

THE SCOURGE OF CHILD DEFILEMENT: GOVERNMENT AND PARENTAL FAILURE IN OREDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The scourge of child defilement has remained a topical issue and a subject of concern in recent times. Parents, guardians, sociologist, social workers, government, and the general public, are asking how best to protect and reduce the vulnerability of children to defilement. Child defilement leads to short and/or long term negative consequences for the victims, families, and society. The study's aim was to find out the failures of government and parents in protecting children against child defilement in Oredo local government area of Edo State. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting eight wards and twenty-nine quarters within Oredo local government area. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting six informants and 384 parents who were heads of various households as respondents. The study employed the survey research method. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire made up of both open and closed-ended questions. An in-depth interview guide was also used in gathering information from selected informants. The major findings of the study were that, 214 parents, representing 55.7% of respondents, do not think that the existing legislations against child defilement in Edo State are effective enough in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement. In other words, the study found that although there are existing legislations against child defilement, its implementation processes and procedures are not effective enough in prosecuting offenders. The findings further revealed that one of the major causes of child defilement is parental neglect, and fear of stigmatization was identified as a major reason for non-disclosure of cases. The study recommends strict enforcement of the existing legislations against child defilement, and for parents to take priority interest in the care and wellbeing of their children. The study further recommends the enactment of mandatory reporting law – in order to compel individuals to report cases of child defilement immediately to law enforcement agencies.

Keywords: *Child defilement; Existing legislations; Parents; Stigmatization*

INTRODUCTION

The scourge of child defilement is an emerging and worrying issue in Nigeria. Parents now feel that their children might be vulnerable to defilement when they are away from their care. Hornor (2010) as-

serted that child defilement is a form of child sexual abuse that involves an adult having penetrative sexual intercourse with a minor “less than 18 years of age”. In such cases, the child may lack the emotional, maturational, and cognitive development to understand it.

WHO (2020) posited that nearly 3 in 4 children (or 300 million children aged 2–4 years) regularly suffer physical punishment and or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers. One in 5 women and one in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged 0–17 years. Also, 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age have suffered some form of forced sexual contact.

The consequences of child abuse include impaired lifelong physical and mental health. The social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development.

The prevalence rate of child defilement around regions of the world shows that Africa has the highest rate (34 percent), while Europe has the lowest (9.2 percent). South America, North America, Asia and Oceania have a prevalence rate of between 10.1 percent and 23.9 percent (Finkelhor, 1994; Pereda et al., 2009). In terms of countries, South Africa has the highest prevalence (43.7 percent), followed by Jordan with 27 percent, Tanzania with 25 percent, Spain with 13.4 percent, Australia with 13 percent, and Costa Rica with 12.8 percent. The remaining countries all have a prevalence rate of below 10 percent (Finkelhor, 1994; Pereda et al., 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011).

In relation to government legislation and enforcement, there are serious concerns about delay issues and the non-disclosure of cases. In 2005, Ugandan police recorded 5,693 cases of child defilement nationwide; which is alarmingly high, especially considering some cases are not even reported (Goodman-Brown et al., 2003). In a study of selected countries in Europe (Romania, Germany, Poland, and England) of children who had experienced child defilement, it was revealed that 22 percent reported the abuse within 72 hours, while 47 percent reported it between 72 hours to month after the abuse, and 31 percent more than a month after the abuse (Collings et al., 2005). The willingness to disclose cases is lower when the abuse involves a caregiver (Kogan, 2004; Paine and Hansen, 2002). It was revealed that there could be a delay in the disclosure of abuse of up to 50 years (McElvaney, 2002). Most women do not disclose their child sexual abuse experiences because they are afraid of not being believed (Lund-

qvist et al., 2004). Generally, whether to disclose or not, is usually affected by adverse reactions like blame, fear, fear of not being believed, societal perception of the victim, or stigmatization (Kellogg and Huston, 1995; Somer and Szwarcberg, 2001; Ullman and Filipas, 2005).

