

Beaten to death: Sad tales of parental corrections that ended in tragedy

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Beaten to death

By Godfrey George

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Across Nigeria, chilling stories of children brutalised by their parents often slip through the cracks, buried under the guise of discipline. But behind closed doors and drawn curtains, unspeakable cruelty thrives. In this report, GODFREY GEORGE uncovers the unbearable toll of child maltreatment, where the home, meant to offer safety and love, becomes the most dangerous place, and sometimes, a graveyard

In a sun-bleached compound tucked in the dust-caked village of Ajowa Akoko, Ondo State, silence lingers like the stench of guilt.

The quiet here is heavy, unnatural. It is the kind that follows trauma, the sort that hovers over a grave dug too soon.

Beneath a patch of upturned soil behind Monday Elela's house lies the remains of his 14-year-old son, Tope.

Not buried with dignity, not mourned as a child should be, but discarded in a shallow grave like an afterthought.

A child silenced, allegedly by the very hands that brought him into the world.

The father, a 34-year-old bricklayer and farmer, now wears handcuffs and shame in equal measure.

Paraded among other suspects at the Ondo State Police Command in Akure, Elela looks gaunt and withdrawn.

His voice, when he spoke, was barely more than a mutter.

"We only spanked him," he insisted, describing a child whose short life was marred by a series of arrests and community shame. But the facts scream louder than his denials.

Tope, a boy with seven siblings, had been labelled a thief.

He had reportedly been in and out of police cells and even the custody of the Amotekun Corps, a regional security outfit. His father, speaking through a cracked lens of justification, said the boy had been nothing but trouble, that his behaviour brought the family embarrassment, and that his escape from detention was the last straw.

That a few slaps, just a few, he claimed, were all the punishment meted out.

But the truth, according to the police, is that Tope died overnight after his father and stepmother beat him mercilessly.

The woman, Tope’s stepmother, now on the run, allegedly joined in the act. By dawn, the boy was no more. The story Monday tells, that his son simply ate, bathed, slept, and didn’t wake up, the police noted, was riddled with convenient blanks and was unacceptable.

“What kind of bruises did he sleep with? What pain did he cradle in his thin arms as he drifted off into unconsciousness? And what kind of parent, upon finding a lifeless child, thinks first to dig a hole?” are questions on the lips of many.

“He is the third of my seven children. We buried him in our backyard,” the father mumbled.

There was no coroner. No prayers. No ceremony. Just silence and soil heaped on his battered body.

Child protection advocates in Ondo State say this is not an isolated case, adding that it is part of a frightening pattern and a culture of brutality hidden in the cloak of discipline.

According to them, Nigerian society blurred the line between correction and cruelty long ago, putting the lives of children at risk.

“Corporal punishment at home is often hidden, often excused, and frequently deadly,” says a representative of a local NGO that centres on child welfare, and who asked not to be named for safety reasons.

“When you create an environment where beating a child is seen as love or discipline, you create fertile ground for abuse.”

Neighbours describe Tope as a lanky, restless boy, the kind who talked back and the kind who wandered off too often.

Some remember his quietness; others, his sticky fingers. But no one imagined he would die this way.

“We used to see him fetching water,” said Felicia, a woman who claims to live a few compounds away, recalled. “Even when he was in trouble, he would always smile at me.” She stops short of saying more. Fear is thick in the air.

In rural Nigeria, where police intervention is sporadic and justice is slow, people learn quickly to whisper their outrage. But the scars, like the one experienced by Tope based on his encounter with Amotekun officers, are harder to hide.

Meanwhile, this is not the first time a parent has turned punitive hands into instruments of death.

And unless the conversation around child discipline changes, it won’t be the last.

The Ondo State Commissioner of Police, Wilfred Afolabi, confirmed Elela’s arrest, stating that a manhunt had been launched for the absconded stepmother.

“The body has been exhumed. An autopsy will be conducted. We will ensure the law takes its full course,” he assured.

In a country where children are often considered property, where fathers still hold canes like sceptres and mothers wield belts as whips, Tope’s story is a mirror.

It reflects a national crisis, a cultural failing, and, above all, a heartbreak that should have been prevented.

His siblings now live with relatives, scattered and afraid. None have spoken to the press.

Father bathes seven-year-old’s feet with hot water

In another disturbing tale from the rural expanse of Lere Local Government Area in Kaduna State, a tragedy unfolded that shook even the most hardened hearts.

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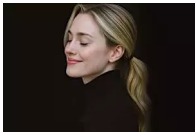
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It was not war. It was not terror. It was the quiet scream of a child whose legs were so ravaged by burns and infection that doctors had no choice but to amputate them.

