



Reinforcing Interventions on Child Abuse for Social Work Practitioners

VIVIAN ALIEMEKE YUKA, TRACY B. E. OMOROGIUWA
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract. There has been a global call for reinforcing interventions on child abuse for social work practitioners, where children are exposed to situations that impedes on their well-being. Specifically, the study investigated the prevalence of child abuse, and it interrogated social work intervention strategies in combating child abuse in Egor Local Government Area in Edo State, Nigeria. The study adopted the quantitative and qualitative research methods, where the cross-sectional research design was adopted in collecting quantitative data. The study covered selected public secondary schools, and target participants were children within the age range of 11-17years which were both male and female, who are secondary school students, parents/guardians', teachers and social workers. A sample size of 400 respondents was adopted, and the research instrument for collecting data were the questionnaire and in-depth interview guide. The findings identified a prevailing trend that children suffered considerable emotional, psychological, and physical distress as a result of abuse. It also revealed a broad agreement in affirming that social work interventions could positively influence the health of abused children. Lack of awareness about children's rights allows the cycle of abuse to continue. Majority of the respondents who had experienced abuse were not supported enough. The study recommended the need to strengthening reporting mechanisms, education on children's rights, collaboration with law enforcement and legal system.

Keywords: child, abuse, social work, interventions, reinforce, children, Advocacy, practitioners

1. Introduction

All parents look forward to having children and raising them so they can all reach their full potential. Children, however, are consistently exposed to all manner of

behaviours that gravitate towards impeding on their objectives in life when they are not effectively cared for by their parents, guardian, and other caregivers. At other times, parents, caretakers, and other members of the community abuse or maltreat the child. Child abuse can be defined as any unwholesome mistreatment of a child or any selfish use of the child's senses by adults who are in charge of them. As a result, even if the adult is unrelated to the child, the person the child is left with may be abusive. A child or teenager may experience violence, mistreatment, or neglect while in the custody of a person they either rely upon or respect, such as a parent, sibling, other family members, or caretaker (Child Welfare League of America, 2001). There is no one answer that is commonly accepted due to the diversity of views on what constitutes the aforementioned phenomenon. Any actions or in actions that endanger children's mental, emotional or physical health caused by their parents, guardians, caregivers, or other adults constitute child abuse and neglect (WHO, 2024; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). "Child abuse" occurs when abusers persistently cause physical, sexual, and mental trauma to helpless youngsters, leaving behind severe emotional or psychological wounds that may never fully heal. A number of different types of child abuse were emphasized by Okpala (2010) to include physical mistreatment, psychological and emotional torture, neglect, child labour/mishandling, trafficking of minors, street children, child marriage, and female genital mutilation.

Social work interventions involve the likelihood of addressing child abuse phenomenon by promoting the health, educational, psychological and social development of children. Impediment, amelioration and safeguarding strategies are projected by social work practitioners to reduce the maltreatment of

children in order to strengthen their psycho social well-being and improve the family's condition (Munro, 2008, Omorogiuwa,2020). The ruination associated with the abused children is in the front line of public awareness, therefore, without a theoretical structure, researching on the comprehensive study would have been mostly fragmented.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

As a result of the maltreatment some children endure in their early years, countless children lose their lives; some are deprived of formal education and miss out on the joys of childhood. This creates a serious risk to the development of the personalities of abused children, as well as the safety and progress of their communities. There are different kind of child abuses in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State. These manifestations include child trafficking, sexual exploitation, bodily harm, child labour, modern day slavery/servitude, child prostitution, female genital mutilation, baby abandonment and neglect (Uwa, 2010). This appears worrisome as many live in fear. There are cogent concerns about the development of the child's academic potentials, since child abuse may result in lack of development in human advancement (Alokan & Olatunji, 2014).

Children who are subjected to this kind of abuse have been shown to face a variety of serious and persistent problems, according to research on childhood psychological abuse. Therefore, relationship issues, emotional and behavioural issues, low self-esteem, often withdrawn and other consequences are possible. Therefore, it is crucial to create social work rehabilitation programmes to aid youngsters in their recovery.

Premised upon this, this research set to establish reinforcing Interventions on child abuse for social work practitioners in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine reinforcing interventions on child abuse for social work practitioners in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The objectives are to:

1. ascertain the prevalence of child abuse in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State.
2. determine social work intervention strategies on child abuse in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State.

