

# Child Abuse in Nigeria: Responses of Christian Churches and the Way Out

Dr. Victor Ifeanyi Ede<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Dominic Zuoke Kalu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State Nigeria  
E-mail: victorifede@gmail.com or ede.victor@mouau.edu.ng  
Phone Number: +2348038361285

<sup>2</sup>School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State Nigeria  
E-mail: domziki@gmail.com  
Phone Number: +2348035628052

**Abstract:** *This paper examined the responses of Christian churches in ameliorating the effects of child abuse on children in Nigeria. Child abuse includes any behaviour which neglects the child's survival and development needs, causes physical or emotional injury, or subjects the child to measures, situations and experiences which interfere with his healthy development. Children in Nigeria are exposed vulnerably to engage in street/highway hawking, exploitative labour and domestic help, street begging, girl-child marriage, illiteracy and female genital mutilation. The Nigerian government and some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have made several efforts to curtail the menace of child abuse in the country. However, child abuse has persisted, hence the need for Christian churches to initiate actions against the menace. Churches in Nigeria have taken bold steps in addressing the problem of child abuse in the country through preaching, public sensitization, and establishment of motherless babies' homes. The paper recommends among others the need for churches to sanction members who are involved in child abuse; and the need for churches to collaborate with government agencies for effective implementation of rehabilitation programmes for abused children. It is believed that if such measures are taken the problem of child abuse in Nigeria will be properly addressed.*

**Keywords:** Abuse, Child, Church, Nigeria, Response.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The child is the bedrock of any society and as such needs to be trained, adequately handled and protected. Children are the greatest assurance of the continuity of human society. Without children today there will be no society of humans tomorrow. Yet children are the most vulnerable members of the society. Onwe (2014)<sup>[1]</sup> stated that Nigerian children are highly vulnerable to income gap or poverty, cultural values, religious incidence and unacceptable economic and social factors. This vulnerability usually exposes children to abuse. Olok-Ake (2000)<sup>[2]</sup> described child abuse as all sorts of injustice, abnormality and inhuman treatment given to the young feeble ones by the adult generation. The African Network for the Protection and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN)<sup>[3]</sup> defined child abuse as the physical, emotional or sexual exploitation by parents, guardians or others. According to Alokun (2010)<sup>[4]</sup>

Child abuse includes any behaviour which neglects the child's survival and development needs, causes physical or emotional injury, harassment or subjects the child to measures, situations and experiences which interfere with the healthy development towards adulthood (p. 240).

Child abuse violates the United Nations declaration on human rights, the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child adopted in 1989 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. This evil, which is also considered offensive to any genuine Christian conscience, is becoming very common in many villages, towns and cities in Nigeria. The Nigerian child like every other child in the world has the right to live and such protects them from people trampling on their rights. Children in Nigeria are exposed vulnerably to engage in street/highway hawking, exploitative labour and domestic help, street begging, girl-child marriage, illiteracy and female genital mutilation. The Nigerian government and some Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) have made several efforts to curtail the menace of child abuse in the country. However, child abuse has persisted, hence the need for Christian churches to initiate actions against child abuse.

## 2. FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE IN NIGERIA:

Child abuse in Nigeria appears in various forms. According to Ebigbo (2003)<sup>[5]</sup>, "analysis of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria nation, may found that child abandonment, sexual abuse, child neglect, vagrancy, kidnapping and hawking were the most seen forms of child abuse" (p. 2). In this paper, the following forms of child abuse in Nigeria will be discussed; child labour, child abandonment, vagrancy, sexual abuse, child marriage, child trafficking and female genital mutilation. These are the common and dangerous forms of child abuse in Nigeria today.

2.1 Child Labour: The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)<sup>[6]</sup> defined child labour as "work that is mentally, physically and socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and deprives them opportunities for schooling and development". According to Adedapo (2004)<sup>[7]</sup> child labour in Nigeria is the employment of children under the age of eighteen in the manner that restricts or prevents them from basic education and development. Child labour remains a major source of concern in Nigeria. The high level of diverse and tedious jobs that children execute in dangerous circumstances is particularly worrisome. These jobs include being street vendors, beggars, car washers or watchers and shoe shiners. Others work as apprentice mechanics, hair dressers and bus conductors, while a large number work as domestic servants. It is worrisome that young girls and boys are sent from rural areas to families in the cities to serve as house-maids and house-boys. Children who work as house-helpers may also be required either by their parents or by the families they serve to sell items of food, clothing and general merchandise on the streets. In most cases, they are part-time street traders and subject to many of the damaging facets of street life such as kidnapping, drug abuse and prostitution.