His name is Abubakar Sani, and he is just seven years old.

At an age where he should be running barefoot through dusty courtyards or learning to write his name carefully across a slate board, Abubakar was instead enduring a cruelty so harrowing it defies comprehension.

His crime, according to his father and stepmother, was stealing a packet of biscuits.

The punishment? They tied his legs together and poured hot water, straight from the fire, over them.

The Kaduna State Commissioner for Human Services and Social Development, Rabi Salisu, stood before reporters last week and recounted the horror with a tremble in her voice.

“By the time the boy was brought to us, his legs were rotting,” she said. “Maggots were crawling out of open wounds. The doctors had no choice but to amputate both legs below the knee.”

The water that burned Abubakar was not the first act of cruelty. For over 20 days, the boy had been locked in a room by his father, Sani Tanimi Maishago, and his wife, the boy’s stepmother.

No proper food. No light. No affection. Just hunger, darkness, and the overwhelming weight of neglect.

Neighbours who occasionally heard faint cries assumed it was just another case of a stubborn child being punished. Nobody intervened.

Pain with no escape

When government officials were finally alerted through a desperate call by a good Samaritan to the Ministry of Human Services, it was almost too late.

By the time rescue teams arrived, the boy was unconscious. His legs, bound tightly for days, had swelled grotesquely. The burns from the hot water had festered. The skin had blackened and peeled. Beneath it, infection had burrowed its way into his bones.

Doctors at Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital fought to save him. They stabilised him, cleaned the wounds, and administered fluids and antibiotics. But the damage was irreversible. Gangrene had set in. So they did what they had to do – amputation.

The face of fatherhood distorted

Maishago, the man who fathered Abubakar, showed no remorse. According to investigators, he justified his actions by calling his son “wayward” and “defiant.”

He saw discipline where the world saw torture.

He saw correction where the world saw cruelty. He believed that beating, starving, and scalding his child into submission was a father’s right.

But no culture, no scripture, no ancestral teaching gives any man the right to burn a child and inflict life-threatening injuries.

Commissioner Rabi Salisu has vowed justice and called for systemic change.

“We have zero tolerance for child abuse, domestic violence, and molestation,” she declared.

“We are taking this as a lesson. We must begin a proper orientation campaign across Kaduna State. We must educate parents. We must criminalise these actions in stronger terms.”

Father beats two-year-old son to death

In Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, on the morning of September 26, 2021, tragedy struck with brutal finality. The city awoke to a chilling revelation: a two-year-old boy had been beaten to death, not by a stranger, but by his own father.

The boy, known only as the son of a man called Vwede, was a toddler whose life had already been marked by abandonment and suffering.

His mother had left long ago, leaving him in the sole care of his father in their modest one-room apartment along Immiringi Road.

Neighbours often heard the cries, the thud of beatings, the child’s muted sobs. They saw the signs—malnourishment, bruises, fear. But the full extent of the horror became evident only when the cries stopped altogether.

On the night of his death, Vwede flew into another fit of rage, triggered by a reason no one could confirm.

The beating that followed was ferocious, the kind of violence no child could survive. When the assault ended and Vwede realised the boy had lost consciousness, he rushed him to the Answer Clinic on Ruthmore Hotel Road. But it was too late. The child was declared dead on arrival.

Vwede vanished soon after, escaping under the cover of darkness.

His neighbours were left devastated, the community paralysed by grief and fury.

Advocacy groups quickly rallied. Comfort Itoru, Bayelsa State Coordinator of the Do Foundation, a legal advocacy group for victims of gender and child abuse, vowed action.

“We have reported the case to Akenfa Police Station and are working with other groups to track this man down,” she stated.

As the community mourns, the search for justice continues.

Ogun father kills 10-year-old son

On October 11, 2016, Ijebu-Igbo, a quiet town in Ogun State, was rocked by the horrific death of a young boy named Waries.

At just 10 years old, he died not in an accident, not from illness, but from the savage blows of his father, 37-year-old Rasak Adekoya.

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The alleged reason: theft. His father believed he had stolen something. That accusation led to a punishment so cruel it defied comprehension.

Rasak beat Waries repeatedly, ignoring the boy’s screams and pleas for mercy. Neighbours, alarmed by the commotion, tried to intervene, but it was too late. When silence finally fell, Waries was gone.

Police operatives from the Ago-Iwoye Division, alerted by concerned locals, arrived the next day. What they found was a crime scene: a young boy’s body bearing the unmistakable signs of sustained physical torture—deep bruises, welts, and untreated wounds.