2. Literature Review

This phenomenon under study transcends geographical and socioeconomic confines, as evidenced through studies spanning diverse regions, including Sub-Saharan Africa and the third world nations. The concept of child abuse is associated with the act of depriving children of their essential need while they are at home, on the street, in a place of worship, or at school. It has the potential of killing children as well as causing physical, emotional, and sexual trauma (Owolabi, 2012). The occurrence also intersects with other societal quandaries, such as poverty, inequality, and gender-based violence, further underscoring its intricacy and the necessity to holistically tackle it (Chikwiri and Lemmer, 2014). The violation of children's rights through abuse generates profound and multifaceted repercussions. Overcoming this distressing predicament necessitates concerted endeavours from governments, entities, communities, and individuals to thwart, address, and eliminate its existence. According to Ugiagbe (2020), the aggressive behaviour towards a child which may include any act or failure to act by a parent or caregiver, neighbours, relations and loco parentis that results in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in the child's home or in an organization, schools or communities the child interacts with. He further emphasized that it is a very serious problem in Nigeria and other nations of the world with prevalence and profound long-term effects. This phenomenon defined cruel treatment that leaves no physical scars but causes the child emotional harm. It is well-defined as "the physical or mental harm, sexual abuse, neglect, or abuse of a child under the age of 18" (United Nations Convention on Child Abuse and Treatment Act; 1978). Omorogiuwa (2020a), highlighted it as the intentional and deliberate harm done to a child by a care giver, either by hitting, using a belt, rope, or other instrument, or crashing the child against a wall, burning with cigarettes, scalding with hot water, locking in a prison cell, torture, sexual abuse, and even killing.

2.1 Prevalence of Child Abuse in Nigeria

Child abuse is a global concern that threatens the well-being and future of millions of children. In Nigeria, a populous country in West Africa, this phenomenon remains a pervasive issue that demands urgent attention. Child abuse in Nigeria encompasses various forms, including physical mistreatment, sexual exploitation, emotional torture, underage labourer and neglect. According to Fakunmoju and Olagbuji (2019), physical abuse is the most prevalent form of child abuse in Nigeria, followed by neglect, emotional

abuse, and sexual abuse. These forms of abuse often occur simultaneously, exacerbating the detrimental effects on children's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Determining the exact prevalence of child abuse in Nigeria is challenging due to under reporting and cultural factors that inhibit disclosure. Extant from a nationwide study by Adebayo, et. al (2018) estimated that 64% of Nigerian children have experienced at least one form of abuse or the other. This study highlights the alarming magnitude of the problem and emphasizes the urgent need for preventive measures and interventions. Several factors contribute to the high prevalence of child abuse in Nigeria. Socioeconomic disparities, limited access to education, cultural norms, and weak child protection systems are some of the significant factors identified in the literature

Victims of abuse are at higher risk of developing mental health disorders, experiencing impaired cognitive development, engaging in high-risk behaviours, and becoming victims or perpetrators of violence in adulthood. Fakunmoju and Olagbuji (2019) underscored the detrimental effects of child abuse on children's mental health and emphasized the need for comprehensive support services and interventions. Omorogiuwa (2020) highlighted evidence-based encounter where numerous youngsters wandering and picking pockets as a means of livelihood, because their parents or guardians have abandoned them. She further observed that such guardians should be given greater financial resources to care for their children and reduce the use of child labour. A lot of children have been taken from their homes without parental supervision. Some of which work as housekeepers for other people's families. They can be used as hackers in such foster homes to steal various commodities (Nwideduh, 2002). Several of them work as nannies, and many children who are enrolled in school do not attend (Omorogiuwa and Yuka, 2022). A large number of young men and women work as automobile salespeople, and it is now common knowledge that child traffickers have kidnapped and sold some children. These children have become ready markets for those who take them to Europe for limited jobs and prostitution (Nwideduh, 2003).

2.2 Social Work Intervention Strategies

Multiple strategies exist within social work practice to address cases of child abuse, including approaches such as counselling sessions with family members, individualized emotional support, community-based

group engagement, rights advocacy, and emergency response interventions.