In the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria, children may attend morning or afternoon school and hawk goods out of school hours, though there are some children who trade on the streets the whole day. The children's income helps their families or house-madams financially or pay for school fees at times of their children against the social contract they had with the parents from village to train the child. It is a fact of common knowledge that at the public highways leading into and out of the major cities in Nigeria, children are actively involved in hawking to the extent of even obstructing traffic and constituting a cog to the free flow of same. It is the same Nigerian child that hawks at ministries, social welfare departments, police stations and even the court premises, and nobody seems to show concern. It is quite convincing that no child desired to be involved in exploitative labour, but where as in our economy, there is depression and hardship, a child would voluntarily accept a job that is labour intensive and exploitative just to source money for his school fees, future trade or assist the poor parents.

2.2 Child Abandonment: There have been increased cases of abandonment of normal infants by unmarried or very poor mothers in our society. An online media, News NAIJ.com captured some cases of child abandonment thus: On January 27, 2015, a baby was found inside a plastic bag in the Abule Egba suburb, Lagos. The baby was approximately 3 months old. Also in December 2013, a 23 year old woman who allegedly dumped her new born baby in Dutse, Jigawa state was arrested by the police operatives. In 2014, a sales girl at Alaba Rago market in Ojo area of Lagos State gave birth in the toilet and then tried to flush the baby. However, the baby got stuck in it. When he was released, he died ([www.naija.com](http://www.naija.com))<sup>[8]</sup>.

2.3 Vagrancy: A vagrant is a person without a settled home. Vagrant children are usually found in the streets of our cities. They live or work on the streets deprived of family care and protection. These children, usually wretched and ragged, are forced to the streets as a result of abuse and exploitation by people responsible for them. The National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria<sup>[9]</sup> identified four forms of street children in Nigeria to include:

- a. The *Almajiri*, who are a fallout of the abuse of the *Tsangaya* system of Islamic education.
- b. The child hawkers who are forced to the street by their families, to help in bringing in money to support the family, or as a result of being trafficked and used for child labour.
- c. The child beggars, who are out on the streets on their own or who accompany disabled adults.
- d. The 'area boys' seen in Nigeria's largest city (Lagos). They are delinquent youths who roam the streets and markets extorting money from unsuspecting members of the public.

2.4 Sexual Abuse: Child sexual abuse can be described as a form of child abuse in which an adult uses a child for sexual stimulations. According to Theoklitou (2012)<sup>[10]</sup> child sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed towards the physical gratification or financial profit of the person committing the act. Martin (1993)<sup>[11]</sup> listed some forms of child sexual abuse to include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities, indecent exposure of the genitals to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual sexual contact with a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, or using a child to produce child pornography. NAN (2015)<sup>[12]</sup> reported that child sexual abuse occurs all over the world but it's phenomenal growth over the years in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. The National Statistics Office<sup>[13]</sup> in its National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) report in 2008 stated that over 25% of adolescents in Nigeria often experience the first sexual abuse at the age of 15.

2.5 Girl Child Marriage: Child marriage is the marriage whereby minors are given in the matrimony. Child marriage is common in many parts of the world, especially in parts of Asia and Africa including Nigeria. Such marriages are typically arranged and often forced; as young children are generally not capable of giving valid consent to enter into marriage. Marriages under the age of majority have a great potential to constitute a form of child abuse. (<http://www.endvawnow.org...>)<sup>[14]</sup>.

Onwe (2014) observed that child marriage in Nigeria is more among the northerners with minimal practice in southern part of the country. The girl-child marriage poses life threatening risk like Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), and associated pregnancy related complications. The tradition of early marriage is very difficult to change and has led to abusive practices which are condoned by parents. According to Okolo (1989)<sup>[15]</sup> the practice has made girls engage in street hawking to assist the mother to buy household goods for them when they marry. In some cases you may see a girl-child betrothed to a man who is of the age of her father. The child whose rights are violated or abused may not even be disturbed since she takes it as a normal way of life or the culture of her people.

