Child Abandonment And Its Implications For Educational Development In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This is a position paper that examined child abandonment and its implications for educational development in Nigeria. Child abandonment is a common social phenomenon in Nigeria and the rate at which the act is been committed calls for serious action by all in order to minimize the impact of this ugly menace on our society. The paper therefore identified the causes and effects of child abandonment which ranges from family conflicts, barbaric cultural practices, poverty and homelessness, and intra/inters ethnic conflicts among others. The paper emphasis that when a child is abandoned, the child is faced with physical, behavioural, psychological consequences and the society faces the bulk of these consequences. It was recommended amongst others that government should ensure strict monitoring of the child rights acts in all the states, conflicts in the family should be settled amicably, youths and intending parents should be properly counselled on the roles of parenting. It was concluded that education is a vital tool which should be used as an instrument to minimize child abandonment in the society.

Key words: Child abandonment, Education, Child abuse

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian child is faced with a lot of challenges which arises from the family, the school, peer groups, and the society at large. One of such challenges is the plague of child abandonment. Child abandonment is gradually eating deep into our society and the value as well as the place of our future leaders is gradually been darkened by this inhuman act.

It is in this light that this paper seeks to look at the meaning of child abandonment, cause and effects of child abandonment and the possible remedies to curtail the menace of child abandonment through the use of education.

Education is seen as a process of nurturing, guiding, training and bringing forth worthwhile character in an individual. Onyido (2009) defines education as a black box through which an individual passes and becomes different from what he used to be. This implies that education brings about positive changes in the life of an individual. It is said that one of the aims of education is to instil moral values in man, such that if we succeed in instilling these moral values in man, society will take care of its self. It is the foundation of any political and socio-economic advancement in any country. It is on record that countries such as China, Korea, Singapore to mention a few have overcome many developmental challenges such as inequality, under employment and poverty as a result of advancement in education. These challenges have far reaching impacts on the society and if overcome will prove beneficial to the society.

Child abandonment is a societal phenomenon and as such requires that society passes through the black box (education) in order to become different from what it is. The society does not exist in a mass but through social institutions of which the family is the first and the most important. Individuals are formed or made in the family, thus if individuals are properly educated, the issue of child abandonment can be minimized from the society.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Education

Education is derived from the Latin word Edu care which means the act of nurturing, guiding, training and bringing forth worthwhile character of a child. Education as defined by Oxford Advanced Dictionary (1995) is the process of training and instructing, especially children and young people in schools and colleges which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills. Education is social institution that is derived from the value of the society in which it exists (Fafunwa, 1994; Ugwuja, 2010). Thus, how organised and developed an educational system is depends on the level of value placed on it by the society.

According to E.B Castle (1965) education is all that happens to us from the day we were born to the day we die. As such, education can be stated as a continuous process that takes man to his grave. It can alternatively be defined as the process of collation and utilization of knowledge, man acquires knowledge and utilizes the knowledge acquired (Alfred Whitehead, 1907; Asaju & Adagba, 2014). Therefore, knowledge acquired must be utilized and must reflect in the sum totality of man's behaviour and in his interactions with others in the society. It involves the collation of abstract thoughts and psycho-motor competencies for existence in an atomised social order (Ojobo, 2008). It is the art of acculturation that sees an individual aided to reach his/her maximum potentials (Okafor, 1981; Asaju & Adagba, 2014).

Education can be used to bring about positive changes and development needed in the society, through education man can think reason and act as a better person in the society he finds himself. According to Alufohal & Ezeani (2012) education liberates the population from ignorance and fuels development. Hence, the goal of education is to achieve total development of a child and the pattern of interaction between the parents and the child indicates the manner the child is socialised into behaviours that are acceptable by the society. It is a tool that seeks to integrate individuals effectively into the society in order to attain national consciousness and self-realisation (Umoru, 2015). As such, education is the totality of the advancement of the personality of the child.