Malaysia has a high rate of child neglect cases. Statistics from 2013 to June 2018 reported by the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) show that 1,769 child neglect cases occurred in 2013, 2,035 cases in 2014, 2,236 cases in 2015, 2,547 cases in 2016, 2,410 cases in 2017, and 1,318 cases through June 2018. On average, nearly 400 children are abandoned each year by a parent or guardian – and the majority is Malay Muslims (Aminah, 2018). This increase represents an endless concern and can have adverse effects if certain precautions are not being taken. According to Fayaz (2019), child neglect often involves parents with substance abuse an issue, including alcohol and drugs, which may impair their judgment and mean the child is left unsafe and unprotected by their parents.

In addition, Fayaz (2019) further explains that parental neglect will affect the child's development and character. This is evidenced in his study of two children, namely (A) and (B), 10 year-olds with different developmental and behavioral disorders, which came about because of parental neglect arising from divorce issues. The findings show that (A) children have a stubborn attitude, are often angry, do not listen to adult instructions, and have problems with discipline and academics. Meanwhile, (B) children often suffer from depression, are always sad, do not get along with others, and demonstrate behavior that is difficult to understand.

Statistics show that 90 percent of these abusers are people that the child knows, loves, trusts, and who may not even have criminal records (UNICEF and African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect /ANNPCAN/, 2007). One study estimated that about 30 percent of these abusers are close family members, most often brothers, fathers, uncles, cousins, and females. About 60 percent are close family friends, neighbors, and babysitters, while 10 percent of offenders are strangers (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). In a study carried out in Ibadan, on parents' perception of child sexual

abuse, 70 percent of the parents agreed that child sexual abuse is most often perpetrated by familiar adults (Ige and Favole, 2011). The study also revealed that fifteen of the parents (3.9 percent) reported to have experienced child sexual abuse while growing up. Of these, eight of the parents (2.1 percent) disclosed their abuse, five of the abusers were neighbors, and three were unknown persons.

There are no official national statistics in Nigeria on how many children have been defiled, and even in Sub-Saharan Africa, the issue is largely under reported and under studied (Abdulkadir et al., 2011). It is also pertinent to note that many researchers believe that statistics based on official reports do not accurately reflect the prevalence rate of child sexual abuse (Igbinovia et al., 2003). This may be due to non-disclosure of cases and the fact that some of these cases occur in rural areas. For example, in Uganda most of the cases of child defilement originate from the rural areas (Townsend and Dawes, 2004). Nevertheless, in Nigeria reports from print and non-print media and independent research studies keep us aware of rising cases.

Statement of the research problem

On recording three cases of child defilement within a week in Bauchi – a man of 45-years defiled his 11 year-old daughter, two other men aged between 45 and 54 years defiled children between ages two and four years – the Commissioner of Police in Bauchi state expressed worry over the increasing rate of child defilement. He advised parents, especially mothers to always monitor the movement of their children, particularly if they are female. He further warned mothers to be on high alert, because cases of rape are on the increase in teenagers, and young children between five and fifteen years are now the victims (Vanguard Newspaper, Nigeria, 2015).

The phenomenon of child defilement manifests across the socio-economic class spectrum. It is not specific to any professional, religious, ethnic, or cultural group (Finkelhor, 1994). Hence, it requires necessary intervention due to the long and short-term medical, psychological, physical, and financial implications it may have on the victims, family members and the society. Depending on the age and size of the child and the degree of force used during the defilement, a defiled child

may experience emotional trauma, injury to the genital or rectum, chronic pelvic pain, internal laceration, bleeding and sometimes, severe damage to internal organs that may lead to death (Hornor, 2010). In some cases, abusers may infect the child with HIV/AIDS. Moreover, stigmatization may be attached to a sexually defiled child. In African society sex is not openly discussed with children, it is seen as exclusively reserved for adults, and when a child is sexually defiled, that child is viewed by the society as damaged (Wingood and Di-Clemente, 2000). Consequently, parents of other children may not allow their children to associate with the defiled child; even family members may neglect the child, because to them the child has brought shame to their family.

The government of Nigeria passed the Child Rights Act in 2003. Federal Republic of Nigeria Child Rights Act, 2003; Edo State Child Rights Law, 2007, Section 31 states that no person shall have sexual intercourse with a child and that any person found guilty of such an offence faces life imprisonment. In addition, Section 32, states that any form of sexual abuse of a child is an offence – Edo State Child Rights law, 2007. This may further explain the fact that an adult's sexual intercourse with a child negates the principle that a child is not capable of consent, and that any apparent consent by a child is not considered to be legal consent (Umukoro, 1997).

