

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA: CAUSES AND POLICY CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence against children has increasingly become a serious social concern in Ekiti State, Nigeria, despite the state's long-standing reputation for strong moral discipline and cultural values. Drawing on data and documented incidents from 2013 to 2023, the study traces the emergence and spread of CSA in the state. This paper examines the growing prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Ekiti State and investigates the factors responsible for its emergence and persistence. Using the Social Ecological Model (SEM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as theoretical frameworks, the study explores how individual behaviours, family dynamics, socio-cultural practices, technological exposure, and broader societal conditions contribute to the incidence of sexual violence against children. The paper identifies several drivers of CSA in the state, including poverty, communal living patterns, alcohol and substance abuse, population growth, family instability, and the increasing influence of digital technologies that expose minors to online grooming and exploitation. It further evaluates the effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks, including the implementation of child protection laws and advocacy initiatives by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and faith-based institutions. The study finds that, although efforts have been made to address the problem through legislation and public awareness campaigns, significant challenges remain in the areas of reporting, prosecution, victim support services, and community education. The paper therefore recommends a comprehensive and multi-sectoral strategy involving stronger law enforcement, expanded public awareness programmes, improved access to health and psychological services for victims, and sustained collaboration among government institutions, civil society, religious organizations, and community leaders. Such an integrated approach is essential for preventing sexual violence against children and protecting the dignity, safety, and future of the younger generation in Ekiti State.

Keywords: child sexual abuse, Ekiti, sexual violence, cultural, Social Ecological Model,

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a marked rise in the prevalence of sexual violence against children in Ekiti State, Nigeria, manifested in acts of defilement and abuse (Olatunya, [et.al](#) 2013). This is particularly intriguing because sexual violence generally, and against the children, specifically in Ekiti State is novel, strange to the traditional culture of Ekiti people and very abhorring in history. This is a development that has left discerning minds wondering how this practice crawled into the Ekiti society, a community of people who had been hailed for their moral discipline and communal checks. The emergence of sexual violence against children in Ekiti State has become a point of attraction and demanding for the attention of this researcher, with the aim of unravelling the cause(s) of the infractions among the populace, more so that, it has been spreading in the society and almost becoming an embarrassment and an issue of concern to the general public. If viewed from the backdrop that Ekiti State is largely homogeneous, peace loving and culturally sensitive to moral discipline (Vanguard News, 2017)), it then becomes a concern for an academic study of the inglorious practice, with a view to finding a permanent solution to the practice. The matter is made more complicated, if the extent, dimension and spread are fully put in focus. To this extent, when it is understood that, violence against children in Ekiti State, is not only practiced by children on children, but, mostly carried out by adults against the children, and to make the matter worse, it is done sometimes by the same sex.

Obviously, this is an aberration on the culture of the people of Ekiti State, who are widely known for not indulging in frivolous behavioural patterns, not in tandem with their cultural values (Punch Newspaper, 2020). Definitely, sexual violence on children is one of such no-go areas! The implications are grave and numerous, as the very foundation of the people's values have been attacked, resulting in untold cultural values' degeneration and erosion. When and where this happens, the affected society usually pays dearly for it. Sexual violence alone is a crime, talk less of such, being directed against innocent children. That completely shatters their futures, erodes their self-esteem, as well as negatively impacts directly on their personal motivation and confidence, which in an unprecedented manner; eventually deprives them of self-life fulfillment. This therefore subjects the entire social landscape to future degeneration and collapse, both physically, mentally and morally. This research therefore would consider those factors responsible for the upsurge in sexual violence against children in Ekiti State, and also consider the various forms of the violence against children. It should be the concern of the research to also examine how this practice has violated, both moral and legal regulations and acts of Ekiti State, as would be discussed immediately hereafter.

