



Islamic Position on Child Abuse: Selected Cases in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract. Child Abuse remains a plague eating up every society. With children being victims of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse, one wonders if there is any hope for the upcoming generations. This paper, therefore, examines the Islamic position on child abuse with reference to selected cases in Ilorin. Employing the descriptive and analytical methods of research, this paper realizes that the menace of child abuse is prevalent and often not recognized as a form of violation. It notes that victims of abuse suffer physical and psychological repercussion of the abuse, which leads some into depression, pushes some to suicidal acts, and even affect the cognitive and emotional development of others. Hence, the study concludes that child abuse should be spoken against and never normalized and that all hands must be on deck towards applying the Islamic principles in cleansing the society of the filth of child abuse.

Keywords: Child, Abuse, Cases, Islamic Position, Right, Effect

1. Introduction

More than a thousand years ago, the noble cause of safeguarding the welfare of children was espoused by Islamic law and in pursuit of that commitment certain inalienable rights and legal safeguards were promulgated for the benefit of all children. The glorious Qur'ān itself, the primary source of Islamic law, initiated this unprecedented venture by declaring certain basic rights for the protection of children that have acquired universal validity in Islamic juristic thought. In addition to children, there are other persons in society who, because of natural or cultural disabilities, similarly require special protection. This matter was considered of such importance that a whole chapter, *Surat al-Nisa* (the Women) was

enacted in the glorious Qur'ān to deal with some of the particular matters affecting such persons

The issue of childhood is at the core of the objective of *Sharī'ah*, namely, safeguarding children (progeny) and immunizing them against dangers. On this theme, Islām introduces bountiful and precise laws that are almost non-existent in other religions or social systems. It would suffice to point to the rigorous legislation dealing with the child from the early days of formation in the womb of the mother, all the way until he or she attains the age of puberty. In between, there are the various stages of pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, weaning, playfulness, discipline and education, friendliness and companionship, and finally independence and self-reliance.

The concept of child protection cannot be fulfilled unless we confront all forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation that deny the child – or even just threaten to deny the child – his or her basic rights in attaining sufficient parental care, as well as education, health services, enjoyment of recreation and sports, and the free expression of what goes on in the child's mind. Child care and protection are principally the responsibility of the family. When the family is the source of abuse, exploitation, and violence, however, it becomes incumbent upon state institutions to intervene to provide the abused children with protection.

2. Conceptualization of Child Abuse

The history of the human race lends credence to the fact that human nature sometimes is dominated by aggressive impulses. Invariably, this creates a social disturbance that adversely affects socio-cosmological orderliness. These impulses could be of selfish motives or oppressive tendencies. Based on the above position, it is a popular belief that injustice is

ubiquitous, and is inextricably linked with abuse in one form or the other. As a result; human abuse is a global phenomenon that many religious bodies and international organizations have made serious efforts to reduce its occurrence to a minimal level.

The term 'child' could be defined as an unborn or newly born human being, boy or girl, son or daughter. About the contextual meaning of this work, a child means a human being of under-age, irrespective of his sex, and who should be under the care and protection of the adult race in the society.

The term 'abuse' simply means wrong use and ill-treatment. Hornby defines "Abuse" as an act of making bad or wrong use of something. In the light of this, child abuse could be defined as infamous acts of ill-treating, wrong handling, and wrong training of a child. It is simply one of the ways of placing the duties and responsibilities of the parents (who are adults) on the child's shoulder without considering his or her capacity in bearing such a burden.

According to the World Health Organization, Child abuse includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Violence against children in its comprehensive meaning is a complex phenomenon that includes physical abuse, sexual assault, verbal harassment, psychological abuse, emotional deprivation, neglecting the material and moral needs of children, and deserting them without paying attention to who should take care of them or giving them up to a known person or institution. In its wide-ranging scope, violence against children may take place at home or school, in the street, at work, or inside welfare houses such as orphanages or reformatories. Laxity in confronting familial or societal violence against children, and neglecting the duty to provide them with protection against such violence, may lead to serious repercussions.

2.1 Forms of Child Abuse

Child Abuse as a societal menace happens in several forms. The following are the known forms of child abuse as recognized by The World Health Organization (WHO):

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse occurs in the form of beating, kicking, tying, choking, burning, hard work, and denial of food.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse occurs when children are coerced or manipulated into sexual acts by an adult.