Despite the provisions of these laws, cases of child defilement have continued unabated in Edo state. A case of a six year-old girl, defiled several times by three male students at Edo state school of Nursing, is a point of reference. According to the girl's testimony, the three male students usually came to her mother's shop when she was away, and whisked her through the window to a hideaway or to their hostel where they usually defiled her (Vanguard newspaper, Nigeria, 2015). One may ask, did the parents not notice this was happening and have these students prosecuted?

Parents are the primary custodian of children; it is their responsibility to guide, protect, and provide for the basic needs of their children, particularly during their formative years (Umukoro, 1997). These responsibilities may have been neglected by some parents who spend less time with their children, leaving them in the care of housemaids, extended

family members, and neighbors. Sometimes parents send children on errands at odd hours, giving them wares to hawk, thereby making their children vulnerable and easy targets for defilement. In addition, the rigorous court processes involved in prosecution, and even the stipulated punishment of life imprisonment, have all created loopholes for offenders to be let off the hook in cases that could have served as a deterrent to others (Grant and Brundige, 2014). In other words, convicting offenders may be tedious and complicated. In view of all this, what is the way out?

Purpose of the study

The study is aimed at examining the scourge of child defilement, and government and parental failure in protecting children against child defilement in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo state, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the failure of parents in protecting their children against defilement in Oredo Local Government Area.
2. Examine whether the existing legislations are effective enough in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement.
3. Establish why parents do not disclose cases of child defilement.
4. Identify the most likely cause of child defilement in Oredo Local Government Area.

Research questions

To carry out this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What were the failures of parents in Oredo Local Government Area in protecting their children against defilement?
2. How effective were the existing legislations in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement?
3. Why do parents cover up cases of their child's defilement?
4. What is the most likely cause of child defilement in Oredo Local Government Area?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey research design was used for this study. The design is considered appropriate because only a part of the population will be

studied, and findings are generalized for the entire population. The estimated population for the study is 117,226 as of 2020. Cochran's (1977) formula was adopted to determine the sample size of 384. INEC directory of polling units was used as a guide in selecting wards and quarters within the Oredo Local Government Area for the study. The study also adopted a simple random sampling technique in selecting eight wards from the twelve wards that make up Oredo Local Government Area, and in selecting the 29 quarters from these wards. In doing so, the wards and quarters were given equal chance of been selected. The selected wards were Ogbe, Gra/Etete, Uzebu, Urubi/Evbiemwen Iwehen, Ihrogbe/Isekhre or Ogbene/Ibieve, Ikpema/Eguadase, Uneru/Ogboka, Ogbelaka/Nekpenekpen. The selected respondents from these wards came from different ethnic, religious, cultural, professional, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds, thus providing the requisite diversity needed to make a valid representation. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting household heads within the selected quarters. Six informants for in-depth interview were also selected using the same method. The consideration for using this technique is that it allows one to pick the respondents who can provide the best information in achieving the objectives of the study.

The instrument used to gather data is a structure questionnaire and the in-depth interview guide. The questionnaires contained closed and open-ended questions, which required the respondents to state their opinion. The questionnaires were also in two sections. Section A focused on respondents' demographic profile such as age, gender, educational qualification, type of job and work status. Section B covered relevant research questions. For the in-depth interview guide, interview questions were derived from the objectives of the study, and served as complementary tools and to validate the responses from the questionnaire.

The answered questionnaires were collected immediately. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used in analyzing the data collected. The data analyses were done using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21. The data interpretation and analyses used descriptive analytical tools, such as simple percentage and frequency dis-

tribution table. On the qualitative data (in-depth interview) side, the responses gathered from the informants were organized into themes and components for effective manual content analysis.

RESULTS

Socio economic demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows the results of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. As highlighted in the frequency distribution table above, 290 respondents (75%) were male, while 94 respondents (24.5%) were female. Thus there were more male respondents than female respondents in the study. With respect to the age of respondents, the above chart shows that the majority of the respondents were aged 39–48 years (135 respondents representing 35.2%), closely followed by those

aged 49–58 years (116 respondents constituting 30.2%); 68 respondents (17.7%) fell within the age bracket of 59 and above, while 54 (14.1%) and 11 (2.9%) were within the ages 29–38 and 18–28 years respectively. This implies that the majority of the sampled household heads in the study's population were within the age bracket of 39–48 years.