In family therapy context, a structured psychotherapeutic intervention addresses dysfunctional family dynamics and fostering healthier patterns of communication, attachment, and behaviour among family members is required (Hulgaard et al., 2021). In cases where abuse has occurred, this form of therapy becomes essential, as it seeks to uncover underlying issues such as unresolved trauma, entrenched family conflict, or ongoing life stressors that complicate parenting (Sepers, et al., 2025). By involving most or all family members in the therapeutic process, practitioners promote mutual understanding, minimize blame, and work towards establishing a safer environment for the affected child (Lockhart, 2024).

Individual therapy is designed to support children in confronting and making sense of their traumatic experiences, learning techniques to manage distress, and rebuilding a sense of trust and emotional safety particularly when their development has been affected by physical, emotional, or sexual harm (Helimäki et al., 2021). Unlike sessions involving families or peers, this approach focuses closely on the child's unique emotional landscape, often providing them with the first consistent and accepting space to express their inner world without fear of blame or punishment (McGoron et al., 2020).

In child protection, advocacy becomes eminent in the decision-making process to ensure children are safe and have access to the services they require, especially when they are unable to speak for themselves (Barišić & Brkić, 2021). Social workers serve as intermediaries, guiding individuals through complex systems and representing their interests in various professional settings (Lewis et al., 2023). This responsibility is grounded in core values such as fairness, ethics, and human rights, which demand proactive support for those who cannot advocate for themselves (Marshall-Lee et al., 2020).

A major strength of the group-based approach lies in the mutual support members offer one another, to enables individuals to realize they are not alone, which lessens the sense of isolation and fosters inner resilience (Epel et al., 2021). Observing others facing similar difficulties helps participants understand that their emotions and behaviours are valid especially crucial for those dealing with trauma or shame (Rahmati et al., 2024). The group setting also encourages positive role modelling, allowing children and adults to acquire healthier habits and social skills

simply through observing others (Heijerman-Holtgreffe et al., 2020).

2.3 Crisis Intervention and Management

Crisis responses must be timely, as any delay can significantly impact the child's recovery process. The crisis response typically unfolds in phases. The first phase involves assessment identifying immediate needs, evaluating risks, and understanding the psychological condition of the child or their family. Next, a coordinated team approach is adopted to formulate a response plan, encompassing safety measures, mental health referrals, and legal interventions where necessary (Ciekanowski et al., 2023). This is followed by immediate intervention, which may include removing the child from harm, providing medical treatment, or delivering early psychological support (Cassivi et al., 2023). The final phase focuses on reduction, arranging long-term support services, and maintaining communication to monitor the child's continued recovery.

2.4 Legal Framework

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 was established to uphold children's right within Nigeria and sub-Saharan regions, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990 served as instrument of safeguarding the well-being of children across Africa continents, the Child Rights Act 2003 stipulates the provisions of ensuring security progress and well-being of Juveniles within Nigeria boundaries. The Edo State Child Rights Law, 2007 was enacted to assist vulnerable children in the best interest of the child but its ambiguity and vagueness further lead to the enactment of Edo state child protection policy. In 2015, under the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Child Protection Policy came on board with the intent of protecting children from abuse, discrimination, exploitation, violation and organisational negligence; another policy titled End Violence against Children, 2018 was made with the aim to stop violent acts on children. These laws and Policies acknowledged that in every decision concerning a child, the best interests of that child shall remain a central focus. However, it has been noted that the Policy does not currently define the term "best interest," which should be rectified to provide it with the appropriate meaning it requires

However, it is uncertain whether its provision has been fully enforced, as many children remain unmonitored, particularly given the persistent rise in incidents of domestic abuse against children, which raises concerns about the effectiveness of the laws.

A summary of the Policy indicates that it is a comprehensive document which reinforces the goals of the Child Rights Act, 2003 concerning the necessity of safeguarding the child's best interests. Nevertheless, it is noted that, despite the detailed regulations, there is a lack of sufficient measures regarding informal care, particularly in situations where a relative or individual takes a child from an impoverished family with the intention of caring for the child, which often does not occur. Additionally, the Policy recognizes that various forms of abuse have been perpetrated against children, and unless such abuse is reported, those children endure suffering in silence. While the Policy includes provisions for monitoring and evaluation, it remains to be seen how effectively this Policy has influenced the lives of children, especially considering that abuses against children continue to occur daily.

