

CHILD ABANDONMENT SYNDROME: IMPLICATIONS ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN LAGOS NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Child abandonment is as old as the society itself that means it has been in existence for ages, but this but this calls for greater concerned as child abandonment has become a daily occurrence for and sundry in which Lagos as one of the most densely populated cities in Nigeria cannot be an exemption. This and may more necessitated the researcher to have an in-depth knowledge of child abandonment and it's implication to child development in Lagos-Nigeria. The main purpose of the study is to find out why do people abandoned their children at the slightest provocation. Qualitative research design was employed in the study, questionnaire was also used to collect data as well as focused group discussion interview and observation method. In conclusion child abonnement as being established as a way of neglecting a child either partial or total abandonment either intentionally or unintentionally. The causes has been traced to include family conflicts, negative cultural practices, poverty and homelessness as well as intra/inter ethnic conflicts. Irrespective of the reasons behind abandonment it is viewed as an immoral act as well as criminal in nature. The consequences of child abandonment are physical, behavioural, psychological and societal consequences. This writer up has established one fact that abandonment causes a lot of damage to the environment and the society suffers and it is the duty of the society to stop the menace by using education as main ingredients to end the problems. Recommendations were also given in a bid to end the menace.

Key Words: Abandonment psychological, phenomenon, ethics and conflict

Introduction

Child abandonment is as old as the society itself, that it has been in existence for ages, but this calls for greater concern as child abandonment has become a daily occurrence of the phenomenon and this calls for greater concern by all and sundry in which Lagos as one of the most densely populated cities cannot be an exemption. This and may more necessitated the researcher to have an indepth knowledge of child abandonment and it's implication to child development in Lagos-Nigeria.

The Nigeria child according to Abidogun (2019) faced a lot of challenges when it comes to abandonment. He opines that mostly women abandoned their children at the slightest provocations which includes unwanted pregnancies, poverty, single parenthood, post natal depressions, mental illness and so on.

Abandonment according to Abidogun means, to leave, forsake, run and left unattended to or not intending to care for over a period of time. Abandonment as opined in New Webster Dictionary as a way of giving up in somebody with the intention of not attempting to work back or return.

Oduolowu (2018) opined that abandonment can also be either total abandonment or partial abandonment. Abandonment is said to be total when either parents leave his or her wards or children without any intention to return back; while partial abandonment means an act of leaving your wards for a particular period with the intention to return later.

Cases of child abandonment is alarming and is gradually building up and turning to a social vices and if urgent attention is not given, it may result into a very big problem that will definitely lead to moral decadences in our society, most especially in Lagos Nigeria.

Young children at the earliest part of their lives were abandoned either at birth or immediately after delivery by mothers most of whom gave flimsy excuses as reasons for abandoning their children. This corroborated Abidogun (2020) which opines that as we record an increase in the rate of abandonment daily and in recent times so also the desire to stop or nip it in the bud also increases either by an individual group or as government agencies.

Causes of Child Abandonment

Child abandonment do not just happen and it is due to one factor or the other that necessitated abandonment, most of the factors were not just justifiable enough for parents to abandoned their children but serve as reasons for engaging in this act. Noticeable among the reasons are.

Family conflict- family serve as the first abode when it comes to socialization. Family serves as an important aspect when it comes to child development. If any conflict ensued in the family according to Asaju K. and Adagba S. O. (2014) and is not well handled and resolved by parents, it can lead to broken homes that may result in child abandonment either by father, mother or both. Family is widely acknowledged as among the most powerful socializing agent in a young child's development Onyido (2016). Opined that children should be given adequate love, care, attention and support that will make him feel loved and wanted. A child that is abandoned cannot have all the attributes highlighted above; and the reverse will always be the case.

Negative cultural practices- In a situation whereby some cultures beliefs in gods and that any children born with one deformity or the other were as a results of cursed from god's. Such a child may likely be abandoned by either or both parents. This has led to the abandonment of children with certain medical condition such as blindness, handicapped. The issue of preferred sex cannot also be underemphasized, in a situation where a male child is being preferred to a female child, this also results in child abandonment and child trading whereby some women exchange their female children for a male child so as to remain in marriage and be relevant as a complete wives in their matrimonial homes.

Poverty and Homelessness- Poverty means a condition that makes one not to be able to provide for his/her basic needs. When you are not able to provide for foods, shelter, clothe, healthcare and education. Poverty is one of the major causes and determinants of child abandonment, since parenting involves a whole lot of responsibilities which include, feeding clothing and sheltered, all these involves money in order to bring it into realization. In a nutshell a parents that is not gainfully employed may likely turn abusive due to financial pressure at home and it not property handled it may lead to child abandonment on the part of either parents.