**2.6 Child Trafficking:** This is the recruitment transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. David (2005)<sup>[16]</sup> observed that children are trafficked for several purposes such as commercial sexual exploitation, bonded labour, camel jockeying, child domestic labour, drug couriering, child soldiering, illegal adoption and begging. It is difficult to obtain reliable estimate of the number of children trafficked each year, primarily due to the criminal nature of the practice. But the International Labour Organization<sup>[17]</sup> in 2002 estimated that over 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. In Nigeria, child trafficking has been on the increase in the recent times. Information provided by the immigration authorities in 1998 indicated that children between the ages of seven and sixteen have been transported to Gabon and Cameroon, from various points in the states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers and Imo. Between March 1994 and January 1997, at least 400 children were rescued in Akwa Ibom state, which is one of the main departure points for Gabon (The Guardian, August 9, 1998)<sup>[18]</sup>.

**2.7 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** Female Genital Mutilation is defined by the World Health Organization (W.H.O)<sup>[19]</sup> as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers who often play other central roles in communities such as attending childbirths. Female Genital Mutilation is recognized internationally as a violation of the human right of girls and women. W.H.O (2014) stated that, Female Genital Mutilation has no benefits, and it harms girls and women. The practice is therefore a form of child abuse and should not be tolerated in this modern era. Consequences of this practice include shock due to severe bleeding, intense pain due to the traditional methods usually used, risk of HIV/AIDS and death in some cases.

### **3. Causes of Child Abuse in Nigeria**

Child abuse is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes. Understanding the causes of child abuse is critical to addressing the problem. Some causes of child abuse identified by Okebukola (2012)<sup>[20]</sup> include: unwanted pregnancy, poverty, broken homes, and busy parents.

**3.1 Unwanted Pregnancy:** This refers to the sum of mis-timed and unwanted pregnancies. Pre-marital pregnancy has attained terrifying dimension such that it has become a social problem facing the Nigerian society. Its problems, most prevalent of which is the resultant population increase, has undoubtedly continued to place unbearable burden on the individual, the family, the community and the entire society. According to Aigbe and Zannu (2012)<sup>[21]</sup> over 900,000 births to adolescents occur annually and 150 out of every 1000 women who gave birth in Nigeria are 19 years old or under. These young people who may not be prepared for the challenging task of being parents end up producing children who are often denied quality education and other social opportunities of legitimate inheritance. The children usually grow up without the needed care and support they deserve to develop appropriately. Children who find themselves in such situations may be forced to take child labour as a means of survival. Also, some of these young girls end up abandoning their innocent children on the streets.

**3.2 Poverty:** Poverty as a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompasses such issues as inadequate income, nutrition and education. It is characterized by vulnerability and exposure to risk, low life expectancy, low purchasing power, insufficient access to social and economic services. A major cause of child abuse can be traced to poverty. Hence, LesaBethea (1999)<sup>[22]</sup> observed that poverty is the most frequently and persistently noted factor for child abuse. Majority of families where child abuse occurs live in poverty. Drucker (1997) cited by Odu and Alokun (2011)<sup>[23]</sup> concluded in his research that although child abuse occurs across socioeconomic spectrum, evidence shows that child abuse is more likely to occur in poor families. Some girls who are mostly from poor families go as far as producing babies and selling them in order to make money. This has led to the increase of illegal maternity homes popularly known as “Baby Factories” or “Baby Farms”, where children are born and sold to prospective buyers. Also in recent times children are seen engaged in petty trading and street begging; while some hawk for their parents and guardians when they should be laying solid foundation for their future. There are also cases of child prostitution to get money. Poverty is therefore a major factor that drives child abuse in Nigeria.