With regard to the marital status of respondents, 261 respondents (68%) were married, while 18.8% (72 respondents) were separated. The result further revealed that 27 respondents (7.0%) of the study population were divorced. 4.2% (16 respondents) were widows, while 8 of the respondents (2.1%) had never married. Hence, the majority of the respondents were married and living together with their spouse and children under one roof.

As for the level of educational attained by the respondents, 354 (92.2%) had tertiary education, 14 (3.6%) had post-primary education, while the number of respondents with

Table 1 – Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Responses	Frequencies	Percentages
Sex of the respondents	Male	290	75.5
	Female	94	24.5
	Total	384	100.0
Age of the respondents	18–28 years	11	2.9
	29–38 years	54	14.1
	39–48 years	135	35.2
	49–58 years	116	30.2
	59 years and above	68	17.7
	Total	384	100.0
Marital status of the respondents	Never married	8	2.1
	Married	261	68.0
	Divorced	27	7.0
	Widowed	16	4.2
	Separated	72	18.8
	Total	384	100.0
Level of education of respondents	None	4	1.0
	Primary school	12	3.1
	Post-primary school	14	3.6
	Tertiary education	354	92.2
	Total	384	100.0
Occupation of respondents	Unemployed	12	3.1
	Self employed	100	26.0
	Private sector employee	58	15.1
	Public sector employee	160	41.7
	Retiree	54	14.1
	Total	384	100.0
Religious affiliation of respondents	Christian	370	62.5
	Muslim	9	21.9
	African Traditional Religion	5	15.6
	Total	384	100.0

primary education and no formal education were 12 (3.1%) and 4 (1.0%) respectively. The results therefore suggest that the majority of respondents had tertiary education. While the occupational distribution of respondents revealed that 41.7% (160 respondents) were public sector employees, while 100 respondents (26%) were self-employed; 15.1% (58 respondents), 14.1% (54 respondents), and 3.1% (12 respondents) were private sector employees, retirees and unemployed, respectively. In terms of the religious affiliation of respondents, the majority was Christians (370 respondents, 62.5%). This was followed by Muslims (9 respondents, 21.9%). 5 (15.6%) of the respondents were practitioners of African Traditional Religion.

The analysis of the data in Table 2 highlights the failures of parents in protecting their children against defilement in Oredo Local Government Area. On the question of whether parents think that most perpetrators of child defilement are well known to the children, a significant proportion of the respondents (62.5% which represents 240 respondents) think that most perpetrators of child defilement are well known to the children. Whereas 84 respondents (21.9%) do not think that most perpetrators of child defilement are well known to the children; 60 (15.6%) of the respondents were not sure if most perpetrators of child defilement are well known to the children.

Furthermore, in relation to whether more parental responsibility would help in child

defilement prevention, the result shows that the majority of the sampled household heads (337 respondents, 87.8%) think that more parental responsibilities would help in child defilement prevention; 27 (7%) of the respondents were not sure if more parental responsibilities would help in child defilement prevention; 20 (5.2%) of the respondents do not think more parental responsibilities would help in child defilement prevention.

With regards to whether sex education should be given to children, 368 respondents (95.8%) think that parents should provide their children with sex education. Conversely 10 respondents (2.6%) disagree, while 6 (1.6%) were not sure if sex education should be given to children.

351 of the respondents (91.4%) supported the option that parents should tell their children the correct names for their private parts. Meanwhile 18 respondents (4.7%) were not sure, and 15 (3.9%) were against parents telling their children the correct names for their private parts.

To support the point on the failures of parents in protecting their children against defilement in Oredo Local Government Area, some of the informants in the in-depth interview responded thus:

“Parents, in terms of pro-activeness and preventive measures, are not doing enough” (IDI, Male informant, 21-09-2020).