Intra/Inter Ethnic Crises – Crises can said to be an uneasy and unclam situation, that results into rifts between one community and the other, the crises can lead to a conditions that results into war and family displacements. All the above mentioned were all ingredients of war, but we all know that families are displaced from their homes or abode during crises, as individual scrambles for safety and when these occurs parents may likely lose their children, takes for example the crises of farmers and herdsmen has led to abandonment in all ramifications. The relevance is that any unrest will make the Family dispersed and unsettled the effect will lead to abandonment as the parents may likely loose their own children or wards, while running for safety and the society will be at the receiving end thereby increases abandonment in the society.

Effects of Child Abandonment

Child abandonment can be said to be more of a social problem and must be put to an end or minimized if possible. The consequences of abandonment move from the child to the larger society since, the society is always at the receiving end when it comes to abandonments. The consequences of child abandonment were numerous and will be based on the following.

Societal Consequences- Every child abandoned in any part of our environment, the society always bears the brunt and will always remain at the receiving end. Since the society itself is a very complex hierarchy of classes and strata and for every injustice meted out on the child there are consequences on the society, in as much as such a child is neither isolated nor taken away from the community where such an act is being perpetrated.

A child who is abandoned suffers pain, mental torture and withdrawal in as much as he/she is not isolated from the society, the society will always pay the high price of child abandonment since the more children are abandoned, the more the society bears the brunt of the psychological, economical and physical impacts of the abandonments. According to Bolariwa and Badejo (1998) the more the cases of juvenile and adult criminal activities, domestic violence and low self-esteem individuals that will eventually drop out of school. This will eventually reduce the literacy levels of the society and encourage high rates of unemployed youths and will result in poverty. Poverty will definitely encourage abandonments and the society goes through the vicious cycle all over again with increasing or double tendencies of all the above-mentioned vices. On a daily basis we see pictures as well as even witness one case of abandonment or the other either in sewage tanks, dust bins, uncompleted buildings just to mention a few, society must rise up to the menace of this child abandonment once and for all.

Psychological Consequences- An injury to a child's psychological self can be said to be an emotional abuse that results in fear and inability to trust others that translate to long-term consequences of low self-esteem, depression as well as what we call relationship difficulties. The child is said to undergo psychological torture and the feeling of insecurity associated with abandonment, though abandonment according to Abidogun (2020) can be said to be a means to an end and not an end in itself. He further opines that abandoned children later in life turn out to be important personalities in our society, provided they are well handled and trained.

Behavioural Consequences- When we are talking of behavioural consequences one should bear in mind that you cannot place something on nothing. There is always a behavioural deficit on the part of an abandoned child, since abandoned children stated by Oduolowu (2011) feel dejected, rejected and unwanted due to

the abusive experiences that he/she has passed through in lives there is every tendency that he/she will equally be abusive towards others in the society. When they are opportune to be in school they display truancy and can easily spotted among the disobedient students or pupil's who constantly breaks the school rules and regulations. Drugs and alcohol addict are usually found among abandoned or neglected children. 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. The height of behavioural consequences as a results of abandonments tends to be a vicious cycle and needs to be minimized or eliminated from our society.

Physical Consequences- Injuries were inflicted on children as a result of dangers associated with neglect and abandonment. This may be physical injuries inflicted on an abandoned child. Sometimes the injuries may be a minor one and at times permanent in which the victims may not likely forget in a hurry. An abandoned child as opined by Odoolowu was exposed to unfavourable health conditions which sometimes results into physical injuries such as bruises, cuts, broken bones. Polio may likely affects the abandoned child in as much as all the necessary immunization might not be given to the abandoned child as an infant, all these and many more resulted into physical consequences since there is a correlation between varying forms of households abuses and poor health.

Psychological Consequences- Psychological abuse can also be referred to as emotional abuse which means an injury into a child's psychological self. This is always attributed to fears and inability to trust others that may translate to lifelong consequences of low self esteem, depression and relationship difficulties. An abused and neglected children are often not feel secured and this is supported (Morrison Frank, Holland, Kates 1999; Onyido 2016). This gave birth to depressions, emotional difficulties as well as anxiety and a whole lot of others, since the issue of psyche has to do with emotions that needs to be monitored and guided so as not to allow derailment on the part of the child.

Societal Consequences- Since an abandoned child is a product of the society, in as much as the child cannot be solely isolated, the society therefore stands at the receiving end. The society is said to be a complex hierarchy of classes and strata and for every injustice meted out on the child, there is always a consequences for the society at large. In a much as 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 ground price of children being abandoned, the more the abandonment the more the cases of juvenile and adult criminal activities, domestic violence and low self esteemed individuals that may ended up as drop outs and increases

the level of illiteracy in a society. As poverty remains at the centre. So also the rate of abandonment will increase and the vicious circle revolve again and again.