The child’s remains were transferred to the mortuary at St. Joseph Catholic Hospital in Oke-Agbo. An autopsy later confirmed what had already been witnessed: Waries had died from fatal physical abuse.

Adekoya was promptly arrested. The Ogun State Police Command confirmed the development, with spokesperson Abimbola Oyeyemi announcing that the case had been handed to the Homicide Section at the State Criminal Investigation Department in Abeokuta.

Yet, the case continues to haunt the conscience of the state.

The question that begged for an answer was how many more children must die before parental abuse is treated as the emergency it is?

A Delta father’s fury

On Elebe Street in Asaba, Delta State, a locked brown door concealed a horror story that would leave a community in shock.

A 10-year-old boy, brutally beaten and imprisoned by his father for three days, was found barely alive.

His crime? Accepting a plate of food from a neighbour.

The boy, whose name was withheld for protection, had innocently eaten a meal offered in kindness. For this, his 43-year-old father, Silas Ossai, saw betrayal. He dragged the boy home, beat him mercilessly with an electric cable, and locked him inside without food or water for 72 hours. The wounds across his back and buttocks festered in the closed room, hidden from the world.

A neighbour, disturbed by the prolonged silence and stench, eventually broke in. “He was curled up on the floor, shaking, skin split in places. He hadn’t eaten in days,” she recounted.

Only when a family friend intervened was the boy taken to a local chemist. But his condition was dire. He was moved to the Central Hospital, where doctors confirmed he had suffered extensive trauma, possibly including fractures.

Ossai fled before authorities could apprehend him. The boy, through tears and pain, told nurses he had cried while eating the rice and stew from the neighbour, crying from gratitude, not fear. “And now, this?” one nurse said in disbelief.

A silent plague

Child maltreatment, commonly referred to as child abuse and neglect, encompasses all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that inflict actual or potential harm on a child’s health, development, or dignity.

Broadly, five distinct subtypes exist: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and negligent treatment, and exploitation.

In Nigeria, physical abuse remains a disturbingly common yet grossly underreported phenomenon. It is most often disguised as corporal punishment, a long cultural spectrum that, at one end, may be intended as corrective discipline.

Yet, when such punishment crosses the line into physical or emotional harm, it ceases to be discipline and becomes abuse.

Increasingly, research suggests that physical punishment by those in authority teaches children to use violence, not reason, as a means of control and communication.

The consequences of physical abuse are profound. Beyond the immediate pain or injury, it damages the developing psyche, alters behaviour, and leaves indelible scars, sometimes visible but always psychological.

Despite this, child physical abuse is routinely normalised in Nigerian homes and schools. The absence of effective reporting systems, coupled with entrenched socio-cultural beliefs, has rendered the problem insidious.

Other forms of abuse, such as child sexual assault, child labour, and neglect, tend to be more commonly reported, likely because they are less cloaked in societal approval.

Globally, child abuse is recognised as a grave public health issue. A recent meta-analysis put the incidence of physical child abuse at 226 per 1,000 children.

In the United States, a family survey revealed that 14 per cent of children, approximately 140 in every 1,000, experienced physical abuse within a single year. Nigeria, by contrast, suffers from a scarcity of reliable data.

The lack of surveillance, research, and public awareness continues to hinder national efforts to measure and mitigate the crisis.

What little we know underscores the extent of the problem. Abuse occurs not just within the home, but in schools and institutions as well, places that should offer safety and guidance.

Surveys confirm that corporal punishment remains legal in at least 60 countries for juvenile offenders and in 65 countries within educational and correctional institutions.

What Nigerian parents call discipline

Our correspondent, in a survey conducted between February and April 2025, showed startling numbers.

Three hundred questionnaires were sent out, and 230 responded. The survey showed that 92 per cent (212 of 230 respondents) admitted to physically beating their children.

About 49.6 per cent (114 of 230) acknowledged being fully aware that child abuse is illegal under the Child Rights Act, yet continued regardless.

12.2 per cent (28 of 230) confessed to leaving visible injuries or permanent marks on their children due to beatings.

48.3 per cent (111 of 230) specified that they use only a cane when beating their children.

The remaining 101 parents (43.9 per cent) used alternative, often more brutal tools that include belts, electric wires, horsewhips, and cooking utensils.

Why maltreat your own child?

The causes of child maltreatment are multifaceted. The widely accepted ecological model offers a useful lens through which to examine this complexity. At its core lies the child, situated within the family (microsystem), which in turn exists within a broader community (exosystem), which itself is influenced by cultural values and norms (macrosystem), all of which evolve (chronosystem).