**3.3 Broken Homes:** When any marriage stands on the brink of collapse, attention is usually given to the differences of the couple. This is sometimes at the expense of the total well being of the children of the marriage. The divorce of a

child's parents can lead to child abuse due to diminished parental care. Alokani (2010) observed that children are safer living with their biological married parents than in other family configurations. Breakdown of marriages or death of one or both parents can therefore lead to the abuse of children. This is due to the fact that there are little or no safety nets for such victims who are usually abandoned to their fate.

3.4 Search for greener pasture by Parents: The children may become neglected or abused when the parents are too busy to find and spare time with the children and supervise them. Such parents leave their children at home and search for greener pasture. Ebigbo (2002)<sup>[24]</sup> noted that this occurs most commonly in homes in which all material needs and more have been provided. The ever busy parents discover too late that the children have found alternative pursuits often involving crimes and drugs.

#### 4. EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN COMBATING CHILD ABUSE IN NIGERIA:

ObiKeguna (2008)<sup>[25]</sup> observed that in Nigeria, no attention was given to child abuse until very recent times. According to her, the first professional efforts to harmonize professional contributions and enlighten the public, culminated in all African International Workshop on "Child Labour in Africa" which was organized by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection of Child Abuse and Neglect in Africa (ANPPCAN) in April 1986. ANPPCAN was formed by a number of African delegates to look into child abuse/neglect as it pertains to Africa.

It is noteworthy that the Nigerian Government has made frantic efforts to deal with the problem of child abuse in recent times. One of such efforts is the ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC). On 20th November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly Adopted the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), while the Organization of the African Union Assembly of Heads of States of government adopted the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC) in July 1990. Nigeria has signed both international instruments and had ratified them in 1991 and 2000 respectively. Since the ratification of these international instruments, Nigeria has instituted various legislative and institutional measures at both Federal and State levels, aimed at addressing various forms of child abuse. Some recently enacted legislations include:

- a. The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003<sup>[26]</sup>.
- b. Trafficking in Person (prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015, which replaced the Trafficking in Persons (prohibition) Law Administration Act 2003 (as amended in 2005)<sup>[27]</sup>
- c. Ebonyi state Law No.010 (2001) on the Abolition of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Children and Women<sup>[28]</sup>.
- d. Edo State Female Genital Mutilation (prohibition) Law 2002<sup>[29]</sup>.
- e. Cross River State Girl Child Marriages and Female Circumcision (prohibition) Law 2000<sup>[30]</sup>.

These legislations prohibited different forms of child abuse in Nigeria. For instance sections 21-40 of the Child Rights Act 2003 provide for the protection of the rights of the child through the prohibition of:

1. Child marriage
2. Child betrothal
3. Infliction of tattoos and skin marks
4. Exposure to use, production and trafficking of drugs and other psychotropic substances
5. Use of children in any criminal activity
6. Abduction and unlawful removal and transfer of a child from lawful custody
7. Forced, exploitative or hazardous child labour including employment of the children as domestic helps outside their own home or family environment.

Under the Child Rights Act 2003, the age of legal majority for all purposes irrespective of gender has been fixed at eighteen (18) years, including the issue of consent to marriage or sexual activity. The Act prohibits marriage by any person below the age of eighteen (18) years.

The Government of Nigeria has also evolved some Institutions charged with child protection issues including protection against child abuse. These include:

- a. National and State Child Right Implementation Committee.
- b. Child Development Departments in the Federal and State ministries of Women Affairs.
- c. National Council of Child Rights Advocates of Nigeria (NACCRAN) as the Umbrella NGO involved in child rights advocacy.
- d. Nigerian Children's Parliament.
- e. National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP).

These institutions of Government have made efforts in addressing issues of child abuse in the country. For instance, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in a Press Release on 28th July

2015 announced that it recently uncovered child abuse cases during school sensitization campaign in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. According to the Press Release, evidence of the abuses were clearly seen from one school to another as some of the children have fresh physical marks and swollen heads reportedly inflicted on them by their guardians who use objects such as pressing irons, wooden spoons, electric irons and pounding pestle as corrective tools. The agency promised to step up its activities against human trafficking issues and child related abuses ([www.naptip.gov.ng/...](http://www.naptip.gov.ng/))<sup>[31]</sup>.