Table 2 – Failures of parents in protecting their children against defilement in Oredo Local Government Area

Variables	Responses	Frequencies	Percentages
As parents, do you think that most perpetrators of child defilement are well known to the children?	Yes	240	62.5
	No	84	21.9
	Not sure	60	15.6
	Total	384	100.0
Do you think more parental responsibilities would help in child defilement prevention?	Yes	337	87.8
	No	20	5.2
	Not sure	27	7.0
	Total	384	100.0
As parents, do you think sex education should be given to children?	Yes	368	95.8
	No	10	2.6
	Not sure	6	1.6
	Total	384	100.0
Do you support the idea that parents should tell their children the correct names for their private parts?	Yes	351	91.4
	No	15	3.9
	Not sure	18	4.7
	Total	384	100.0

Similarly:

“On the part of the parents, most parents do not follow up on their children. Even in school or at home, parents do not check up on their children, leaving everything in the care of the teachers, housemaids and babysitters” (IDI, Female informant, 20-09-2020).

Table 3 shows the effectiveness of the existing legislation in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement. The analysis of the responses shows that most of the respondents, 198 (51.6%), think that perpetrators of child defilement get punished according to the law. On the other hand, 108 (28.1%) do not think that perpetrators of child defilement get punished according to the law, while 78 (20.3%) were not sure.

The table above also revealed that 268 respondents (69.8%) support life imprisonment as punishment for child defilement offenders, 80 (20.8%) of the respondents do not support life imprisonment as punishment for child defilement offenders, while 36 (9.4%) are not sure.

45.6% (175) respondents think that harsher punishments for child defilement offenders would serve as deterrent. On the other hand, 161 respondents (41.9%) do not think that harsher punishment for child defilement

offenders would serve as deterrent, while 48 (12.5%) are not sure.

In relation to whether the existing laws against child defilement in Edo State are effective enough in prosecuting child defilement offenders, the results revealed that 72 (18.8%) of the respondents think that the existing laws against child defilement in Edo state are effective enough in prosecuting offenders. However, the majority of the respondents (214 which represents 55.7%) do not think that the existing laws against child defilement in Edo state are effective enough in prosecuting offenders of child defilement; 98 (25.5%) of the respondents were not sure.

Lastly, the above results revealed that 84 (21.9%) of the respondents think that the government and its relevant agencies are doing enough in prosecuting offenders of child defilement. However, most of the respondents, 234 (60.9%), do not think that the government and its relevant agencies are doing enough in prosecuting offenders of child defilement, while 66 (17.2%) of the respondents are not sure.

It was deduced from the above findings that most of the respondents think the existing laws against child defilement in Edo state are not effective enough in prosecuting offenders. This signifies that the problem under

Table 3 – Effectiveness of the existing legislation in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement

Variables	Responses	Frequencies	Percentages
Do you think offenders of child defilement are punished according to the law?	Yes	198	51.6
	No	108	28.1
	Not sure	78	20.3
	Total	384	100.0
Do you support life imprisonment as punishment for child defilement offenders?	Yes	268	69.8
	No	80	20.8
	Not sure	36	9.4
	Total	384	100.0
Do you think harsher punishments for child defilement offenders would serve as deterrent?	Yes	175	45.6
	No	161	41.9
	Not sure	48	12.5
	Total	384	100.0
Do you think the existing laws against child defilement in Edo state are effective enough in prosecuting offenders?	Yes	72	18.8
	No	214	55.7
	Not sure	98	25.5
	Total	384	100.0
Do you think the government and its relevant agencies are doing enough in prosecuting offenders of child defilement?	Yes	84	21.9
	No	234	60.9
	Not sure	66	17.2
	Total	384	100.0

investigation needs attention. To substantiate the quantitative data on the effectiveness of the existing legislation in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement, some of the informants interviewed responded thus:

"The laws are fairly effective, but it is the system that needs to be improved upon, like the prosecution processes, we need a system whereby the consent of parents or family members of the defiled child will not be needed for the government to go ahead to prosecute offenders of child defilement. The laws should be strengthened to the extent that when the prosecution process is initiated in court, the family or parents of the victim cannot back out, this had been a major impediment in prosecuting cases. This really needs to be improved upon, because the position of the law as it stands now gives consideration to the victim's parent when it comes to prosecution of cases" (IDI, Male informant, 03-10-2020).

Similarly:

"For the laws to be effective, parents and families of the defiled children have to report the cases" (IDI, Female informant, 20-09-2020).

Another responded thus:

"The laws are not completely effective, because most people or parents are not aware of the law, victims and families of victims do not know how to access or get justice. Hence prosecuting an offender is difficult in a situation where a case of child defilement goes to court; parents come around to say they are not interested in proceeding with the case due to selfish reasons and the case is withdrawn from the court without the abused child getting justice. It is the position of this organization, that there should be compelling laws to make parents report cases and stand by their defiled child in court and get justice for their child" (IDI, Male informant, 03-09-2020).