These layers interact constantly, and together, they shape how children are treated, or mistreated, by their caregivers.

A lawyer, Selena Onuoha, told *Saturday PUNCH* that Nigeria’s legislative response to child maltreatment arrived in the form of the Child Rights Act of 2003.

She said, “This comprehensive law consolidates existing child protection measures and outlines the rights, duties, and obligations of parents, government bodies, and institutions. It explicitly prohibits physical, mental, or emotional injury; abuse or neglect; maltreatment; torture; degrading punishment; and attacks on a child’s dignity or reputation.”

However, she noted that two decades on, only 24 of Nigeria’s 36 states have domesticated the CRA.

For the law to have teeth, beyond paper and proclamation, she added, there is an urgent need for the remaining states to follow suit and for robust mechanisms to be put in place to enforce it.

The American Psychological Association has long cautioned against the use of corporal punishment, warning that it may lead a child to internalise a harmful self-image, believing themselves to be inherently bad or unworthy.

Such early trauma, studies show, may linger for life, manifesting in mental health challenges and maladaptive behaviours well into adulthood.

A nation of bruised childhoods

According to the World Health Organisation, nearly three out of every four children aged two to four, an estimated 300 million globally, routinely endure physical punishment and psychological aggression from those tasked with their care.

Nigeria mirrors this bleak reality with disturbing precision. The 2014 National Survey on Violence Against Children revealed that one in every three Nigerian children has suffered physical violence at the hands of a parent or teacher. This is not merely anecdotal: it is a nationwide phenomenon.

Further corroboration comes from the 2016–17 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, which reinforced that over 30 per cent of Nigerian children have faced physical punishment.

The regional breakdown is even more sobering: in the South-East, 39 per cent of children have endured severe physical punishment.

In the North-Central, it’s 36.1 per cent; 31 per cent in the South-South; 29 per cent in the North-West; 26.4 per cent in the South-West; and 23.7 per cent in the North-East.

When viewed through the lens of corporal punishment alone, the figures surge. In the South-South, a staggering 93.6 per cent of children under 14 have experienced it.

The South-East follows closely with 92.7 per cent; the South-West, 91.8 per cent; and the North-Central, 90.3 per cent. Even in the North-East and North-West regions with the lowest recorded figures, the prevalence remains worryingly high at 83.4 per cent and 78.1 per cent, respectively.

These numbers reveal a grim, persistent truth: the physical chastisement of children is not an exception but the norm across the country.

It is a deeply embedded cultural practice, often justified as discipline but, more often than not, crossing the line into cruelty.

The fight to end ‘legalised’ violence

While Nigeria’s children continue to bear the weight of culturally sanctioned violence, global organisations have not remained silent.

End Corporal Punishment, an advocacy group hosted by the World Health Organisation, has taken up the mantle of eliminating corporal punishment in all its forms.

The group monitors international legality and implementation, partnering with local, national, and global actors to push for the universal abolition of corporal violence against children.

In a 2024 report focusing on Nigeria, the NGO laid bare the urgent reforms required to bring the country in line with international child protection standards.

Despite Nigeria’s ratification of the Child Rights Act in 2003, the law remains impotent in many quarters due to contradictory legal provisions embedded deep within colonial-era codes and religious penal systems.

Corporal punishment remains legally permitted in virtually every setting where children are found: in the home, in schools, in alternative care and day care centres, in penal institutions, and even as a court-sanctioned sentence for minors.

The law, according to the NGO, instead of protecting children, legitimises their harm.

Article 295 of the Criminal Code (applicable in the South), Article 55 of the Penal Code (operative in the North), and provisions of the Shari’a penal codes in several Northern states all grant parents and caregivers the right to “correct” a child using physical force. These clauses have become legal shields for abuse, cloaking cruelty in the language of discipline.

The NGO has called unequivocally for the repeal of these outdated provisions. It demands clear legal statements that prohibit all forms of corporal punishment, no matter how light or well-intentioned, by anyone with parental authority.

Risk of mental health disorder

Renowned psychologist Usen Essien, quoting a study published in the journal Paediatrics, noted that children subjected to violence and maltreatment risk having mental health problems as adults.

He said, “According to the researchers, these mental health challenges can show up as mood and anxiety disorders or substance abuse.

“The study also defined ‘harsh physical punishment’ as pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, or hitting by elders, adding that these punishments can psychologically affect a child in adulthood.

About two to seven per cent of mental problems, including depression, bulimia, personality disorders, and intellectual disabilities, were linked to such punishments in childhood.”

He urged parents and guardians to explore gentle parenting tactics and not use brutality to correct children.