Literature Review

Child sexual abuse has been widely studied across different disciplines including sociology, psychology, public health, and criminology. Research consistently indicates that CSA occurs in both developed and developing societies, although the patterns of occurrence and reporting vary significantly (Finkelhor, 2009). In many African societies, socio-cultural factors often shape how sexual abuse cases are handled. Cultural silence around sexual issues, fear of stigmatization, and family pressure frequently discourage victims from reporting abuse (UNICEF, 2015). Consequently, many perpetrators escape prosecution. In Nigeria, scholars have noted increasing reports of child sexual abuse in both urban and rural settings. Factors such as poverty, family instability, substance abuse, and weak law enforcement have been identified as major drivers of the problem (Eze, 2013). Another emerging dimension of child sexual abuse involves the influence

of digital technologies. The expansion of internet access and mobile communication has created opportunities for online grooming and digital exploitation of minors (Livingstone & Smith, 2014).

Focusing specifically on Ekiti State, there have been few reported cases of child sexual abuse. The main reason for the under reporting is stigmatization of the victims by the society and the fear of rejection. Victims of CSA accounted for 0.43% of new patients seen during the period under review with a yearly increase over the time. The respondents noted that all the victims were female with a median age of 11.5 years and the age range was 4-17. They all had genito-urinary findings and 3.6% had an anal tear. The assailants were all male, mostly. Appropriately, all of them were screened for HIV, and 60.7 received 60.7% HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (Olatunya & Akintayo, 2013).

Assault of children is becoming an epidemic across the globe, Ekiti State inclusive (Ogunlade, 2023). This development is in spite of efforts geared towards gender equality and empowering women and girls (SDG5). The researcher established that, a statistical number of respondents (90%) mentioned drug addiction, tramadol intake, marijuana intake (85.3%) and children with poor economic background (62.7%), were the factors associated with sexual abuse of minors in Ekiti State. In the same vein, Leadership Newspaper (Alo Abiola, 2024) reported that, there is a ragging menace and upsurge in child sexual abuse in Ekiti State, which according to him needed urgent government's attention. According to the report, most often female victims are lured to private residences in isolated areas before such crimes are carried out. The sad thing about it is that only a few of such cases are reported. Again, the Punch Newspaper (Abiodun Nejo, 2024) reported that a man was jailed 14 years for sexually assaulting a minor in Ekiti State. The report indicated that the victim was yet another female minor who had been abused and the presiding judge did not hesitate to sentence the assailant to a long (14 years) jail sentence.

Generally, the situation of child sexual abuse has become a case for serious study in Ekiti State, with a view to finding solutions to the ugly and debasing occurrences. However, not much practical and legal efforts are being directed toward achieving this goal in Ekiti State, other than the usual propaganda and rhetoric. The literature therefore emphasises that combating child sexual abuse requires a multi-sectoral approach involving legal frameworks, community education, social welfare services, and economic development initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Ecological Model (SEM), and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), are two frameworks that can assist understand and address sexual violence. SEM views sexual violence as an intricate and complicated issue, which is motivated by several factors such as individual's beliefs, and behaviours (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It also understands it that, sexual violence could be caused by relationships with peer norms, family dynamics, and social networks. In the same vein, SEM explains that, sexual violence could also be triggered by the community and its cultural norms, social institutions and community resources. Lastly, SEM opines that, societal laws, policies, and cultural values influence sexual violence. Therefore SEM suggests that, addressing sexual violence requires a comprehensive approach that targets these multiple levels. On the other hand, the theory of planed behaviour (TPB), proposes that, behaviour, including perpetration of sexual violence, is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, which are perceived social norms and expectations, as well as perceived behavioural control. TPB suggests that, changing attitudes, norms, and perceived control of behaviour can reduce sexual violence perpetration.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach. The research relies primarily on secondary sources of data, including scholarly publications, government reports, media reports, and policy documents relating to child sexual abuse in Nigeria and Ekiti State. The descriptive approach allows the researcher to analyze the prevalence, causes, and implications of child sexual abuse within the socio-cultural context of Ekiti society. In addition, the study applies theoretical insights from the Social Ecological Model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour to interpret the underlying social and behavioural dynamics associated with sexual violence against children.