2.5 Ecological Systems Theory

This theory explains the rudimentary levels of the Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST). The term Ecology was used to describe plants and the communities in other studies. It establishes a connection between the concept of organisms with reference to human in environments and the field of child protection (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Thus, multi-level systems of EST aid in recognizing relationships between the living conditions of organisms and they interact with one another within their surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Berk, 2000). The micro system level is the interaction between a child and his direct environment, which enhances or hinders the actualization of his developments. Applying this to the phenomenon of child abuse in this study, the micro level includes the factors responsible for the child abuse. Mesosystem level consists of the interactions between systems that directly affect children and their environment. In this study the meso factors include the impacts of child abuse. The macrosystem level explained as the forces of; social, political, cultural economic environments, which could form the social work intervention measures to protect children. The Exo system consists of the factors and immediate systemic environment which directly affects the child. This theory could be a useful tool in the intervention process in the field of child protection. This idea suggests several levels of interaction while working with children that should be taken into account. Therefore, Social workers need to understand the dynamics of power relations responsible for abuse, whether within families or outside, in order to apply their expertise during the intervention process.

3. Methods and Materials

The study adopted the quantitative and qualitative research methods, where the cross-sectional research design was adopted in collecting quantitative data. The study area covered the five public secondary schools which were children within the age range of

11-17years, who are secondary school students, parents/guardians’ teachers and social workers. A sample size of 400 respondents and 14 informants were adopted for the quantitative and qualitative data respectively, while the simple random and purposive sampling techniques were adopted in selecting the respondents and informants.

Social-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency (N = 400)	Percentage
Age		
11 – 12 years	39	9.80%
13 – 14 years	189	47.3%
15 – 16years	144	36.0%
17 years and above	28	7.0%
Total	400	100%
Gender		
Male	178	44.5%
Female	222	55.5%
Total	400	100%
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	382	95.5%
Islam	14	3.5%
ATR	4	1.0%
Total	400	100%
Marital Status		
Single	400	100%
Married	0	0%
Total	400	100%
Level of education		
No Formal Education	0	0%
Tertiary	0	0%
Secondary	100%	100%
Primary	0	0%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

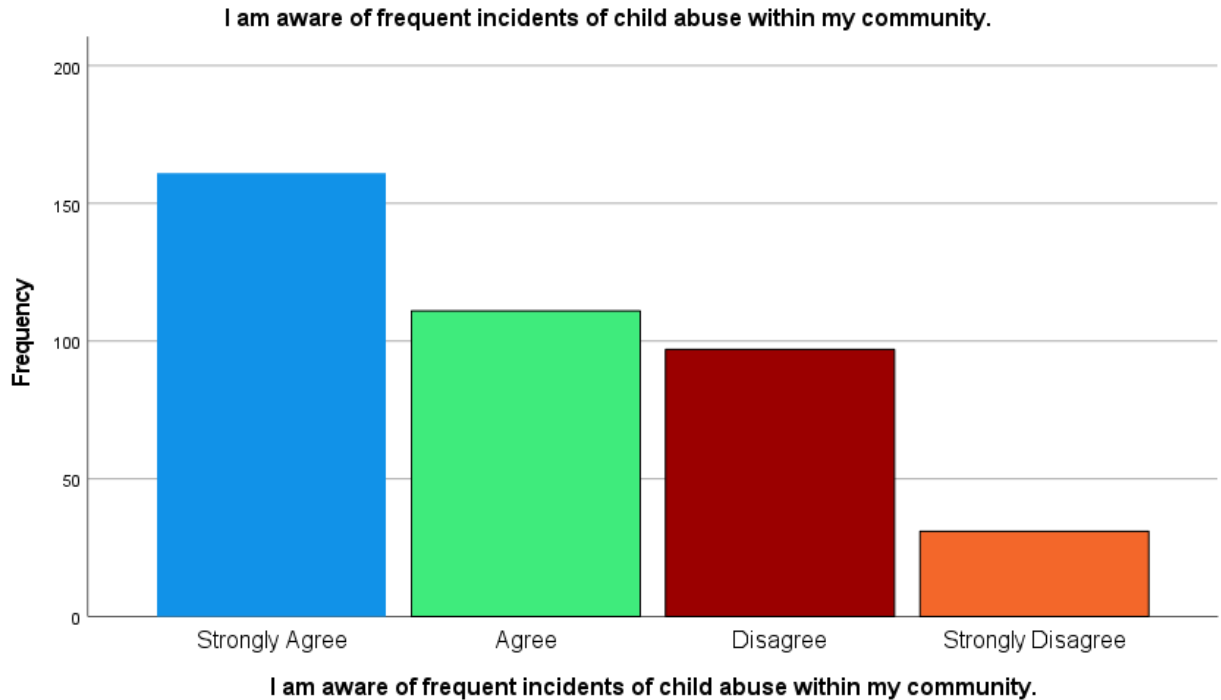
The Prevalence of Child Abuse in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
I am aware of frequent incidents of child abuse within my community.	Strongly Agree	161	40.3%
	Agree	111	27.8%
	Disagree	97	24.3%
	Strongly Disagree	31	7.8%
Total		400	100%
I believe there are adequate and effective mechanisms in place for reporting child abuse in Egor Local Government Area.	Strongly Agree	106	26.5%
	Agree	177	44.3%
	Disagree	76	19.0%
	Strongly Disagree	41	10.3%
Total		400	100%
The local community actively participates in programs and activities aimed at preventing child abuse.	Strongly Agree	112	28.0%
	Agree	175	43.8%
	Disagree	75	18.8%
	Strongly Disagree	38	9.5%
Total		400	100%
Victims of child abuse have access to necessary support services and resources in Egor Local Government Area.	Strongly Agree	103	25.8%
	Agree	134	33.5%
	Disagree	92	23.0%
	Strongly Disagree	71	17.8%