It was also deduced from the findings that most of the respondents do not think that the government and its relevant agencies are doing enough in prosecuting offenders of child defilement.

To substantiate the quantitative data on the effectiveness of the fact that the government and its relevant agencies are doing

enough in prosecuting offenders of child defilement, some of the informants interviewed responded thus:

"The government is doing enough, in terms of policy formulation a lot of government policies have been made available like the child protection policy or child's right law, and Edo state government has gone ahead in establishing the family court which a child friendly court" (IDI, Male informant, 21-09-2020).

Similarly:

"At the implementation level, the government is trying – by way of creating an enabling environment and collaborating with NGOs and other organizations like the association of orphanage network, and the child's right implementation committee – both at the state and local government level. More so, the government, through the ministry of women affairs and social development, is collaborating with other organization and agencies to end all forms of violence against children" (IDI, Male informant, 20-09-2020).

Some informants interviewed gave contrary response, thus:

"The government is not doing enough in its responsibilities, for example, the government is not providing funds for ministry, organization, and NGO saddled with the responsibility of child protection to assist in doing their work" (IDI, Male informant, 20-09-2020).

Similarly:

"Government is not doing enough, because cases of child defilement are still on the increase" (IDI, Male informant, 03-10-2020).

Table 4 shows reasons why parents may not disclose cases of child defilement. It was revealed that the majority of the respondents, 286 (74.5%), supported disclosure of cases of child defilement, 80 (20.8%) did not, and 18 (4.7%) were not sure if they would support disclosure of cases of child defilement or not.

Most of the respondents, 229 (59.6%), affirmed that they would disclose their child's incidence of defilement to the police if such a situation occurred. On the other hand, 117 (30.5%) of the respondents were not sure if they would disclose their child's incidence of

Table 4 – Reasons why parents may not disclose cases of child defilement

Variables	Responses	Frequencies	Percentages
Do you support disclosure of cases of child defilement?	Yes	286	74.5
	No	80	20.8
	Not sure	18	4.7
	Total	384	100.0
If you found out about it, would you disclose your child's incidence of defilement to the police?	Yes	229	59.6
	No	38	9.9
	Not sure	117	30.5
	Total	384	100.0
Why do you think some parents conceal cases of their child defilement?	Stigmatization	256	66.7
	Fear	48	12.5
	To save their marriage in the case of incest	24	6.3
	Financial involvement in reporting and prosecuting	28	7.3
	Stress of law enforcement agencies	28	7.3
	Total	384	100.0

defilement to the police, while 38 (9.9%) of the respondents said that they would not disclose.

In relation to why some parents conceal cases of their child's defilement, the analysis shows that a significant proportion of the respondents, 256 (66.7%), think that parents cover up cases of their child defilement because of stigmatization; 48 (12.5%) of the respondents think that parents cover up cases of their child defilement because of fear; 28 (7.3%) of the respondents think that parents cover up cases of their child defilement because of financial involvement in reporting and prosecuting and stress of law enforcement agencies, while 24 (6.3%) think that parents cover up cases of their child defilement just to save their marriage.

From the findings above, we can deduce that most of the respondents support disclosure of cases of child defilement. Most of the respondents would also disclose their child's incidence of defilement to the police if such a situation happened to occur. However, most respondents think that some parents cover up cases of defilement because they and/or their children wards will face stigmatization. Some of the reasons why parents would not disclose their child's defilement, aside stigmatization, include fear of being attacked by the perpetrator. Other reasons include, saving their marriage in the case of incest, financial implications of reporting and prosecuting cases

of child defilement, and the stress they will go through in the hands of the law enforcement agencies when seeking justice for their child.

To substantiate the quantitative findings, interviewees gave the following reasons why some parents may not want to disclose cases of child defilement:

"It depends on the level of strata the parents belong to in society. For middle-class parents, the reason for the cover up could be stigma, and for lower class parents, their reason could be poverty" (IDI, Male informant, 21-09-2020).