Preventing Child Abandonment

Child abandonment is a phenomenon that needs urgent attention of all and sundry to nip in the bud and with no exception of individuals, groups, corporate as well as government agencies. There are a number of actions being taken by government and its agencies most especially in Lagos Southwest Nigeria to nip and prevent child abandonment in the bud. Noticeable among the factors as stated by Akinbote, Oduolowu and Lawal (2001) includes social assistance, daycare facilities, mother baby units, family planning services counselling services for the mother and / or the whole family, financial support, parent training centers, help-lines to support mothers in need, guidance on preventing child abandonment at maternity units and training of hospital staff to be able to recognize and manage high risk-situations and provide positive counselling.

Social Assistance- This is one of the best and easiest way of providing social assistance to mother and child after delivery, this is done in order to reassure the mother that somebody out there really cares and ready to assist, this will reduce the rate of abandonment and this can be done either by the assigned social assistance agencies or the governments agencies that were recognized for that purpose, this will in no small way prevents abandonments in all its ramifications.

Daycare Facilities- Making provision for day care facilities will definitely go a long way in assisting the abandoned child to learn better. Provision of all the facilities needed at the daycare centres will enables the abandoned child to feel at home and such a centers will just be a home away from home and the abandoned child will undergoes what we call early learning and fear of rejection will just vanished and restore sense of belonging to the child and by extension to the society at large.

Mother Baby Units- Provision of mother baby units will do a lot of good for the pregnant teenagers that were abandoned by their prospective father's either through the fear of unknown or thinking that they are just too young to become a father. The creation of mother-baby units will in no small way solve the problems of abandonment. In as much as there is somewhere for the mother and child to rest their head and both will be catered for as regards all their needs, this will serve as a rallying point for all the prospective mothers that has nowhere to go either to serve as an abode or to raise their would be children.

Family Planning Services- Family planning services has been in existence for ages and this may be majorly government owned where couples can visit to seek for advice as regards either spacing procedure or for

preventing unwanted pregnancies. There are different types of family planning available and this will be subjected to test in order to discover any one that suits a particular mother and the best way to go about it. Since failure to plan also leads to child abandonment and the consequences falls on the society at large.

Counselling Services for the Mother and/or the Whole Family- Mothers are always the main target when it comes to child bearing and that is why all mothers' needs to undergo counselling services before getting married or better still go into any serious relationships, but it's a pity that we put a cart before the horse. Counselling services is where a couple or mother will be educated on the dos' and don't in order to avoid what we termed as costly mistakes either in marriage or in a serious relationship. This will enables the couple to know the best time to have sex and that may not likely results in pregnancy, best spacing techniques and a whole lot of others that will be beneficial for their couple thereby preventing abandonment as a result of poverty or unwanted pregnancies.

Financial Support- This is one of the best way of preventing abandonment, as we all aware of the main ingredients of why people abandoned is mainly for poverty or fear of the unknown. By creating a financial relief for the victims of either unwanted pregnancies or the less privilege in the society. Both are prone to abandonment and the only way to nip it in the bud is to have an agencies where stipend will be given in form of relief either directly or indirectly. Directly by given then cash in form of money either weekly, monthly or otherwise agreed to take good care of the pregnancy and which continues until adulthood. Indirectly by making provision for anti-natal services, providing for delivery goods of mother and child as well as offsetting the hospital bills on the day of child delivery and a whole lot of things that will bring succor to mother and child; all these will in no small way prevent child abandonment in Lagos Nigeria.

Parenting Training Centers- Parent training centers are not so feasible in this part of the World, this is where parents were trained as regards the issue surrounding child neglect and abandonment, the risk involved as related to psychological consequences, physical, behavioural and social consequences. All falls backs to the society and do a lot of damage on the personality of the persons involved. This serves as a prevention services that addresses a range of risk factors and help families and children in needs.

Help-lines to Support Mother's in Need- This is one of the best way of preventing child abandonment. Setting up a help-lines, this has to do with making public some phone numbers where those in need will get in touch with the authority for help. This will be done under a very strict guidelines that will involves a lot of investigation and verifications to ascertain the authenticity or otherwise claims of the callers, after which

succor will come the way of the callers, so as to ensure that truly those that deserves help get help and as when due. This will create a sort of awareness into the public domain and reduce the rate of abandonment.

Social Workers in Maternity Units- There must be presence of social workers in all our maternity units, this is important in order to identify those that are prone to toll the line of abandonment after delivery or those that are prone to abandoned their baby sooner than expected. All these by training the social worker's can detect and nip it in the bund where necessary. The recommendations of social workers will go a long way in assisting the maternity units of risk of abandonment and if eventually abandoned the social workers will come to the rescue and thereby preventing what we call social menace in our environment.