Total		400	100%
Sufficient efforts are made by local authorities to educate the community about preventing child abuse.	Strongly Agree	123	30.8%
	Agree	168	42.0%
	Disagree	79	19.8%
	Strongly Disagree	30	7.5%
Total		400	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

The Prevalence of Child Abuse in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State



Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings on awareness of child abuse in Egor Local Government Area shed light on the level of awareness within the community. Understanding the frequency with which child abuse is thought to occur is essential for creating effective social work interventions, as it reveals how widespread the issue is perceived to be by locals, including parents, guardians, and children. According to the data, 40.3% (161 respondents) of the 400 participants strongly agree that they are aware of frequent child abuse incidents in their area, and 27.8% (111 respondents) agree. Together, these figures (68.1%) indicate that a large majority of respondents recognize that child abuse occurs regularly. This level of awareness suggests that child abuse is an ongoing concern in Egor Local Government Area, and the community is well aware of it. This is significant for social workers as it points to a community where child abuse is both happening and acknowledged, signaling the need for targeted intervention efforts.

On the other hand, 24.3% (97 respondents) disagree, and 7.8% (31 respondents) strongly disagree that they are aware of frequent cases of child abuse in the community. While this minority may not view child abuse as a common problem or may not recognize it, the data still suggests a concerning level of awareness. Social workers will need to address both the actual incidents of abuse and the factors contributing to the lack of awareness or denial, ensuring that interventions are preventive and educational, raising awareness about the signs and consequences of child abuse.

The following captured the views of the IDI participants:

In Egor Local Government Area, the number of reported cases of child abuse has been concerning over the past year. We have documented around 100 cases, ranging from physical abuse to neglect and emotional maltreatment. A significant portion of these cases involved children under the age of 10. Most of the reports came from schools and concerned neighbours who noticed signs of abuse. Sadly, domestic violence is a common contributing factor. The

cases often involve a combination of neglect and physical harm. We have worked closely with law enforcement to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. In many situations, social workers intervene by providing support and counselling to both the victims and their families. Despite these efforts, the resources available to us are still limited. Our aim is to continue raising awareness on children’s rights to prevent future cases (Swkr A, Male IDI/37years/2025).