Another informant responded:

"The main reason for non-disclosure is stigmatization, because it is believed that when defilement is disclosed, the child might be stigmatized, if not immediately, maybe later in the future. Sometimes, even the parents of the victim may be stigmatized by the society" (IDI, Female informant, 21-09-2020).

Similarly, it was stated that:

"The reason is mostly stigmatization; most parents will cover it up because they don't want their defiled child to be stigmatized, which might jeopardize the future of their child especially when they want to marry in the future" (IDI, Female informant, 21-09-2020).

Table 5 analyses the most likely causes of child defilement. With respect to the question of who parents think are most likely to sexually defile children, a significant proportion of the respondents, 132 representing 34.4%, think that relatives are most likely to sexually defile children; 60 (15.6%) of respondents think that domestic employee are most likely to sexually defile children. Whereas 56 (14.6%) think that stepfathers are most likely to sexually defile children; 28 (7.3%) of the respondents think that drug addicts and teachers are most likely to sexually defile children.

Furthermore, 25 (6.5%) of the respondents think that fellow children are likely to defile other children; 24 (6.3%) of the respondents think that drunkards are most likely to defile children; 11 (2.9%) of the respondents think that the perpetrator could be from other categories, like neighbors or unknown persons. Lastly, 9 (2.3%) of the respondents think that

pastors/clergy are most likely to sexually defile children.

In addition, the table above shows that the majority of the respondents, 134 which constitutes 34.9%, think that parental neglect is the most likely cause of child defilement; 97 (25.3%) of the respondents think that moral decay in society is the most likely cause of child defilement; 44 (11.5%) of the respondents think that broken families is the most likely cause of child defilement; 38 (9.9%) of the respondents think that drug abuse/alcoholism is the most likely cause of child defilement; 20 (5.2%) of the respondents think that poverty is the most likely cause of child defilement; 16 (4.2%) of the respondents think that overcrowded homes is the most likely cause of child defilement; 14 (3.6%) of the respondents think that poor dress code is the most likely cause of child defilement; 9 (2.3%) of the respondents think that weak laws are the most

Table 5 – Causes of defilement in Oredo Local Government Area

Variables	Responses	Frequencies	Percentages
Who do you think are most likely to sexually defile children?	Fathers	11	2.9
	Step fathers	56	14.6
	Relatives	132	34.4
	Teachers	28	7.3
	Fellow children	25	6.5
	Pastors/clergies	9	2.3
	Domestic employee	60	15.6
	Drug addicts	28	7.3
	Drunkards	24	6.3
	Others	11	2.9
	Total	384	100.0
What do you think is the most likely cause of child defilement?	Drug abuse/alcoholism	38	9.9
	Overcrowded homes	16	4.2
	Moral decay in society	97	25.3
	Parental neglect	134	34.9
	Poverty	20	5.2
	Broken families	44	11.5
	Poor dress code	14	3.6
	Weak laws	9	2.3
	Poor performance of legal institution	5	1.3
	Others	7	1.8
	Total	384	100.0

likely cause of child defilement; 7 (1.8%) of the respondents think that the 'other' category, which includes all the listed factors and mental illness, is the most likely cause of child defilement; 5 (1.3%) of the respondents think that poor performance of the legal institution is the most likely cause of child defilement.

It was deduced from the findings above that most respondents believe that the major cause of child defilement is parental neglect, although several factors among those mentioned above also are pivotal causes of child defilement. The findings also revealed that the majority of the respondents affirm that relatives are most likely to sexually defile children.

To substantiate the quantitative findings from the study, some informants reported the cause of child defilement thus:

"It is attributed more to parental neglect; most parents are so busy these days that they do not have time for their children" (IDI, Male informant, 21-09-2020).

Another informant also identified this as the cause of child defilement:

"Parental neglect mostly, lack of knowledge by the public about the existing laws against child defilement. In addition, most organizations that take care of children do not have safeguarding policies in their organization to protect children in their care. In other words, the care giver organization for children should have a safeguarding policy that will define the relationship between children they are taking care of and adults who take care of these children. In other words, these adults should be made to sign the safeguarding policy as part of their employment requirement" (IDI, Female informant, 03-09-2020).