The cases of abandonment in the United Kingdom is low comparing to the rate in Europe, this can be attributed to access to family planning advice which is free in the UK and with specific sexual health centers and clinics for young people. Abortion is also legal up until 24 weeks of pregnancy. The UK benefit system is one of the most comprehensive in the World that offers an array of financial supports for all family with children and additional supports for those with low or no income at all.

There are general prevention for child abandonment put in place in places like UK to address a range of risk factors and help families and children in need noticeable among them are provision of mother-baby units in prisons and mental health residential facilities. They are designed to address childcare and protection issues and strive to keep families together. The sentiments of some of the professionals was that families have more chance of having their child removed from them for child protection reasons, than they do if willingly abandoned their child, this was as a result of many services available within the UK that help families cope with their children and overcome their difficulties and thereby reducing the risk of child abandonment.

Cases of child abandonment is becoming very rampant in Lagos Nigeria, the traditional and social media have reported many of such cases that is gradually becoming a "normal" occurrence, even as incidents of child abandonment cut across the country.

There are different facets to the challenge as some children are branded as witches by their parents and abandoned them to die. Sometimes their children are inflicted with serious physical scars under the guise of exorcism before they are abandoned. There are also cases of babies abandoned shortly after they were born and that this phenomenon is still occurring in the 21st century is a sad commentary on our national policy. While some of these babies were abandoned in the hospital some are dropped off at all sorts of unconventional places such as public toilets, dump sites, bush and drainage systems among others. Sometimes some of these

babies often get respite and are rescued by members of public before they give up the ghost while some may not be so lucky to be rescued and thereby give up the ghost. Though it is an offence to abandoned children in Nigeria, according to section 16 of the violence against persons prohibition act 2015, it is a criminal offence to abandon children or leave them without a means of sustenance. The Nigerian child act of 2003 also stipulated that no child should be subjected to torture or other cruel or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishments; this section is also supported by section 34(1) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria which affirmed that every individual is entitled to respect and dignity of their person. The Lagos State Government also enacted a criminal code law of Lagos State (2011) to prevent dumping of children. The law prescribes fines and other punishments for members of the public who dump or abandoned children at any slightest provocation.

Apart from the federal and state law against child abandonment, Nigeria according to Okeke (2016) is also a signatory to many international conventions aimed at protecting the right of the child. These includes the international conventions on Economic, Social and cultural rights of the child (1976); and the United Nations convention on the right of the child (1989). It must be emphasized that the crime is at variance with the social and cultural values of Nigeria and Africa at large, as children are traditionally desired, treasured and loved not just by their parents but by the entire community. Therefore, we must not condemn by proactively address this social menace and the multiple factors responsible for it. It must be stressed that dumping a child is the most serious form of child abuse, such abandoned children may have negative psychological effects as well as health issues that the child might have to live with for ages.

In conclusion child abandonment has been established as a way of neglecting a child either partial or total abandonment either intentionally or unintentionally. The causes has been traced to include family conflicts, negative cultural practices, poverty and homelessness as well as intra/inter ethnic conflicts. Irrespective of the reasons behind abandonment it is viewed as an immoral act as well as criminal in nature. The consequences of child abandonment are physical, behavioural, psychological and societal consequences. This writer up has established one fact that abandonment causes a lot of damage to the environment and the society suffers and it is the duty of the society to stop the menace by using education as main ingredients to end the problems.

Recommendations

If child abandonment is to be minimized the following recommendations has to be adhere to very strictly.

- Children are very vulnerable members of the society and the least they deserve is to be given an opportunity to survive the most vulnerable parts of their lives.

- Conflicts in families are inevitable and such should be settled amicably without the involvement of the child or 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 state has to be improved, more job opportunities should be open up for people to engage themselves and shame poverty.
- Youth and prospective parents should be properly counselled on the responsibilities of parenthood and should be made to face the music when necessary.
- Government must encourage the establishment of more foster homes, by strengthening the non-governmental organization that partake in this crucial humanitarian services.
- Government may also consider allowing mothers who want to give up their babies willingly to do so, without asking them questions if they prefer not to give reasons for their decisions.
- Enforcement of various laws against child dumping and taking a second look at the laws guiding the operations of orphanages and foster homes.
- Youth and teenagers should get better sex education to reduce incidence of unwanted pregnancies and sensitize members of the public on the evils of child abandonment.
- Enactment of new strategies that will better position the parents, families, traditional and religions leaders to help halt this unacceptable crime.
- Government at all levels should ensure the full implementations of the child right act 2003, children parliament act 2003. Universal basic education act 2004 and child right legislation act 2011.

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