However, it has been observed that these efforts of government, especially the Child Rights Act have not yielded the desired result (Ezeamalu 2014<sup>[32]</sup>, UNICEF Nigeria<sup>[33]</sup>). For instance, out of the 36 states of the country, only 26 States have passed the Child Rights Act for onward enforcement (Amalu, 2010)<sup>[34]</sup>. In almost all the states, children of school age are still out of school. In places like Akwa Ibom, children are still branded witches and wizards beaten and starved. In virtually all the states of the Federation there is a record of one instance of child abuse or the other.

##### **5. Efforts of the Christian Churches in Combating Child Abuse in Nigeria:**

Historically, the Christian Religion came to West Africa and Nigeria in particular from Europe and America. In the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Portuguese, the French and the Italian Governments and Catholic Missionary bodies made several efforts to evangelize parts of what is known today as Nigeria, particularly Benin and Warri areas. But their efforts ended in fiasco. Later on, in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British Government and some English Missionaries and charitable groups became interested in West Africa. Freetown in Sierra Leone was consequently established as a settlement for freed slaves in 1787. In 1841, the British Government sponsored the first expedition to the Niger with the aim of establishing a Christian mission in the area. Ajayi Crowther, a Nigerian of the Yoruba extraction, one of the freed slaves in Sierra Leone happened to be part of this expedition (Diara & Nche, 2013)<sup>[35]</sup>. Between 1841 and 1990 Nigeria witnessed the work of five Missionary Societies, namely, the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) of the Church of England, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary society from England, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States and the French Catholic Society for African Missions. (Ajayi, 1965)<sup>[36]</sup>.

These Missionary societies introduced the Christian Religion to the people who have different cultures with several obnoxious practices. The Missionaries dealt with inhuman treatments against some categories of children such as twins, disabled children and slaves in the society. The Christian Religion which was planted in Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century brought with it a lot of changes in the social and cultural lives of the people. Hastings (1990) cited by Ugwu and Onah (2008)<sup>[37]</sup> stated that “Black Africa (Nigeria inclusive) is totally inconceivable without the presence of Christianity, a presence which a couple of generations ago could be unreasonably dismissed as fundamentally marginal and a mere subsidy of colonialism” (p. 33). Corroborating this, Diara and Nche (2013) made it clear that;

The Christian missions did not only contribute a religious factor after their arrival in Nigeria, they also constituted a viable socio-cultural force acting on the traditional life and practices which the people have lived for many millennia, before the advent of Christianity in the Country (p. 89).

This is true because there is no doubt that from the beginning; the church has been an agent of change in every society.

One of the social and cultural practices in Nigeria when Christianity was introduced in the country was child abuse, which manifested in the form of slavery, killing of twins, and child abandonment. The Roman Catholic Church, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and other mission churches that brought Christianity to Nigeria, made frantic efforts at confronting the different forms of child abuse in the Nigerian society. For instance the churches fought and wiped out the killing of twins in Nigeria. Agha (1997)<sup>[38]</sup> noted that before the advent of the Christian missions in many parts of the country, especially in the south, the twins were victims of circumstance because they were killed at birth or abandoned to die after birth. In many cases both the mother and the innocent twins suffered the same fate. According to him, the various missionary societies in Nigeria did not leave any stone unturned in their war against the evil cultural practices, where they existed. In the same vein, Ugwu and Onah (2008) noted that “in Nigeria Christianity has made a lot of contributions to the development of the nation, noticeably in such areas as in the establishment of schools, hospitals and wiping out some of obnoxious practices such as killing of twins” (p. 33). Noticeable among the missionaries who helped in the stopping of the killing of twins was Mary Slessor, a Presbyterian Church missionary. In order to settle and care for the abandoned children in those days, the churches established Motherless Babies Homes in different parts of the country. For instance, in 1942 the Methodist Church built a Motherless Babies Home in Uzuakoli in Bende L.G.A of Abia state. The home presently has about 29 inmates and operates under the care of Mary Corput, a Briton (Sampson, 2015)<sup>[39]</sup>.