DISCUSSION

The results in research question one show that the perpetrators of child defilement are people very close and well known to the children, such as relatives, step fathers, neighbors, domestic employees and others. These findings agree with the study of Stoltenborgh et al. (2011), which asserted that about 30 percent of perpetrators of child defilement were close family members, most often, fathers, brothers, un-

cles, cousins, and about 60 percent were close family friends, neighbors and babysitters, and 10 percent were strangers. The study also revealed that parental responsibility in the area of care and welfare of the children will help in reducing the vulnerability of the children to defilement. The findings support the study by Umukoro (1997). The results in research question two show that the existing legislations in prosecuting perpetrators of child defilement are not completely effective and that the position of the laws as they stand now, does not compel parents or any other person to report cases of child defilement when they happen. In addition, the prosecution processes are rigorous. These outcomes confirmed the work of Ajanwachuku (2016), which indicated that the majority of judicial decisions against child defilement towed the line of leniency, rather than imposing the maximum sentence of life imprisonment to deter potential offenders and protect public morality. In addition, Akpoghome and Nwaro (2016) agree that courts in Nigeria have not been handing out full punishment to offenders of child defilement. The results in research question three show that parents may not disclose cases of defilement because of stigmatization, fear of being attacked by the abuser, the finances involved in reporting and prosecuting cases, and the stress of dealing with law enforcement agencies. The above results also support the findings of Bowman and Brundige, (2014). The results in research question four analyzed the causes of child defilement as a result of parental neglect. The findings support the work of Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006) that parental neglect is a major cause of child defilement; parents pursue their career at the expense of their children's wellbeing. Most parents are so busy with their job that they leave home very early when the children are still asleep and come home late when they are again asleep. In most cases, these children are left in the care of domestic employees, relations, neighbors and others, who may end up sexually defiling these children.

Recommendations

Based on our conclusions, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Strict enforcement of the existing laws against child defilement, and the clearing of technical hurdles in the prosecution

- of offenders. Judges should be firm and decisive in exercising their discretionary power in passing judgments, ensuring that offenders are given maximum punishment to serve as deterrent to others.
2. The government should create a comprehensive database of all reported cases of child defilement. This will assist in the understanding of the trend, nature, most endemic area, predisposing factors, age range of both victims and abusers, causes, effects, and to help in better policy formulation on how best to address the scourge. Law enforcement units, departments, government ministries, and other organizations responsible for child welfare and protection should be well equipped with the necessary facilities. Its officials, such as the police, sociologists, social workers, counsellors and lawyers, should be well trained on how best to handle cases of child defilement in line with global best practices.
 3. The newly inaugurated family court in Edo State should provide a friendly environment to enable defiled children to give evidence against their abusers. In other words, the court should be equipped with closed circuit television (CCTV) facilities and a separate waiting area for the accused and defiled children. It is believed that the family court will promote a peaceful and safe environment for the children to grow and develop.
 4. Parents should prioritize giving their children sex education early enough in life. Children should be taught how to say no and to report any kind of inappropriate touching of their body, especially their private parts. This can happen when parents, especially mothers, develop a close relationship with their children.
 5. Parents should stop sending their children on errands to either buy things or deliver information to somebody at odd hours. Also, they should be mindful to whom and how they entrust their children, especially their female children, because when a child develops a total obedience and trust towards an adult, it becomes easier for the adult to defile the child.
 6. Child caregiver organizations like baby day care centers, schools and others should have a safeguarding policy that clearly states and defines the relationship between employees and children in the organization. The signing of this policy should be made compulsory and part of the conditions for employment. Meanwhile, staff in this organization should be trained on how to recognize behavioral signs of a child who has heard of or is experiencing defilement.
- ## CONCLUSIONS
- Overall, we observed the failures of government to implement effective legislations against child defilement. We also discovered the failures of parents in protecting their children against defilement. Based on this, it was concluded that child defilement has horrifying consequences for children and their family members, and that the perpetrators come from all backgrounds, cutting across age and status. In most cases however, they are people close and well known to the children. It was also concluded that more parental responsibilities would help in curbing the scourge, and the level of awareness about child defilement is low, especially among parents. The existing legislations against child defilement are not effective enough in prosecuting offenders. Relevant government agencies and organizations responsible for effective implementation of the existing legislations in the prosecution and protection of children against child defilement are not doing enough. Finally, we also concluded that the fear of stigmatization of victims and the family members is one the reasons why parents cover up cases of child defilement.
- ### Ethical aspects and conflict of interests
- The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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