Neglect: Neglecting a child can be done by failing to meet a child's physical, economical, educational, and emotional needs.

Violence Exposure: Children can as well be abused by exposing them to several forms of violence, either in the home, in schools, or the society.

Exploitation: Children are can be abused by exploiting them economically and sexually. They are exploited economically by making them go through child labor and child prostitution to provide for someone older than them. This form of abuse greatly affects the child emotionally, psychologically, and health-wise.

2.2 Effects of Child Abuse

Child abuse is not without its effects. Below are some serious repercussions of abuse on the victims:

Physical Effect: Many children suffer physical injury as a result of abuse, such as broken bones, infections, and physical illness. These physical consequences can be painful for children and costly for families. Injuries can affect children's physical development and can have an economic impact on the entire community.

Emotional and Psychological Effect: When children are beaten or molested, they often feel anger and shame at the same time, which leads to a feeling of humiliation. When we force children to tolerate injustice, we damage their sense of dignity and self-confidence. Children may also stop trusting adults who repeatedly abuse them. These negative experiences can lead children to depression, thoughts of suicide, desires for revenge, and aggression toward others.

Behavioural Effect: Many children who experience any form of abuse bully other children, or as adults, use domestic violence. Abusing children teaches them that violence is an acceptable way of imposing their views on someone less powerful than themselves.

Developmental Effect: Many children who experience abuse on a regular basis live with slowed or interrupted cognitive and emotional development. They become withdrawn and fearful of trying new things. They feel ashamed of themselves due to regular humiliation. They need more time to learn social and academic skills. Their performance at school deteriorates, and their ability to form healthy, satisfying relationships can be severely affected.

3. Cases of Child Abuse in Ilorin

Ilorin, the haven of Arabic and Islamic scholars, is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic community popularly known to some people as “*Gerin Alimi*” (the town of *Alimi*) and to many others as “*Ilorin Afonja*” (Ilorin of *Afonja*). The people of Ilorin are known to possess intellectual dexterity in regards to Islamic knowledge, with Islamic schools scattered around the town – running on weekdays and weekends respectively.

Notwithstanding the status of the Ilorin Emirate, it stands to date as one of the promoters of child abuse in Nigeria. Jekayinfa studied 210 students of selected secondary schools in Ilorin and reported the following percentages for various types of abuse: Physical abuse (47.5%), sexual abuse (26.2%) psychological abuse (41.5%), physical neglect (82%), Medical care neglect (28.4%), intentional drugging (10.9%), and educational deprivation (19.7%).

Children in Ilorin are not spared from different forms of abuse; from the family level to the school and societal level. They have experienced and are experiencing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse heartbreaking. They are being exploited and exposed to domestic violence. With emotional or psychological abuse being the most common form of childhood abuse in Ilorin, a considerable number of parents are known for cursing their children, this happens incessantly and you will wonder if the child truly belongs to them or not. According to the Islamic teachings, parents are enjoined not to curse their children, as the supplication of a parent upon the child is always answered – good or bad. Rather, they are advised to pray for them at all times, even when they err. The prophetic narration states:

Jābir (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Messenger of Allah said, “Do not invoke curses on yourself or your children or your possessions lest you should happen to do it at a moment when the supplications are accepted, and your prayer might be granted.

Teachers in schools take joy in punishing children physically when the condition arises; they at times go overboard with these punishments and end up hurting the children, leaving them with bodily wounds. All these punishments and abuses are mostly counter-productive, making a child withdraw from the rest, and when the abuse persists, it turns the child into a habitual offender and the punishment ceases to have any effect on him no more.

There is also the issue of sexual abuse in Ilorin, which is today a cankerworm that brings about

societal decay. Known mostly to be affecting the female child, the perpetrators of sexual abuse are deemed to be perverts who cannot keep their hands to themselves. They sexually harass and assault the female child, even to the extent of forcefully cohabiting some of them. These assaults are made by known people, family relatives, teachers in schools, and other individuals in society. In bringing light to the cases of abuse in Ilorin, this study will be looking at instances of child abuse in the parts of Kwara State, Ilorin. These cases are examples of physical, emotional and sexual abuses.