Currently, the mission churches are still waxing strong in their efforts at tackling the problem of child abuse, which has taken different shapes in the country today. They do this by preaching against child abuse, sensitizing the public on the dangers of child abuse and frequent call on the governments to step up efforts in tackling the problem. For instance, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in a communiqué issued at the end of its meeting in Umuahia in September 2012, condemned the abuse of human rights and dignity in the country, and called on

relevant authorities to wake up to their responsibilities (Kaigama & Martins, 2012)<sup>[40]</sup>. Also, the Diocese of Lagos West (Anglican Communion) at the end of its third season of the 5<sup>th</sup> Synod in Lagos, in May, 2014 decried the increase in the cases of violence against women and children and frowned at the sales of babies by outfits popularly called “baby factories”. The Synod called on the states that have not adopted the Child Rights Act to do so in the interest of the Nigerian Child. It called on the Federal Government to establish a special agency to co-ordinate efforts in rehabilitating abused women and children (Odedeji, Adewunmi & Akindolure, 2014)<sup>[41]</sup>. These efforts are the right steps in the right direction as they will help to reduce the incidences of child abuse in Nigeria.

The Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria are not left out in the fight against child abuse in the country. Many of the Pentecostal churches preach and teach against child abuse. Some of them have even taken practical steps in rehabilitating abused children in the society. Examples of such Pentecostal churches are the Deeper Life Bible Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and This Present House, in Lagos. According to the teaching of the Deeper Life Bible Church, children are entitled to be nurtured and trained to adulthood by their parents (Deeper Christian Life Ministry, 2015)<sup>[42]</sup>. According to Owoye, (2011)<sup>[43]</sup> “the Deeper Life Bible Church forbids parents from abusing their children for whatever reasons. They must not allow them to embark on any labour that may jeopardize their education or health” (p. 61). The teaching of the church on child abuse is a commendable approach.

Two Pentecostal churches that have done more practical works in helping abused children are the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and This Present House, Lagos (Burgess, 2012)<sup>[44]</sup>. The Redeemed Christian Church of God runs a Faith-Based Organization that takes care of street children in Lagos, known as Habitation of Hope. Habitation of Hope was started after a team of women belonging to the Redeemed Christian Church of God began to evangelize street children at Kurano Beach in Lagos.

According to Burgess (2012);

During the day, boys from Kurano Beach go out on to the streets of Lagos to hustle and scavenge for food in an attempt to scrape a living, only to return to the beach at night because they cannot afford accommodation.

Girls as young as eleven ply their trade as commercial sex workers under the sway of pimps who profit from their exploitation (p. 33).

In 2004, the Redeemed Christian Church of God evangelists brought a group of newly converted boys to the RCCG’S annual Holy Ghost Congress. At the end of the week-long event, the boys refused to return to the beach and were temporarily housed in rented accommodation paid for by the Church. Since then, Habitation of Hope has opened a residential rehabilitation centre. It has also opened several branches of the church, called “Street Parishes”, which are specifically geared towards catering for the needs of children on the streets. Habitation of Hope sees street children as victims in need of rescue, rehabilitation, and if possible restoration to their families of origin. This is reflected in its mission statement; “To help street persons make Heaven; to help them become useful to society; to raise evangelists out of street persons; to settle and reunite them with their family” (Redeemed Christian Church of God, 2009)<sup>[45]</sup>.

Also, Freedom Foundation was founded in 1999 as the social arm of This Present House, a large congregation in Lagos. The outreach arm of Freedom Foundation evangelizes those living on the streets and invites them to church every week. Currently, the church owns two residential centres, Genesis House and House of Refuge. Genesis House caters for street girls involved in challenging situations such as forced labour, drug addiction, and prostitution. House of Refuge caters for male drug addicts, many of whom are also living on the streets. These initiatives by these churches are commendable and should be sustained. Other church denominations should develop more of such programmes so as to eliminate the problem of child abuse in the country.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Having discussed the problem of Child Abuse in Nigeria, and the different measures taken by churches to ameliorate it, the following recommendations are necessary:

- a. Churches should encourage their members to be alert and diligent, and do all they can to protect children from child abuse.
- b. Churches should teach their members to be aware of child abuse and to alert law enforcement agents and church leaders if they discover a child in danger.
- c. Churches should intensify effort in teaching moral values to the younger generation so as to stop cases of teenage pregnancies and child abandonment.
- d. Churches should sanction any of their members found involved in child abuse.
- e. Churches should develop more robust strategies for caring for abused children.
- f. Churches and government agencies should establish functional help lines and instruct members of the public to call immediately they learn of any case of child abuse.
- g. Parents should be sensitized to give birth to the number of children they can cater for.
- h. Churches in Nigeria should collaborate with government agencies for effective implementation of rehabilitation programmes for abused children.
- i. The government should ensure that the Child Rights Act is implemented.