This therefore calls to question the reasons behind child abandonment. Analyst have identified child abandonment as a common social phenomenon in Nigeria and the rate at which the act is been committed calls for serious action by all to eradicate this ugly menace from our society. A report from the United Nations International Education Fund (UNICEF) shows that no fewer than 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of schools out of this number more females were recorded than males (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Looking at this figure, one is tempted to ask how effective Nigeria has implemented and monitored international and national policies on child rights acts and education such as:
1. Children Parliament Act, 2003
2. Child Rights Act, 2003
3. Universal Basic Education Act, 2004
4. Child Rights Legislature in Nigeria Act, 2011.

Children are the future leaders of tomorrow and every society that hopes to survive and be relevant, must give prompt attention to it's future leaders. It was in light of the place and significance of children in the society that the Nigeria government signed on to these policies for the protection and education of the Nigerian child. These policies spell out the rights of children and the responsibilities of parents as well as government towards the children. In order to strictly monitor the compliance and enforcement of these acts, children, parents, government and the society at large must be synthesized, awareness programmes must be carried out and all these can only be visible if the populace is educated. Therefore, education is very necessary in combating the menace of child abandonment in Nigeria.

Child Abandonment
The word abandonment literally means to leave, forsake, desert, left unattended to, uncared for. The Merriam Webster Dictionary (1828) defines the word abandonment as the act of giving up someone with the intent of never again claiming a right or interest in the person. It means to withdraw support or help from someone. Abandonment as a word originated from an Anglo French word "abandoner" which was derived from the phrase "a bundun" which means to hand over ,thus to abandon means to let go of something, to lose interest in someone, to hold back ones love and affection towards a person.

Child abandonment is the act of abandoning a child; a child refers to someone who is not grown enough to take responsibilities of his life. A child is abandoned when a parent or parents fail to take responsibilities of the child. It is the practice of relinquishing interest and claims over ones offspring with or without the intent of never again resuming guardianship over the child. The phrase is also used to describe the physical abandonment of the child which includes acts such as neglect and emotional rejection. Child abandonment is an extension of child abuse and it is a phenomenon that is gradually eating deep into our society. (Portwood, 2006; Nuszkiewicz, 2012) defined child abuse as the deliberate use of force, physically or psychologically to carry out acts that have the possibility of causing developmental disruptions as well as injury to the mental and physical state of a child. It is an act intentionally carried out with the view of inflicting harm on the child (WHO, 2002).

A case of child abandonment is alarming and is gradually building up as a social vice, which if urgent attention is not given, will become a national threat to the country. The rate at which this plague occurs in our society poses the great question that every concerned Nigerian will want to ask, where have we and why have we thrown our moral consciousness away? What moral justification do parents have to abandon a child? It is pathetic that a parent who is suppose to nature a child will rather choose to abandon him or her with no feeling or pang of guilt. The manner in which the act is practiced in Nigeria exposes the rate of our moral decadence. Countless children are been abandoned daily and are flooding our streets at an alarming rate, these children have been forced by their parents to grow up and take responsibilities of themselves. And as such have become easy and ready prey to unscrupulous individuals in the society who lure them into acts such as prostitution, robbery, cultism, drug abuse, hooliganism and other anti social vices.

Causes of Child Abandonment
The rate at which children are abandoned in Nigeria is on the increase and in combating this menace, it is necessary to x-ray the reasons why child abandonment occur in our society. Children are not just abandoned, parents do not just abandon their children and there are reasons why this act takes place. Although these reasons are not justifiable enough for parents to abandon their child, the following are some of the causes of child abandonment in Nigeria.

Family Conflict

The family is the first place of socialisation a child experiences. The family serves as an important aspect for the development of a child. It is also in the family that the act of abandonment starts. Thus, the family is seen as the sole cause of child abandonment. Conflicts in the family if not well resolved by parents, leads to broken homes which results to children been abandoned either by the father, mother or by both (Lemin & Sarah, 2008). Scholars have opined that in situations where parents are abusive towards a child, it goes to affect the character of the child latter in life, who in turn will be abusive towards other children (Thrasher, 1927; Poonen, 2014). This is further promulgated by the contribution that the family is widely acknowledged as among the most powerful socializing agent in a young child's development (Maccoby et al, 1957; Onyido, 2016) therefore the child should be given adequate love, care, attention and support that will make him feel loved and wanted. On the other hand when the child is abandoned, the child grows up with the negative feeling of rejection and feels unwanted.