3.1 A popular case relating to *Hijab* wearing in Ilorin locality

The kinds of this case has been happening in Ilorin, however, this particular one is characterized with physical molestation, assault, sexual abuse, denial of rights, and inhumane reactions to an issue that seems not complex. This case happened in an area of Ilorin, precisely at *Okelele*. According to interview granted to an informant, the victim who was a female teenager claimed to have been physically abused by her parents due to her insistent on the use of *Khimār*. Worthy of note is that she was never known with wearing the *Khimār* (a long flowing *Hijab*) before, but when she began to use it, her parents cautioned her regarding the usage; having heard that those who use the *Khimār* are known to be disobedient to their parents and do not subscribe to the ‘normal’ religious inclinations all other people are known with.

On different occasions, she was subjected to torture from her parents and these went rotational between the family members. According to narration, she was beaten to a pulp which affected her and she had to be taken to a psychiatric hospital along *Eyenkorin*. This became a serious case of several hospital visitations, and after a series of tests that proved nothing was wrong with her, she was locked up in the house until a day she got herself free and absconded. Her parents thereafter raised a supposedly false alarm that their daughter was kidnapped.

Upon all these threatening and provocation, the girl remained adamant on her use of *Khimār*. Adding that, she has chosen that the *Khimār* would stay with her as a mode of dressing forever and absolute “no” to skimpy dresses. This stance of hers birthed the days of abuse and molestation for her which would be made known as the paragraph unfolds. To keep the fire burning, a Muslim cleric who happened to be a relative to the victim also intervened in the issue. Her intervention to a source was described as a salt to a sore.

This cleric was reported to have ferociously taken a stance that the girl in question should be dealt with on a refusal to return to her normal dresses and do away with the *Khimār*. Several episodes of the “Alfa” for cleric, ordering that the girl be beaten and seeing to some of her *Hijab* burnt were narrated. She was reported to have been abused physically through beating, and emotionally through utterance of unpleasing accusations.

There was also a narration that the girl was forcefully married off to a man she has never consented to. The man tried to forcefully cohabit with her for days and he failed, until a time when he had beaten her up to a pulp and when she became too weak to struggle, he raped her; with the result of that rape ending in a traumatizing unwanted pregnancy. The moment was a heartbreaking one, and she reportedly escaped from the village some days after.

Everything was said to have been masterminded by the Alfa in a bid to return the girl to her earlier and usual mode of dressing. Upon all these, it could be seen that she stood her ground, and never felt weary of using *Khimār*. To be noted is that a list of witnesses was summoned to hear their voices on the issue, including the parents of the girl and their neighbors. However, there were dissecting statements, especially the one made by the girl and her parents.

Similarly, a close personality to the cleric was granted an interview; he debunked the claim of the girl and proclaimed that she only want to tarnish the reputation of the cleric. It calls for great concern that the rate of child abuse in Ilorin is on the rise and cases like this are but few among the ones which happen every day, in the home, in schools, right under our noses, and behind our backs. This prevailing incident of abuse calls for great concern and needs curbing. To curb it, however, the responsibility falls upon everybody, keeping in mind the prophetic narration:

Abu Sa'id said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah say: 'Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart- and that is the weakest of Faith.

3.2 An issue arising from birthday celebration party

On the 9th of October, 2021, about 3 videos surfaced online. The videos detailed about 3 students of a particular Arabic and Islamic school being beaten in a way that could be said to be unpleasant, degrading

and horrible to watch. In fact, viewers' discretion was strongly advised regarding the video. After what could be regarded as combing through the online space, the researcher found out that the Arabic and Islamic school in question is located somewhere in Ganmo, Ilorin, Kwara State.

Judging from the viral video, the students were apparently punished for an offence we would come to know as the research unfolds. Out of the three videos, the most sensational one which generated lots of discussion online was that of a lady (who is apparently a student of the school as she is dressed in uniform) being beaten by fellow students (who would later be identified as her seniors). Just like her male colleagues, the lady was whipped several lashes that one could possibly not lay a claim to its numbers, as she was lashed by 3 individuals concurrently.

The researcher, in a bid to shed light on the eyesore situation did a field work to ascertain the true sides of the narrative. Getting to the school, the researcher met with teachers of the school, the school principal, and victims of the unfortunate incidence.

According to interview held with individuals who pleaded anonymity, it was gathered that the students were punished for attending a birthday party in a hotel where they were indecently dressed, pictured with alcohol, and also mixing freely with a female student from the same school. This, they said is against the basic principles of Islam and the laid down rules by the school authority.

