the impact of child trafficking on academic achievements of secondary school students in Nasarawa state. The researcher visited the sampled schools with the introductory letter from the Educational Foundations Department, Nasarawa State University, Keffi seeking permission to conduct research in the sampled schools with the help of three research assistants selected from the teachers of the sampled schools. The instrument was administered and retrieved on the spot for analysis. Mean and standard deviations were used in answering the research questions while the null hypotheses were however tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). In answering the research questions, any weighted mean below 2.50 will be considered disagree while above will be considered agree. In testing the null hypotheses, if the p-values were found to be less than 0.05, the null hypotheses will be rejected while for those greater than 0.05 will be accepted or retained.

Results

Research Question One: What is the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviations on the Impact of Child Trafficking on Mental Wellbeing of Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D.	Decision
1	Child trafficking has impacted negatively on my personality and mental wellbeing	149	158	46	25	3.07	.872	Agree
2	Being a victim of child trafficking, I am exposed to depression, self-harm and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	79	56	81	162	2.14	1.18	Disagree
3	As a victim of child trafficking, I always feel isolated, loss of autonomy and forced servitude	139	127	42	70	2.89	1.10	Agree
4	During my captivity, I experience different forms of violence and abuses, poor living conditions and exposure to a wide range of diseases	143	112	72	51	2.92	1.05	Agree
5	My previous experiences had made me to display excessive aggression, shy or one form of	128	150	68	32	2.99	1.06	Agree

maladjustment or the other

Grand Mean

2.81 1.05

Table 3 revealed the mean and standard deviations rating regarding the responses of respondents on the impact of child trafficking on mental wellbeing of secondary school students in Nasarawa state. From the table, item number 2 had a mean score of 2.14 which is below the bench mark (2.50) indicating that the respondents have disagreed with the item. On the other hand, items 1, 3, 4 & 5 had mean scores of 2.80, 2.96, 3.30 and 3.05 respectively which were all above 2.50 bench mark set for this study indicating that the respondents have agreed with all the items. Also, the overall mean score (2.81) shows that child trafficking had impact on mental wellbeing of secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

Research Question Two: What is the impact of child trafficking on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviations on the Impact of Child Trafficking on Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D.	Decision
1	My past experience made me not to be comfortable with schooling any longer	154	133	58	33	2.80	1.12	Agree
2	As a survivor, I feel helpless and hopeless, struggling to feel competent with life skills, ashamed about my past experience and angry about missed education and job training	125	157	53	43	2.96	1.06	Agree
3	My academic pursuit was disrupted and delayed making me to lose hope in life	202	117	31	28	3.30	.876	Agree
4	I hardly concentrate on my studies because I always reflect on my bitter experience	155	129	52	42	3.05	.932	Agree
5	I always feel reluctant seeking any assistance or advice towards my educational pursuit	52	87	114	125	2.17	1.16	Disagree
Grand Mean						2.86	1.03	

Table 4 revealed the mean and standard deviations rating regarding the responses of respondents on the impact of child trafficking on academic achievement of secondary school students in Nasarawa state. The table revealed a mean score of 2.17 for item number 5 which is below the bench mark (2.50) indicating that the respondents have disagreed with the item. On the other hand, items 1, 2, 3 & 4 had mean scores of 2.80, 2.96, 3.30 and 3.05 respectively which were all above 2.50 bench mark set for this study indicating that the respondents have agreed with all the items. Also, the overall mean score (2.86) shows that child trafficking had impact on academic achievement of secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

Testing of Hypotheses

The formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significant using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMr).

H0¹: There is no significant relationship between child trafficking and mental wellbeing of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

Table 5: Correlation Between Child Trafficking and Students' Mental Wellbeing

Variable	N	\bar{X}	Std Dev.	Df	R	Sig. (2- tailed)	Decision
Child Trafficking	378	2.92	.86	376	.811	.010	Reject H0 ₂
Mental Wellbeing	378	3.19	.77				

***significant at 0.05 level

Table 5 revealed an R value of .811 and a p value of .010 which is less than the alpha value (0.05). This indicates a significant positive relationship between child trafficking and students' mental wellbeing in Nasarawa state. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between child trafficking and mental wellbeing of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state is hereby rejected.

H0²: There is no significant relationship between child trafficking and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nasarawa state.

Table 6: Correlation between Child Trafficking and Students' Academic Achievement

Variable	N	\bar{X}	Std Dev.	Df	R	Sig. (2- tailed)	Decision
Child Trafficking	378	2.89	.98	376	.828	.003	Reject H0 ₂
Academic Achiev.	378	3.20	.87				

***significant at 0.05 level

Table 6 revealed a positive significant relationship between child trafficking and students' academic achievement. From the table, n= 378, R= .828 and p value was .003 which is less than the alpha value (0.05) implying that child trafficking has significant positive relationship with students' academic achievements, hence the null hypothesis two was rejected.

Discussions

Findings from research question one and null hypothesis one revealed a significant positive relationship between child trafficking and mental wellbeing of secondary school students in Nasarawa state, Nigeria. This finding has agreed with the findings of Chambers, Gibson, Chaffin, Takagi, Nguyen and Mears-Clark (2022) which revealed that trafficked children are exposed to a range of health- related problems. During captivity, they experience physical violence, sexual exploitation, psychological abuse, poor living conditions and exposure to a wide range of diseases, which may have long lasting consequences on their physical, reproductive and mental health. In addition, many survivors may end up experiencing post-traumatic stress, difficulty in relationships, depression, memory loss, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, and other severe forms of mental trauma. The impacts on their mental health include anxiety, depression, self-harm and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Cloitre, Courtois, Charuvastra, Carapezza, Stolbach & Green, 2021). Analysis of results from the research question and null hypothesis two also shows a significant positive relationship between child trafficking and

academic achievement of secondary school students in Nasarawa state. This finding is in line with the findings of Muthigani (2015) pointed out that child trafficking may affect pupils' academic achievement, but it also affects or disrupt teaching and learning in schools. Victims of child trafficking may also show or display habits such as withdrawal, excessive aggression shy or one form of maladjustment or the other. Hence, there is a need for these children to be properly rehabilitated and re-integrated into the school system because their successes in negotiating these challenges predict school success. Child trafficking may affect students' academic adjustment, which may lead to total disruption of teaching and learning in school. Victims of child trafficking may also show or display habits such as withdrawal, excessive aggression, shy or one form of maladjustment or the other. Hence, there is need for these children to be properly rehabilitated and re-integrated into the school system because their successes in negotiating these challenges predict school success.

Conclusion

Child trafficking as a form of modern slavery has long- term and repeated consequences on students' mental wellbeing as well as their academic pursuit. The victims are exposed to a lot of post-traumatic stress such as difficulty in relationships, depression, memory loss, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, and other severe forms of mental trauma which have direct impacts on students' psychological wellbeing and their academic achievements.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. There is need for Nasarawa state Government to establish rehabilitation centres in the three senatorial zones of the state to handle and rehabilitate victims of child trafficking aim at restoring back their senses of belonging and mental wellbeing.
2. The Nasarawa state Government should ensure the recruitment and posting of qualified guidance and counselling personnel in secondary schools that will counsel students who are victims of child trafficking in order to restore back their interest and confidence to continue with schooling.

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