Negative Cultural Practices

In some society where they still practice some barbaric cultures such as the superstitious belief that children born with deformed body parts are symbols of curses from the gods and as such, should be abandoned. This had led to the abandoning of children with certain medical conditions such as lameness, blindness or handicapped. Also, in some ethnic groups where it is seen as a taboo to be a single mother, mothers with baby/babies are faced with the option of abandoning or neglecting the child/children in far away places just to avoid scorn and shame from the society. The issue of preferred sex also contributes greatly to abandonment. Most Nigerian culture prefers the male child to a female child and for these set of women; their marriages are only secured when they give birth to a male child. There has been reported cases where (during child birth), women trade out their female child (abandon) in replacement of a male child just to remain in and be accepted as complete wives in their matrimonial homes.

Poverty and Homelessness

Poverty is a situation where one is not able to or finds it difficult to provide for his basic needs. A person is said to be poor when he can't provide for his food, clothe, shelter, health care and education. Poverty is also one of the causes of child abandonment, parenting a child comes with a lot of responsibility because a child will need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, sent to school and provided with good health care facilities. The rate of poverty, which is as a result of unemployment in Nigeria, has placed more of our populace below poverty level. According to Sed Lock (1989) the physical abuse of child of which child abandonment is an aspect that is almost seven times more likely to be reported in homes where the annual income is very low. A parent who is not gainfully employed may turn abusive due to financial pressure at home and where it is not properly handled, may just choose to go away and abandon the family.

Intra/Inter Ethnic Crises

Conditions such as war and family displacement are other causes of child abandonment. Sometimes child abandonment is not intended by parents but in cases where there are conflicts such as war, a lot of people are displaced from their homes. When this happens, there is a scramble for individual safety and it is this situations that parents loses their children and these children become abandoned, the clash between farmers and herdsmen has worsen the situation.

Effects of Child Abandonment
Child abandonment is a societal problem which must be stopped. The consequences of child abandonment moves from the child to the society, therefore the end effects of the act is on the society. Below are some of the consequences of child abandonment in Nigeria.

Physical Consequences
This has to do with physical injuries inflicted on an abandoned child. Sometimes physical injuries are relatively minor while at other times it is major. When a child is abandoned, the child is exposed to unfavourable health conditions which sometimes results to physical injuries such as bruises, cuts, broken bones. At very severe cases, a child abandoned at infant age might be down with cases of polio because as at when   he was abandoned, necessary immunization have not been administered. Also in some cases, the stress of chronic abuse causes a hyperousal response by certain areas of the brain which might result in hyper activity, sleep disturbances and anxiety as well as increased vulnerability to post traumatic stress disorder, learning and memory difficulties (Dallam, 2001; Perry, 2001). Studies indicate that there is correlation between varying forms of households abuses and poor health (Felitti, 2002). Furthermore, child abuse and neglect have shown to cause important regions of the brain to fail to form properly resulting in impaired physical, mental and emotional development (Watts-English, Fortson, Gibler, Hooper & De Bellis, 2006). As such, they have a higher probability of suffering from asthma, ulcer, high blood pressure and bronchitis to mention but a few (Springer, Sheridan, Kuo & Carnes, 2007).