When asked whether the school forbids students from celebrating birthdays, one of the teachers responded in the opposite, he said:

We do not forbid them from celebrating birthdays. In fact, whenever they celebrate their birthdays, they do bring drinks and some other edibles for us as part of the celebration gifts. They were only punished because they choose to celebrate in a hotel, with alcohol and free mixing, while they know that all these are prohibited, and they were taught

Speaking with other teachers of the school who pleaded anonymity, the researcher was made to know that the punishment melted out on the offenders were nothing compared to what they also suffered from (as ex-students of the school), although they acknowledge that it is wrong to punish children in such ways at this present age, they however believe that it is one of the ways to instill moral uprightness.

One of the senior teachers was asked how they got to know of the birthday incident and he replied saying:

We never knew that any birthday took place. We received a call from some of the parents who accused us of not properly teaching their children the right ethics and morals. They were the ones who forwarded pictures of their children to us at the said birthday, and requested that we carry out the necessary judgement on them, so that they will serve as examples to others who are planning or nurturing similar ideas.

The researcher was also privileged to meet with some of the students who were victims of the punishment, and from the interview, things became clear that the video which surfaced online on the 9th of October was the second phase of the punishment. It was gathered that quite a number of students were at the said birthday party. The first phase of the punishment happened on Wednesday, the 6th of October, 2021, this phase saw to the punishment of some students, but no video was recorded. The second phase which took place on Saturday, the 9th of October 2021, was the conclusion to the first phase which saw to the punishment of the remaining students who were absent on Wednesday.

From the interview with the victims, the researcher was made to know the other side of the incident. One of the victims, while granting an interview, said: We never had the birthday party at a hotel, rather, it was at a bar. When we got to the bar, we were few in number, and I was told other people are going to join us. Since it is going to be a large crowd, I moved from the small table I was to a larger table, and we met a guy there who ordered a trophy. We never knew this guy. We took our sit. I did not even know who took our picture. We did not drink alcohol.

Commenting on the incident, one among the punished students said: The birthday party was held neither at a hotel, nor a clubhouse. It was at a bar, and we did not take alcohol. I did not take alcohol. Why will I take something I have never had before? What we ordered were energy drinks and Malta Guinness.

The birthday party incidence, the accusation of having had alcohol and mixing with the opposite sex ended in a horrible punishment for the students involved. They were all lashed severally by four students, not even the lady among them was spared. The punishment resulted into several bruises, blisters, welts, and injuries on every part of their bodies. Islam as an encompassing religion preaches peace, leniency, and mercy. The peace which Islam preaches does not limit itself to humans alone. It teaches us that birds should not be used as targets in archery. It

teaches us that one should not just kill any animal for fun except you are in dire need of them for consumption. It tells us of a woman who would be punished with hellfire for starving a cat. It tells us of a prostitute who would be admitted to *Jannah* for quenching the thirst of a dog. Islam teaches us that women are fragile vessels who should be cared for, and never molested in any form.

If these are the teachings of Islam, then, the above cited case and others like it which projects an alien form of Islam should totally be spoken against. This does not in any way support acts of indecency, free mixing, and alcoholic consumption, it however calls for moderation in punishment and facts-checking before taking any serious action.

4. The Islamic Position on Child Abuse

Child abuse has for a long time been recorded in literature, art, and science in many parts of the world. Reports of infanticide, mutilation, abandonment, and other forms of violence against children were dated back to ancient civilizations.

Infanticide was a customary practice in many pre-Islamic societies. Some of the causes of infanticide were the fear of penury, or the offering of religious sacrifices, or, in the case of daughters, to avoid disgrace. Thus, according to the glorious Qur'ān, any killing without lawful authority constitutes murder in Islamic law and is punishable in this life and the hereafter. It is of fundamental value in Islamic juristic thought, therefore, that the life of a child must be preserved. Furthermore, Islam considers all children – including children in the care of their natural parents – to be vulnerable and thus in need of protection. The Qur'ān, therefore, provides safeguards for children by defining the limits of parental authority.

Violence against children may take various forms and may take place at home, in school, or the society. The Islamic law requires parents to discipline their children and it is for the sake of disciplining the child that parents may sometimes resort to smacking or corporal punishment. A child might indeed commit mistakes, but smacking and corporal punishment may not be suitable for disciplining, rather in some cases, it may be counter-productive. Allah, The Exalted reminds Muslims that:

O you who have believed, indeed, among your wives and your children are enemies to you, so beware of them. But if you pardon and overlook and forgive - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" – Quran chapter 64, verse 14.

