

# Physical abuse of children worries stakeholders

■ It's illegal to have underage kids as house helps - **Psychic ogist**

By Vivian Onyebukwa

THE spate of violent physical abuse on innocent children in the country is raising serious concern among many Nigerians. Hardly will a day pass without the news of a child being physically abused either at home, in school, or some other places.

The recent report of a 45-year-old teacher, Stella Nwadike, who physically abused a three-year-old child, Abayomi Michael of Christ-Mitots School in Ikorodu, Lagos caused a national outrage. The video footage of the child being slapped several times by the teacher raised serious concerns about the safety and well-being of the little ones in school.

Also, in Edo State, a 31-year-old woman, Abigail Oluwarotimi, was accused of using a hot metal object to inflict severe injuries on another child, Joseph's genitals and lap. The incident allegedly occurred after Oluwarotimi had accused Joseph of molesting her children.

Another report of a 19-month-old pupil, Obinna Udez, who was flogged to death, sent shock waves around the country. One account said the teacher, Emeka Nwogbo, flogged Udez for pushing another child while another claimed that the victim was punished for playing with a tap in the school.

The little boy was said to have fallen sick after the beating and was taken to the Federal Medical Centre, Asaba. It was learnt that his health condition deteriorated until he eventually died on the Saturday morning. A third narrative claimed that Udez was hungry and approached the proprietress with his lunch box, crying. In the process, Nwogbo reportedly interfered and allegedly whipped the boy for being troublesome.

Again, a couple, Mr Effioke Nwo and his wife, Nnenna, from Okwojo Ngwo community in Udi Local Government Area, Enugu State were arrested by the police for torturing and inflicting severe bodily harm on their 12-year-old daughter, Mercy Umo.

Mrs Umo, who is Mercy's stepmother, was alleged to be in the habit of brutalising the girl with sticks, electric cable and heels of shoes on several occasions. On one occasion, Mercy was said to have dozed off while slicing onions required for food being prepared that night. The stepmother beat her black and blue. It was the intervention of the neighbours who reported the matter to the police through the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) that saved the girl. The couple was subsequently arrested.

Sometime in 2023 in Makurdi, there was the report of a 57-year-old woman, Ahemen Jam and her son, Omguga Jam who were arrested for beating their house help Kpamor Jir from Konishisha Local Government Area of Benue State, and inflicting wounds on his buttocks daily with electric cable. Despite the injuries, Mrs Jam was said to have continued to compel the victim to be fetching water for her and her son. That

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continued until neighbours discovered the wound and raised alarm.

Also, in Bauchi State, an 18-year-old pregnant housewife, Khadija Adamu, was arrested by the police for allegedly beating her five-year-old step-daughter to death for defecating on her body. Adamu said it was not an intentional act but one aimed at correcting the child for wrongdoing.

There is also the case of a middle-aged woman in Calabar who reportedly burnt her eight-year-old nephew's back and buttocks with a hot iron because of N50 groundnuts she left at home. The incident happened when his aunt came back from church to discover that the little boy had eaten the groundnut. She allegedly use a hot iron to burn his back and his buttocks, leaving him in serious pains.

Another horrible incident happened in Umuahia, Abia State where one Mrs Zazi David was arrested on the allegation that she used hot water mixed with pepper on her house help, 10-year-old Ifunanya in their apartment located at a housing estate behind Saclux Paints, off Aba Road, in the Abia State capital.

Mrs David had lied that the victim mistakenly poured hot water that she had earlier prepared for her bath on herself. Findings from the area indicated that Mrs David, a native of Aboh Mbaise, Imo State, had on several occasions, unleashed inhuman treatments on the child-maid who is said to be an orphan, resulting to visible marks of violence on her body.

The latest however left the victim's skin peeled off, that the victim could neither sit nor lie down as a result of the severity of injury she sustained. She was said to require extensive surgery on her body to get well again.

Sometime in 2022, a teacher, Emmanuel at Elhans College, Ikorodu was accused of flogging Boluwatife Omelaja to death after he failed to

correctly answer a question during one of his maths classes.

Recently in January this year, a woman was accused of cutting the body of a 10-year-old boy with blade for allegedly stealing N600 meant for the purchase of ice cream.