The Nature and Extent of Child Sexual Abuse in Ekiti State

This occurrence has become very rampant in Ekiti State in the last 10 years, or thereabout, and the occurrence cuts across various Demographic patterns (age, gender, location) of victims and perpetrators. There had been instances when the perpetrators were fully grown male adults, defiling and or abusing teenage girls. The reverse had not been common. In a few instances, it is the young boys against young girls. There had been worst cases, where adult men abused and or defiled girl child as young as 3 years old, and some reported cases of incest, between siblings, and or between fathers and daughters. The rate of occurrence has been very steady and regular in Ekiti State.

Probable Causes: Socio-Cultural Determinants

There is no doubt that roles of traditional norms, gender roles, and religious beliefs are shaping attitudes toward CSA. In traditional Ekiti societies, there is a high level of daily interaction between boys/men and girls/women (Ojo et al, 2025). The interaction is almost unavoidable, as they go to distant farms, marriage ceremonies and do other common responsibilities together. Therefore, the frequency of mutual interaction is very high and unrestricted. Although no religion practiced in Ekiti State encourages such indiscipline, however, such religious institutions may many times do a lot of cover ups, just to protect the integrity of the religious groups. Another probable cause is the rate of alcohol consumption in Ekiti State, as most men indulge in excessive drinking of hot drinks, use of cheap hard drugs/stimulants, while those who can afford the luxury of buying the bottled beers, also do so with recklessness. To this extent, many men involuntarily and unconsciously; indulge in so many crimes, including CSA.

Influence of family structure, poverty, and education levels pose genuine risk to CSA. The worst case scenario occurs when, out of the culture of togetherness, low incomes, and poor access to comfortable housing and accommodation, people of different family backgrounds live under the same roof, thereby making themselves very vulnerable to CSA. In instances of broken homes/families, there had been reported cases of fathers molesting their own girl child, and in few instances, rape of homosexuality on minors have been reported as well. So, the problem is big and alarming in Ekiti State.

Technology-Facilitated Abuse

Access to and prevalence of online grooming in digital exploitation of minors is a major contributor to sexual violence against children in Ekiti State. While it is acknowledged that this is not peculiar to Ekiti State, it must however be said that it plays a significant role in CSC among Ekiti people. The introduction of technology in the guise of telephony and its concurrent paraphernalia, are vehicles for the moral degeneration in Ekiti State. The unrestricted access to mobile phones, fueled by yet unrestricted internet access, have both left the social space of Ekiti State very vulnerable to sex offenders' recruitment, learning and unlearning untoward morals. It therefore becomes important to begin to evaluate the clumsy situation, with a view to proffering

sustainable solutions in the areas of legal and technical measures needed to detect and curb such offences. Of course, this falls within the purview of the State government, while it explores all the instrumentalities of the state to achieve a solution to the problems.

Communal Living

It is a hard fact that Ekiti people enjoy living communally. Therefore, they live mostly in large clusters of *Akodi* settlements. *Akodi* pattern of living permits these clusters of separate buildings built on the same vast land, and in the same environment, usually arranged in a circular pattern, with a main entrance leading to a large open space, where everybody gathers to enjoy themselves, whenever time permits. This encourages a lot of interaction between members of the extended family (Oke, 2021). The unrestricted interactions sometimes have its ugly side effects manifested in various vices such as child molestation, defilement and general girl child abuse. Unfortunately, most times, such untoward occurrences go unreported, except if it occurred too openly. Although society frowns about it, because efforts must be made to keep the society intact, and mostly to avoid stigmatizations, such incidents are overlooked, where possible. Thus, in Ekiti State, girl child molestation occurs usually amongst family members and occasionally between distant neighbours. In the extreme cases, there had been reported cases of incest relationship between fathers and daughters, step fathers and step daughters, siblings, and close relations.

Poverty and Environmental Factors

The poverty rate in Ekiti State is very high, and the effects of that are clearly manifesting on the standard of living of the people, such that large families may find it hard to rent comfortable and convenient apartments for themselves. Rather, a family of six children may decide to clamp themselves inside a room of a six room house, and worst still living side by side similar to other families in the same house (Fakuade, 2022). Obviously, the decency, security and privacy needed are nonexistent, and that gives room for so many atrocities to take place.