Parenting can be very hard, especially in this present generation. One of the most fundamental concepts for a parent is to understand that children are a test. Once this is realized, there should be a profound change in how they relate to and deal with their children. The Quran explicitly state:

Your wealth and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward”– Quran chapter 64, verse 15.

Moreover, the Prophet in a *Hadith* narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās has urged all Muslims to be very kind and affectionate to children:

Ibn Abbas narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: “He is not one of us who does not have mercy upon our young, respect our elders, and command good and forbid evil.

The above prophetic tradition does not in any way support spoiling children and not disciplining them when required, rather, it enjoins us to be merciful and not go overboard with bringing them to justice when they commit mistakes. Controlling one’s self at the time of anger is very difficult, but patience in this situation is appreciated by the Prophet:

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah’s Messenger said, “The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger.

According to the great *Hanafi* Jurist, if a father, while disciplining his child, killed him, he will be liable for *Diyāt* (blood money) and *Kaffārah* (expiation) in the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifah. In addition, he mentions that if a teacher disciplined the child with the permission of the child’s father, then the teacher is liable for expiation, however, if the teacher exceeded the disciplining, he will be liable for compensation according to Abu Hanifa and Abu Yusuf. There are many other alternative methods of disciplining the child. Some of these are giving advice, temporary isolation, admonition, withdrawing rewards, denial of playtime, and so on. One or more of those punishments are much effective for the child than corporal punishment which leads to an abuse of the child.

It is reported that the prophet said the whip or stick should be displayed in such a place so that it could be seen by all members of the household. It is important to note that the Prophet did not order the hitting of anyone with the stick. Manawi comments on this *Hadith* and says that when the members of the household could see the stick, they will not commit bad things and it will encourage them to lead good manners.

The verse about the beating of wife for ill-conduct and disobedience mentioned in *Surat Nisaa* should be properly understood as well. Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Allah has permitted to you to hit her in a way that is not painful”. ‘Atā said: I said to Ibn Abbās: What is the hitting that is not painful?” He said: The *Siwāk* (tooth stick) and so on. (i.e. hitting with the *Siwāk*). One can easily understand that hitting with the *Siwāk* is only symbolic and the idea is not to inflict harm.

Shi‘ah jurisprudence suggests that corporal punishment which eventually leads to child abuse is prohibited. A saying was ascribed to Ali bn Abi Tālib as thus: *Do not beat your children. To correct them, speak to them for a while, but make sure that it does not last long.* Also, child exploitation is expressly prohibited in Islam. One of the most obvious forms of exploitation is economic exploitation, especially child labour. This involves the initiation of children in difficult and risky jobs which may endanger their lives and violate their rights. The extreme form of child exploitation is the enslavement of children, their selling, and sexual exploitation.

5. Recommendations

From the discussion above, this study, therefore, recommends the following:

- Rather than punishing at all times, one should learn to appeal to children’s sense of reasoning by having healthy discussions regarding the consequences of their actions.
- There should be an Islamic body consistently enlightening individuals from all society units on child abuse. This body will work hand-in-glove with the Sharī‘ah court to educate individuals about the rights of child in the Islamic law.
- Parents should be made to know the length at which children can be punished; physically, emotionally, and psychologically.
- Adequate time should be spent teaching children about the proper ethics of behavior and positive moral dispositions.
- Discussions centered on child abuse in the home, schools, and public places should be normalized and not seen as a trivial issue.
- Government agencies saddled with defending the rights of the child should see to the strict implementation of sanctions meted out on child offenders.
- People should maintain a middle course between spoiling children when they are

well-behaved and straightening them when they err.

6. Conclusion

The menace of child abuse can be curbed using the injunctions of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Everyone at any level of society is expected to speak up against any form of injustice melted out on children by maintaining a middle cause between spoiling a child and straightening him. Abuse of any form should never be seen as a norm, even though some cultural values might have normalized a number of abuses, it does not erase the fact that it leaves unprecedented effects on the victims, and that Islam totally objects to it. Parents should not in any way be allowed to go overboard in disciplining their children by subjecting them to any form of abuse. Teachers in schools, *Asaatidh* in *Madaaris*, and individuals in the society should be made to know the extent they can go in correcting or punishing children when they err.

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