## 7. CONCLUSION:

Child abuse has adversely affected the development of many children in Nigeria. This paper has traced the origin, forms, causes and consequences of child abuse in Nigeria. It has also examined the efforts of government and non-governmental organizations in tackling the problem of child abuse in the country. Also it examined the responses of Christian churches in ensuring the welfare of abused children. The forms of child abuse in Nigeria identified are child labour, child abandonment, vagrancy, sexual abuse, child marriage, child trafficking and Female Genital Mutilation. Causes of child abuse include unwanted pregnancy, poverty, broken homes and busy parents. Consequences of child abuse include malnutrition, violent crimes, poor academic achievements and psychological imbalance. The government has tried to tackle the problem of child abuse through legislations. Christian churches have also made frantic efforts in controlling child abuse through advocacy, teaching and caring for abused children. The fight against child abuse requires the contribution of all and sundry.

## REFERENCES:

1. Onwe , S. O. (2014). Championing the campaign against child abuse in Nigeria: A call to save the needy. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, (1), 279-286.
2. Olok-Ake, A. (2000). Protecting the children in the midst of conflict: Local, national and regional initiatives, *Proceedings of the Conference on War Affected Children in the West Africa*, Accra, Ghana.
3. African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) (2015). *Child abuse and neglect*. [www.anppcan.org/child\\_abuse\\_and\\_neglect](http://www.anppcan.org/child_abuse_and_neglect), Accessed on 5/9/2015.
4. Alokani, F. B. (2010). Broken homes and child abuse: *Pakistan Journal of Social Science* 7 (3), 240-243.
5. Ebigbo, P. (2003). Street children: The core of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria. *Children, Youth and Environments* 13 (1), 56-63.
6. UNICEF, *Child labour*. <http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/> Accessed on 3/9/2015.
7. Adedapo, I. (2004). Nigeria still in the throes of child labour. *Punch*, June 4, 2004.
8. *Why Nigerian mothers abandon their babies: 6 heartbreaking stories*. [www.naij.com](http://www.naij.com). Accessed on 12/8/2015.
9. National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria, *Protecting and promoting the rights of street children in Nigeria*. [www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/chil..](http://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/chil..) Accessed on 14/8/2015.
10. Theoklitou, D. et al, (2012). Physical and emotional abuse of primary school students by teachers. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 36 (1), 64-70.
11. Martin, J. et al (1993). Asking about child sexual abuse: Methodological implications of a two stage survey. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 17(3), 383-392.
12. News Agency of Nigeria, *Activists lament rising incidences of child sexual abuse*. [www.nguardiannews.com](http://www.nguardiannews.com). Accessed on 15/8/2015.
13. National Statics Office (2008). *Index of the National Demographic Health Survey Reports 2008*. <http://www.census.gov.php/survey/demographic-and-health/ndhs-index>. Accessed on 17/6/2015.
14. *Definition of child and forced marriage*. <http://endlawnow.org/en/articles/614-definition-of-forced-child-marriage.html>. Accessed on 6/9/2015.
15. Okolo, B. (1989). Children's work in urban Nigeria: A case study of young Lagos street traders. *UNICEF Staff Working Paper*, 4, 19-30.
16. David M. S. (2005). Inter-country adoption and child trafficking. *Valparaiso Law Review* 39 (2), 281-325.
17. International Labour Organization, *Every child counts: New labour estimates on child labour, 2002*, [www.ilo.org/ipeinfo/](http://www.ilo.org/ipeinfo/)... Accessed on 2/9/2015.
18. *The guardian news paper*, August 9, 1998.
19. W.H.O., *Female genital mutilation*, 2014, <http://www.Int/mediac...> Accessed on 2/9/2015.
20. Okebukola, A. O. A. (2012). Synopsis of religion and child abuse: Nigerian experience, *International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences* 2 (9), 171-177.
21. Aigbe, G. O. & Zannu, A. E. (2012) Differentials in infant and child mortality rates in Nigeria: Evidence from the six geopolitical zones. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2 (16), 206-214.
22. LesaBethea, M. D. (1999). Primary prevention of child abuse. *American Family Physician* 59(6), 1577-1585.
23. Odu, B. K. & Alokani, F. B. (2011). Relationship between poverty and child abuse among secondary school students in south-west Nigeria. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education* 2(1), 320-324.
24. Ebigbo, P. (2002). The problems of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria and strategies for overcoming them, in L. S. Aminu & B. Olikoshi (Eds) *The Nigerian child now and in future* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Health & UNICEF) 50-56.
25. ObiKeguna, C. N. (2008). Social services available to victims and perpetrators of child abuse in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, 161-172.
26. Federal Government of Nigeria, *Child rights act 2003*.