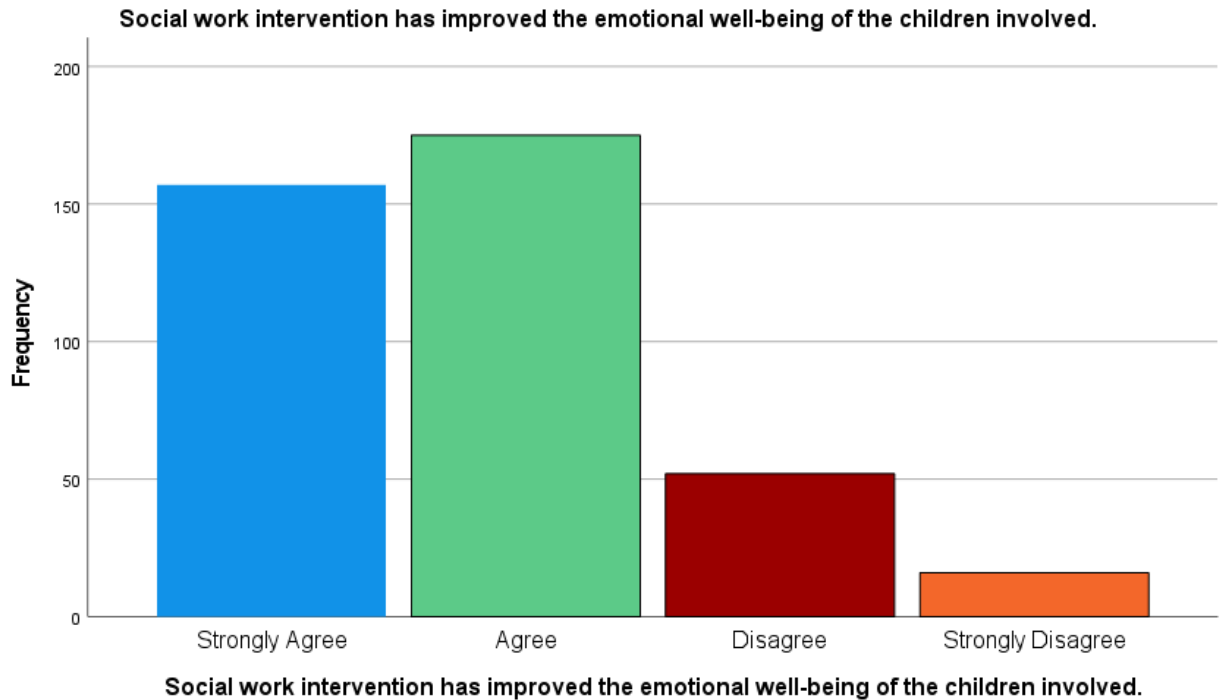
The most effective intervention would be trauma-focused therapy that addresses the specific needs of each child. Establishing a trusting relationship between the social worker and the child is crucial for progress. Family involvement in the healing process through therapy is equally important, as a stable home is necessary for recovery. Social workers should work with the legal system to ensure that justice is served, which would help the child feel safe again. Community education programs to raise awareness about child abuse are necessary to reduce stigma and prevent future cases. Providing access to mental health services and resources will aid in their emotional recovery. Empowering the children with skills to build self-confidence and resilience can help them regain control over their lives. Ongoing support through peer groups can offer emotional reinforcement. Regular follow-up visits and case reviews will ensure that interventions are effective and the children continue to improve (Swkr G, Female IDI/24years/2025).

Social Work Intervention Strategies in Combating Child Abuse in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Social work intervention has improved the emotional well-being of the children involved.	Strongly Agree	157	39.3%
	Agree	175	43.8%
	Disagree	52	13.0%
	Strongly Disagree	16	4.0%
Total		400	100%
I feel that the social workers involved are well-trained to handle cases of child abuse.	Strongly Agree	147	36.8%
	Agree	177	44.3%
	Disagree	56	14.0%
	Strongly Disagree	20	5.0%
Total		400	100%
The services provided are easily accessible to children in need of help.	Strongly Agree	152	38.0%
	Agree	167	41.8%
	Disagree	64	16.0%
	Strongly Disagree	17	4.3%
Total		400	100%
There is sufficient follow-up with the children to ensure their ongoing safety and welfare.	Strongly Agree	125	31.3%
	Agree	178	44.5%
	Disagree	70	17.5%
	Strongly Disagree	27	6.8%
Total		400	100%
The intervention effectively addresses the cultural and individual needs of the abused children.	Strongly Agree	120	30.0%
	Agree	171	42.8%
	Disagree	80	20.0%
	Strongly Disagree	29	7.2%
Total		400	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

To Determine Social Work Intervention Strategies in Combating Child Abuse in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State



Source: Field survey, 2025

According to the data, 39.3% (157 respondents) of the 400 participants strongly agree that social work interventions have improved the emotional well-being of the children involved, while 43.8% (175 respondents) agree with the same statement. This combined 83.1% indicates a significant majority of respondents believe that social work interventions have had a positive impact on the emotional well-being of the children. This suggests that the efforts of social workers in Egor Local Government Area have been effective in addressing the emotional needs of the children, highlighting the importance of continuing and possibly expanding such interventions.