Population Explosion

With the creation of Ekiti State in 1991, there began to happen gradual movement of people, both indigenes and non-indigenes, to the newly created state for economic relief and development. Invariably, the population began to increase. As at the time of creation of Ekiti State in 1991, the population was a little less than a million people. As at the last national census conducted in 2006, the population of Ekiti State had geometrically moved up to over two million. This is a major cause of moral crises, as all kinds of people have been moving in, with their different orientations, intentions, and behavioural lifestyles.

Unfortunately, this has affected the overall moral standard of Ekiti people. This should be expected because, at every point in their daily interactions, exchange of ideas are done, and slowly but steadily, such invariably form another behavioural pattern in Ekiti State. So, the now prevalent girl child abuse is not unexpected, coupled with the fact that, there are other variables which assist the spread of such anomalies.

Hard Interventions at Solving CSA: Legal and Policy Framework

Preceding the administration of Governor John Fayemi in Ekiti, the problem had become very alarming, and the wife of the then Governor Fayemi, Erelu Bisi Fayemi made this criminal issue of rape and abuse of girl child her pet programme. That ensured that, laws were passed against girl child abuse in Ekiti State. She also ensured the implementation of national child protection laws (e.g. Child Rights Act) at the state level. It was at this point that the rot began to gain attention and culprits were sentenced and required to pay for their crimes.

Gaps between policy and practice in reporting, investigating, and prosecuting have always been a source of discouragement for those who campaign against CSA in Ekiti State, as the society often treats such occurrences as local and familial, thereby often refusing to lodge reports at the appropriate quarters (Ekiti State Government Website, 2021). Interestingly, on rare occasions, when complaints are made, the prosecuting authorities are usually not warm towards taking the cases to appropriate courts for prosecution, either out of fear of stigmatization for the victims or because of the perceived expenses it involves to prosecute such cases at the court of law. It should be mentioned that, there are imminent barriers to successful prosecution of CSA cases, as evidence collection, witness protection, and corruption play significant roles in the process. Therefore, except when the victim is courageous enough to bring the awareness of her rape or abuse to public glare, and to the attention of the State functionaries, such as the appropriate ministries and or the office of the First Lady, before justice could be served on the culprits.

Health and Psycho-Social Services

Availability and accessibility of medical, psychological, and legal support for survivors are very limited, especially in the rural areas. While such could be minimally available in the State Capital, such become unaffordable luxuries at the villages in Ekiti State. Apart from that, services accruing from such facilities may be out of reach for the poor families of the victims. Most often, this has been a huge hindrance to securing physical and mental rehabilitation for the victims.

Moreover, the quality of care in health facilities and community-based counselling services are important mentions in this regard. Although the various previous governments that had governed Ekiti State had placed emphasis on providing quality healthcare, they were however often hindered by lack of funds to implement such lofty programmes and intentions. Therefore, most often, it remains a mere political campaign topic, and an unrealizable dream programme. However, of late, there have been noticeable World Bank assisted interventions on health care delivery in Nigeria generally, and by extension, that has equally benefitted Ekiti State tremendously (Ibikunle, 2023). These interventions have enabled the government to provide more quality health care to the rural people, as much as it does to the urban dwellers, through the primary health centres scattered all over the Local Government and Development Council Areas of Ekiti State. By implication, this latest improvement has enabled the right medical tests to be carried out on affected victims of child sexual abuse.

Community Awareness and Prevention Programmes

Existing Awareness campaigns and their impacts on knowledge and attitudes. As a matter of compulsion, there should be a well-articulated and strategically executed public awareness, so that the evil of child sexual abuse could be frequently and sustainably exposed. The media, both print and electronic should be maximally exploited in this instance. Of late, social media has become a powerful tool for mass mobilization and public awareness. This should also be used maximally. Apart from the general education of child sex abuse, the media could also let the public know the implications and legal provisions against sex abuse.