Behavioural Consequences
An abandoned child feels rejected and unwanted and as such, because of the abusive experiences that he has passed through, there is the tendency that he will equally be abusive toward others. When these children are opportune to be in school, they display truancy as they are easily spotted among the disobedient groups of students who constantly break school rules and regulations. It is estimated that approximately one third of abusive and neglected children will eventually victimise their own children (Dube et al, 2001). Drugs and alcohol addicts are equally found among abandoned or neglected children, as there is an increased likelihood that neglected children will smoke, drink and take illicit drugs. This assumption is supported by the National Institute on drug abuse (2002) when it released a report that as many as two third of people in drug treatment are reported to have been abused as children. According to the U.S Department of Human Services (2008) an estimated 905,000 children have fallen victims to child neglect and abuse. These acts have seen victims exhibit high-risk behaviours. Johson, Rew & Sternglanz (2006) suggest that child abuse have a higher likelihood of engaging in sexual risk-taking that expose them to contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Thus, the ill of child abandonment tends to be in a vicious cycle, and therefore needs to be minimized from our society.

Psychological Consequences
This is also referred to as emotional abuse. According to Kinard (1979) emotional abuse refers to an injury to a child's psychological self. The immediate emotional effects of child abandonment are fear and inability to trust others which translates to life-long consequences of low self esteem, depression and relationship difficulties. As such, children who are abused and neglected by parents often do not form secured attachment to them (Morrison, Frank, Holland & Kates, 1999; Onyido, 2016). These early attachment difficulties can lead to latter difficulties in relationship with others-adults as well as with peers. According to a publication by the child welfare information gateway, child abuse leads to psychological problems such as depression, emotional difficulties and anxiety issues (Child Welfare Organisation, 2014). In

furtherance to this, another study established that psychological conditions such as reactive attachment disorder, attention disorder and dissociative disorder (Teicher, 2000).

Societal Consequences

For every child abandoned, the society is at the receiving end. The society is a complex hierarchy of classes and strata and for every injustice meted on the child there is a consequence on the society. Taking a closer look at this, a child who is abandoned suffers pain, mental torture and withdrawal. However, the child is not isolated in the society and as such the society bears the brunt of the psychological, economical and physical impacts of the abandonment. The society pays the grand price of children abandonment, the more children are abandoned, the more society records cases of juvenile and adult criminal activities, domestic violence, and low self- esteemed individuals who will eventually drop out of schools. With these, literacy level of the society reduces with high rate of unemployed youths which leads to high rate of poverty. With poverty, it is more likely that more children will be abandoned and then society goes through the vicious cycle all over again with increasing tendencies of all the consequences mentioned above. All around us, we see pictures and hear cases of children been abandoned, the social media is flooded with gruesome picture of abandoned babies in sewage tanks, refuse disposal sites and in uncompleted buildings; society must rise against these inhuman acts.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, child abandonment has been established as the neglect of the child by his/her parent or parents, either intentionally or unintentionally. The causes of child abandonment in Nigeria include family conflicts, negative cultural practices, poverty and homelessness, and intra /inter ethnic conflicts. Irrespective of the reason behind the act, it is viewed as a criminal act because it is a conduct regarded by society to be destructive, endangering the safety and comfort of the child and for which the offender is punishable under the law.

The consequences of child abandonment are physical, behavioural, psychological and societal consequences. This paper has established that when a child is abandoned, the society suffers. Therefore, the society must ensure the eradication of this ugly menace through the use of education. Thus, society must rise up to the task of eradicating child abandonment, as everyone in the society (the child, parents, non-governmental agencies and the government) must act accordingly by contributing its quota to end this problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The causes and effects of child abandonment in Nigeria can be minimized if the following actions are fully adopted:

- Conflicts in families are inevitable and as such should be settled amicably without the involvement of the child/children.
- Culture is not static; certain cultural practices which are not in line with children's right acts should be abolished.
- Economic situation of the country should be improved, more job opportunities should be provided.
- Youths and intending parents should be properly counselled on the responsibilities of parenthood and should be made to face the law where they default.
- Attitudes of people towards single parenthood especially single mothers should not be judgemental. They should not be scorned at and stigmatised.
- Intra/inter-ethnic conflicts should be settled peacefully. Government must ensure safety of lives and properties of its citizens

- Finally, Government at all levels should ensure the full implementation of the Child rights act, 2003. Children parliament act, 2003. Universal basic education act 2004 and Child rights legislation act, 2011.

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