On the other hand, 13.0% (52 respondents) disagree, and 4.0% (16 respondents) strongly disagree that social work interventions have improved the emotional well-being of the children involved. Although this minority of respondents feel that the interventions have not been effective, the overwhelming majority still reflects a strong perception of success. For social workers, this data suggests that while there is room for improvement in engaging certain sections of the population, the overall impact of their work is perceived positively. Moving forward, efforts could focus on refining strategies to ensure that all children benefit from the emotional support provided by social work interventions, addressing any gaps in service delivery.

4. Findings

The study discovered that in Egor Local Government Area, a significant level of child abuse is evident, with 68.1% of participants indicating that it is a frequent issue within their community, particularly in the form of physical abuse, this aligned with the studies by Block and Williams (2019), Frank (2019), Osunde and Aihie (2021), and Omorogiuwa (2023), each investigate other aspects of child abuse in different communities as reviewed in this research and the cultural, societal, and systemic factors that contribute to its prevalence and concealment, particularly in the Nigerian context. Despite 70.8% believing in the availability of reporting mechanisms, many still hesitate to report due to fear, social stigma, and a lack of faith in the authorities. Insights from social workers highlight that poverty and domestic violence are major contributors to the problem. Although schools and healthcare facilities are involved in interventions, they face limitations due to a lack of resources. Emotional abuse and neglect also stand out as critical concerns, as corporal punishment is often employed by parents, occasionally leading to injury. Financial hardships exacerbate the issue, with many children missing out on education and basic necessities. Both parents and social workers emphasise the need for increased public awareness and better support systems. While some local institutions are working to address these issues,

further education on children's rights and stronger support mechanisms are required.

The study results indicated strong support for trauma-informed strategies, legal advocacy, and community engagement in addressing child abuse. The majority, 83.1%, agreed that social work interventions positively contributed to the emotional health of children who had been abused, with 79.8% stating that the services were easy to access, and 75.8% expressing confidence in the training provided to social workers. Nevertheless, 17.0% raised concerns about the adequacy of follow-up services and the cultural sensitivity of the interventions, highlighting areas in need of improvement. Osunde and Aihie (2021) focus on the impact of parental neglect and the ineffectiveness of child abuse laws in Edo State, showing a lack of trust in the justice system and a tendency to hide abuse to avoid social judgement. Omorogiuwa (2023) critiques the remedial approach of Nigerian social work, noting a failure to consider the broader social environment affecting child protection, while stressing the need for additional professional resources and support.

Furthermore, there was a strong emphasis on the need for more support at the community level. 75.8% recognised the critical role of legal advocacy, with some advocating for closer collaboration between social workers, educational institutions, and local leaders. Social workers proposed solutions such as establishing safe spaces like shelter home, encouraging responsible parenting, and launching awareness campaigns. Parents, for their part, suggested the need for education on non-violent approaches to discipline. In conclusion, the data suggest that addressing child abuse in Egor requires a multi-faceted approach, combining therapy, legal advocacy, community support, and educational efforts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research also underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that involves the community in tackling child abuse. Many respondents (75.8%) acknowledged the importance of legal advocacy in addressing the issue, emphasizing the need for cooperation between social workers, schools, and local leaders. By developing stronger partnerships and fostering better relationships within the community, social workers can play a more active role in early intervention and reporting, which is vital for addressing and preventing abuse in a timely manner.

Social workers also highlighted the need for safe spaces and suggested promoting positive parenting and child rights education as key interventions. These ideas were echoed by parents, who emphasized the importance of teaching non-violent discipline. Including such educational programmes in community initiatives would not only equip parents with the tools to provide a safe environment but would also raise awareness about the protection of children. Moreover, organizing workshops focused on positive parenting and child rights would empower caregivers and parents to prevent abuse and build stronger, healthier relationships with their children.

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