Another source of solution is the evaluation of school-based life-skills and sex-education interventions. This approach is essential for achieving a meaningful breakthrough in fighting and eventually eradicating child sexual abuse in Ekiti State.

Roles of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Groups

The roles of non-governmental organizations cannot be overstated. Collaborations between NGOs, religious institutions and government agencies, would go a great extent in solving or reducing child sexual abuse to its barest minimum. Naturally, NGOs are recognized for their

ability to follow-up issues, pursue justice and maintain decorum, while investigations last. If these abilities of NGOs are collaborated by the religious faith based groups, which is more relevant in instilling morality on the public, a sure path way to total eradication of child sexual abuse will be achieved over time.

The magnitude of the problem in Ekiti State calls for this collaboration between these stakeholders. The realization of the fact that, anyone can fall victim of sexual violence against children, should instinctively motivate everyone in Ekiti State to do everything humanly possible at ensuring the eradication of sexual violence against children.

It must however be said that, the best practices and challenges in partnership for prevention are prompt response and an unbreakable synergy between all the stakeholders. There will be success in the fight against sexual violence against children in Ekiti State, if the NGOs, Faith Based Organizations, security agencies, and the general public; forge a strong bond on reporting incidences of sexual violence against children, ensuring prosecution of offenders and offering the right mental and psychological therapy to the victims.

Policy Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

As part of the envisaged solution to the problem, Ekiti State government could design a development of a state-level action plan for CSA prevention. In view of the fact that, Nigeria is in a state of democratic dispensation, such steps could be slow and dragging because, it cannot be achieved by executive fiat, but through proper legislation, where the acts are initiated by the executives, then passed on to the House of Assembly, for subsequent enactment into law. From that point, the Judiciary does its arbitration responsibilities. In this instance, the government must be deliberate in their sanctions recommended for offenders of CSA. Such sanctions must be seen weighty enough to serve as deterrents to future prospective offenders.

Government Intervention in Poverty Reduction Policies

To assist in this direction, the government of Ekiti State could float different poverty intervention and alleviation programmes; that will be aimed at reducing mass illiteracy, thereby making education affordable. It could also embark on direct and indirect employment programmes, aimed at making life easy for the people. Certainly, when the people can work and earn good living wages, they will definitely be able to rent and or build for themselves; convenient houses, thereby reducing the unnecessary risk, the girl child is exposed to, which has been making them vulnerable to child abuse.

Conclusion

The prevalence of sexual violence against children in Ekiti State represents a disturbing departure from the moral traditions and communal values historically associated with the society. This study has demonstrated that child sexual abuse in the state is not an isolated or accidental phenomenon but a complex social problem shaped by multiple interrelated factors. Economic hardship, communal living arrangements, family instability, substance abuse, population expansion, and increased exposure to digital technologies have collectively contributed to the vulnerability of children and the persistence of sexual violence in the society. The analysis also reveals that although legal frameworks and government interventions exist to combat the problem, the effectiveness of these measures is often limited by underreporting, cultural stigma, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and limited access to psychosocial and medical support services for victims, particularly in rural communities. Consequently, the persistence of these structural and social barriers continues to hinder the successful prevention and prosecution of child sexual abuse cases.

Addressing the problem therefore requires a comprehensive and sustained approach that goes beyond punitive legal measures. Preventive strategies must include intensive public education, school-based awareness programmes, improved community reporting systems, and strengthened collaboration among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, faith-based institutions, and community leaders. In addition, poverty reduction initiatives, improved housing conditions, and responsible regulation of digital technologies are necessary to reduce the environmental factors that expose children to abuse.

Ultimately, protecting children from sexual violence is both a moral obligation and a societal necessity. Ensuring the safety and well-being of children will not only restore the moral integrity of the Ekiti society but will also contribute to building a more secure and responsible future generation. Through collective commitment, effective policy implementation, and sustained community engagement, the challenge of sexual violence against children in Ekiti State can be significantly reduced and eventually eradicated.

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