These are just a few of the incidents of physical abuse being on children by either their teachers, relations, or guardians. These incidents have continued to attract public outcry and total condemnation.

Reacting to them, a parent, John Nwokedi, blamed the teacher that slapped the three-year-old boy at school saying, "What she did was wrong. What does a child of that age know?"

He however pleaded with the government not to jail her or make her face further trials and punishment. In his words, she must have learned her lessons from the incident, just as other teachers would also have learnt their lessons.

He equally blamed parents for sending their children to school at that early age. He noted that even when the society has changed, parents should try and bring their children close to them, especially at a very tender age.

He equally condemned the act of people, especially women who maltreat their houseboys and housemaids, most of who are underage, describing such treatments as wicked and inhuman.

Also condemning physical child abuse, Affiong Ene-Obong, a lawyer stated that according to Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) Section 34(a) provides that "no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment; Section 34(b) provides that "no person shall be held in slavery or servitude, and Section 34(c) provides that "no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour."

She further stated that according to the Child Rights Act (2003), a child is a person who has not attained the age of 18 and as such should not be subject to any form of work or inhuman treatment. If the person has not attained the age of 18, he or she is a child and should have the right to education and not be subjected to any form of servitude.

Obong further stated that according to the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1984, Article 1, defines "torture" as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he committed... "Inflicting pain is torture according to the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. No child deserves to be tortured. Education is a fundamental right of every child and it's about discipline and character training, not flogging."

She also described grievous bodily harm (GBH) as a serious assault that involves causing severe physical or psychological harm to a person. "For



Obong



Ekwem

a child, it's not acceptable. Under the Law of Tort, it's an assault (an intentional tort) which is a civil wrong."

An activist and a writer, Comrade Emeka Anozie noted that it's totally wrong to maltreat someone because he or she is a house help, just as mal-





Prof Onaolapo



Whyte

treating children by schoolteachers is totally unacceptable.

"If a child or a maid did wrong, there's a way to correct him or her without going to the extreme of abuse. It is absolutely not right," he said.

"If I am to write a book on lamentations, the case of house help maltreatment will occupy a major space", said Mrs Adaobi Whyte, a mother, writer, and woman activist. Mrs Whyte said that house helps are treated like slaves by many women, while they suffer sexual harassment by the men. "It is a case that has exposed in great detail the wickedness of the human race. We claim to convert from paganism to Christianity and Islam. But how much have we changed in character? The Christian Scripture says that by their fruits you shall know them. The Islamic scripture confirms it. Where are the Christian and Islamic fruits? Where is love in the homes? We boast of being Christian and Islamic fathers and mothers, yet we are satanically wicked to our house-helps," she lamented.

Ambassador Esther Ekwe Obioma, a human rights activist and Founder, Esther Child Rights Foundation said, most of people maltreat their house help because such kids are not theirs. "They see them as slaves. They maltreat them because of poverty. The parents of the children they are staying with are poor, and such children don't have options. In some cases the children cannot even reach their parents. They keep the phone numbers out of their reach. Sometimes, the people who harbour these children have no conscience, no love. Some of these house helps eat inside the kitchen, toilets," she noted.

She advised parents to stop giving birth to children they cannot take care of, and to stop sending their children to the people that they feel that can take care of such children for them. "They would promise you heaven and earth, but at the end of the day, what they promised is not what they do," Obioma added.

Prof Taiwo Kayode Onaolapo of the Department of Psychology, Lagos State University, has attributed child abuse, especially by the womenfolk, to perception which he described as a very strong concept in psychology.

"The way you see something would dictate how you would behave towards that particular thing. So the way womenfolk see house helps is as though they are slaves. They usually don't give much thought to the fact that some of these house helps are like children to them because they are underage."

He noted that some certain situations and circumstances in the lives of these underage children made them to become house helps in the first place. "That goes a long way. The way these women see these house helps will dictate what they do," he said.