27. Federal Government of Nigeria, *Trafficking in person (prohibition) enforcement and administration act 2015*.
28. Government of Ebonyi State, *Ebonyi state law No.010 (2001) on the abolition of harmful traditional practices against children and women*.
29. Government of Edo State, *Edo state female genital mutilation (prohibition) law 2002*.
30. Government of Cross State, *Cross River state girl child marriages and female circumcision (prohibition) law 2000*.
31. National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, *NAPTIP uncovers child abuse cases during school sensitization campaign in FCT*, <http://www.naptip.gov.ng/childabuseuncovered.html>. Accessed on 2/9/2015.
32. Ezeamalu, B. (2014). *Nigeria's child rights act non-functional, activists say*, [www.premiumtimesng.news/161510-...](http://www.premiumtimesng.news/161510-...) Accessed on 13/8/2015.
33. UNICEF Nigeria, *Child rights and participation*, [www.unicef.org/./children\\_1938.html](http://www.unicef.org/./children_1938.html). Accessed on 12/8/2015.
34. Amalu, C. (2010). *Nigerian child and the child rights act*, [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com). Accessed on 13/8/2015.
35. Diara, B. C. D. & Nche, G. C. (2013). European and American missions and Nigerian national development (1840-1960). *Journal of Educational and Social Research*.3 (10), 89-99.
36. Ajayi, J. F. A. (1965). *Christian missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891* (Essex: Longman).
37. Ugwu, C. O. T. & Onah, N. G. (2008). Christianity and the welfare of the physically and the mentally challenged in the Nigerian society. *Nigerian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, 32-43.
38. Agha, A. U. (1997). *Early European mission to West Africa* (Enugu: Calvaryside Printing & publishing Co.).
39. Sampson, O. (2015). *Group donates items to Uzuakoli motherless babies home*. [www.sunnewsonline.com](http://www.sunnewsonline.com). Accessed on 12/8/2015.
40. Kaigama, I. A. & Martins, A. A. (2012). Promoting authentic development in Nigeria. *Communiqué issued at the end of the second plenary meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at Bishop Anthony Nwedo Pastoral Centre, Umuahia Abia State, 8th -14th September, 2012*.
41. Odedeji, J. O., Adewunmi, T. & Akindolure, T. (2014). *Synod 2014 communiqué, Diocese of Lagos West (Anglican Communion) 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the 5<sup>th</sup> synod held at the Archbishop Vining Memorial Church Cathedral, Oba Akinjobi Rd. G.R.A., Ikeja Lagos, 15th-18th May, 2014*.
42. Deeper Christian Life Ministry (2015). *Christian women mirror* (Lagos: Author).
43. Owoye, S. A. (2011). The Deeper Life Bible Church and the issues of human rights. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1, (1), 59-76.
44. Burgess, R (2012). Nigerian Pentecostalism and civic engagement: Mission in the midst of poverty and violence. *Paper presented at the Theological Education in Africa Conference, Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Jos, Nigeria, 16th May, 2012*.
45. Redeemed Christian Church of God (2009). *Habitation of hope magazine* (Mowe: Habitation of Hope International Ministry).