Prof Onaolapo equally noted that personality also plays a long role in the way people behave. "So many women are not that patient, and some of them just feel that once you give directions or instructions, they expect such a house help to do exactly, if not more, than what these mistresses or masters have requested of them. And, of course, you know that very many people are not empathetic, and won't treat the sons and daughters of other parents who are in their homes as house helps the way they treat their own children. So



Anozie

we have the issues of cognition, perception, and attitude which dictate their behaviour, that is, the way they respond to these underage children. Also, don't forget the fact that these underage children might not be able to promptly respond to do what they are requested to do because they are underage. Naturally, if things are as good as they should be, these underage children are not supposed to be house helps. They should have been in their parents' home, sent to school and being pampered. Also, it's abnormal behaviour. When you treat house helps badly, it's a real bad abnormal behaviour. A normal behaviour is that these are their helpers, and they should be treated fairly."

On what the government can do to ameliorate the situation, Prof Onaolapo noted that there are already existing laws in place, at both federal and state levels. He said that most states have domesticated laws in terms of how to treat house helps, emphasising that it is illegal to have an underage as a house help. "Where the children are of age and they are your house helps, they are supposed to be paid or remunerated. Usually when you listen to some of these issues in the department of social welfare in most States, you would soon discover that when these children are being brought to their masters and mistresses, there are usually agreements on how these house helps should be treated and how much they should be paid, but most masters and mistresses don't keep to the terms. Where some of them keep to the terms, the attitude of their wives or whatever towards these house helps is really bad."

He advised that except the government step up monitoring the cases and situations affecting these house helps, the country would continue to have the kind of violent and conflicting issues that do arise often between house helps and their masters or mistresses. "But as per the law, the laws are actually in place in Nigeria. Both state and the federal government have laws forbidding underage children to work as house helps," Prof Onaolapo added.

# Man, wife in untold agony over daughter born without reproductive organ, anus

From Uchenna Inya, Abakaliki

**THE** family of Samuel Ibina of Ndugueshi Akpenyi, Umuogudoshia Ngbo community in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State are in untold agony. Each passing day, their sense of distress escalates tremendously. They are worried about their seven-year-old daughter, who was born without reproductive organ and anus and she would become netter.

The couple are peasant farmers in their agrarian settlement and have searched for solutions to the medical problem of their daughter to no avail.

They are lamenting that they had spent all their little resources to save the child without results.

They are now appealing to the Ebonyi State Governor, Francis Nwifuru, his wife, the state Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, philanthropists, corporate bodies, well-spirited individuals and other Nigerians to come to their rescue and help save the child from permanent deformity.

Narrating her plight, the mother of the child, Mrs Ngozi Ibina explained that her daughter's reproductive organ was abnormally sealed from birth without any form of vagina and anus openings.

According to her, when the abnormality was discovered shortly after her birth in November 2017 at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Teaching Hospital Abakaliki, two openings were created on the tummy for defecating and urinating respectively, as the poor family couldn't afford the cost for major corrective surgeries required.

She regretted that the situation has exposed the child to pain, stigmatisation and depression, as well as penury and frustration on the part of the parents.

"This is the seventh year of her birth. As soon as I gave birth to this child, my first daughter, who was about 18 years, died mysteriously. When we noticed this unusual condition of no openings at all in her supposed reproductive organ and anus, the hospital created some improvised means of defecating and urinating by opening part of the stomach. This was because we couldn't sponsor the required major surgeries.

"This condition has exposed my child to severe pains and stigmatisation from people. It has exposed me to depression and many other unpleasant situations.

"I am compelled to stay at home to take care of her constantly, abandoning my farm work and other engagements," the woman lamented.

"I am appealing to the state government, Ohaukwu Local Government chairman, and everyone who can be of help to please help us financially to remedy this ugly situation."

On his part, father of the child, Samuel Ibina pleaded for assistance to give the child a life worth living.

His words: "We went through hell to sponsor the two surgeries already done. We were told at the hospital that she needs to undergo more series of major surgeries to correct the situation.

"At a point, we were told it's diabolical and only prayers can help us. So we travelled to Elele, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, to the Catholic Pilgrims Arena and spent two months. Yet there was no miracle in that regard.

"There is no where people recommended for solution that I didn't go, except medical surgeries, and that is because of the huge funds involved.

"As it stands, It seems I cannot run away from it. I beg the government and general public to help me to overcome this challenge and give my baby a life. What is life without reproductive organ and anus?"



The couple with the girl