

Islamic Examination of the Intergenerational Transmission of Child Abuse Among the Hausa Muslim Families in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the intergenerational transmission of child abuse in Hausa Muslim families in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, with a focus on the role of Islamic teachings in parenting. It investigates how abusive behaviors, often masked as discipline, are passed down and whether Islamic values reinforce or challenge these practices. The research explores the intersection of religion, culture, and child-rearing, analyzing how cultural norms shape disciplinary approaches within families. Using a qualitative approach, data is gathered through interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, involving parents, grandparents, imams, and community leaders. Thematic and content analysis techniques identify patterns in child-rearing practices and assess the alignment between religious teachings and actual behavior. Preliminary findings indicate a discrepancy between Islamic principles—emphasizing compassion and justice—and cultural norms that prioritize strict obedience and discipline. This gap suggests that religious teachings on childcare may be overshadowed by deeply rooted cultural expectations. The study's significance lies in its potential to guide interventions that promote positive parenting practices rooted in Islamic values. By offering culturally and religiously sensitive insights, it can help policymakers, religious leaders, and educators develop strategies that both respect local traditions and address child abuse. Ultimately, the research seeks to reduce the cycle of abusive behaviors within Hausa Muslim families by advocating for parenting approaches that align with the core principles of Islam.

1. Introduction

The intergenerational transmission of child abuse is a phenomenon that has drawn increasing attention across the world due to its profound impact on the psychological, emotional, and social development of children (Widom et al., 2015). In Nasarawa State, Nigeria, where a significant portion of the population comprises Hausa Muslim families, understanding this issue within the context of religious, cultural, and familial norms becomes critically important. The transmission of abusive behaviours from one generation to the next raises concerns about how deeply embedded social practices and family dynamics contribute to a cycle of harm that persists over time (Afifi et al., 2012).

Islam, as the dominant religion among the Hausa people, provides a moral and ethical framework that is designed to protect the welfare of children. The teachings of Islam, as found in the Qur'an and the Hadith, place great emphasis on the fair treatment of children, their right to protection, and their development in a nurturing and safe environment (Olayiwola, 2020). Islamic law categorically forbids the oppression, neglect, or abuse of children, stressing the importance of parental responsibility and the cultivation of mercy, respect, and

compassion in family relations (Ahmad, 2018). However, despite these clear directives, the reality of child abuse within some families suggests that religious principles are not always upheld, and cultural traditions may sometimes overshadow or distort these values (Olusanya, 2019).

This study seeks to conduct an Islamic examination of the factors that contribute to the intergenerational transmission of child abuse among Hausa Muslim families in Nasarawa State. The central question is how religious teachings, family structures, socio-economic conditions, and cultural practices converge to either prevent or perpetuate patterns of abuse (Usman, 2021). By focusing on the Hausa Muslim community, this research aims to uncover the unique interplay between Islamic knowledge and cultural practices that may allow harmful behaviours to be passed from parents to children. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in order to develop strategies that break the cycle of abuse while aligning with Islamic principles.

The investigation will also explore how misinterpretations of Islamic teachings or a lack of proper Islamic education might contribute to the continuation of abusive behaviours (Sulaiman, 2022). In some instances, harmful practices that are culturally rooted may be wrongly justified using religious language or traditions, thus enabling the abuse to persist across generations (Abubakar & Bello, 2020). By critically examining these factors, the research hopes to reveal not only the causes but also the potential solutions grounded in the authentic teachings of Islam. This includes the role of religious leaders, Islamic educators, and community organizations in promoting a better understanding of children's rights within the Islamic framework and advocating for behavioural change in families.

2. Background to the Study

Nasarawa State, Nigeria, has a significant Muslim population. Examining child abuse within this context necessitates considering cultural and religious factors like cultural perspectives on discipline wherein Muslim communities in Nasarawa State and Nigeria might have distinct cultural beliefs about child discipline. Practices perceived as corrective measures could potentially blur the lines with child abuse. More so, Islam emphasizes the importance of child well-being. The Qur'an and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advocate for good training kindness, compassion, and fair treatment of children as presented in Q31vv13-19, where Allah says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَنُ لَابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَبْنِي لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ . وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَلَدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفَصَّلَهُ فِي غَامِينِ أَنْ أَشْكُرَ لِي وَلِوَلَدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ . وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ عَلَى أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا وَصَاحِبُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ . يَبْنِي إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مَنَاقِلَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمُوتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ يَبْنِي أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ . وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ وَأَقْبِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَأَغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ .

13. And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice." 14. And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination. 15. But if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me [in repentance]. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do. 16. [And Luqman said], "O my son, indeed if wrong should be the weight of a mustard seed and should be within a rock or [anywhere] in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is Subtle and Acquainted. 17. O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination. 18. And do not turn your cheek [in contempt] toward people and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful. 19. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys."

Cultural norms and traditional practices might sometimes be misconstrued as aligning with Islamic teachings. Examining how these norms intersect with Islamic principles on child protection is crucial. However, while research exists on child abuse in Nigeria and intergenerational transmission globally, a critical gap exists due to the limited research that explores the intersection of these issues within Muslim communities in Nigeria, particularly Nasarawa State.

The issue of child abuse is a global concern that has significant implications for the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of children. Over time, research has shown that child abuse, when left unaddressed, can perpetuate across generations, creating a cycle where abused children may grow up to become abusive parents themselves. This intergenerational transmission of child abuse has been linked to various socio-economic, cultural, and familial factors, which reinforce the patterns of abusive behaviour. In Nigeria, particularly within the Hausa Muslim communities in Nasarawa State, this phenomenon requires close examination to understand the religious, cultural, and social contexts in which it occurs.

The Hausa people, who form one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, are predominantly Muslim. Their way of life, family structures, and social values are heavily influenced by Islamic principles. Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, emphasizes the protection of children's rights and explicitly condemns acts of abuse or harm. The Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advocate for kindness, justice, and compassion toward children. However, despite these clear Islamic injunctions, cases of child abuse within some Hausa Muslim families suggest that other factors—such as cultural practices, economic pressures, and limited access to proper Islamic education—may contribute to the persistence of these harmful behaviours.

The transmission of child abuse from one generation to another within this context raises critical questions about the interplay between religion, culture, and family dynamics. Research has indicated that certain cultural norms and traditional practices within Hausa society, which may not necessarily align with Islamic teachings, can influence parenting styles and approaches to child-rearing. For example, the use of harsh physical punishment as a form of discipline may be culturally accepted in some families, even though such practices contradict the principles of mercy and compassion in Islam. Additionally, in economically disadvantaged households, the stress of financial strain may exacerbate abusive behaviours, particularly where there is a lack of support systems for parents.

Moreover, the lack of adequate Islamic education in some communities may contribute to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of religious teachings regarding child-rearing. When Islamic values are not properly communicated or practiced, cultural practices may take precedence, resulting in a blending of tradition and religion that can sometimes justify or overlook abusive behaviours. This gap between Islamic ideals and the lived realities of some families calls for a deeper investigation into the factors that contribute to the intergenerational transmission of child abuse.

Statistically, Nigeria faces a significant challenge with child abuse. A 2014 Nigeria Violence Against Children (VAC) survey by the National Population Commission, UNICEF, and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that six out of ten Nigerian children experience at least one form of violence before reaching eighteen (UNICEF, 2015). UNICEF reports also indicate that one in four girls and one in ten boys experience sexual violence before the age of eighteen (18). In addition, half of all children experience physical violence (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020).

A Child Protection Hub (CPHub) survey also revealed that only 27% of respondents who witnessed child abuse reported the case to authorities (TheCable, 2019). Factors like cultural norms, fear of stigma, and weak child protection systems contribute to the underreporting of abuse (Odu, 2016). Child abuse can have severe physical, emotional, and psychological ramifications for victims, impacting their development and well-being in adulthood.

(Felitti et al., 1998). The prevalence of child abuse may vary based on factors like location, socio-economic status, and gender.

Overall, the available statistics paint a grim picture of child abuse in Nigeria. The high prevalence rates and underreporting highlight the need for stronger child protection systems, increased awareness, and culturally sensitive interventions to address this critical issue (Ebigbo, 2003). It is glaring that children who experience abuse are more likely to become abusive parents themselves. This phenomenon, known as intergenerational transmission, raises crucial questions about the cycle of abuse (Widom et al., 2015).

Prevalence and Forms of Child Abuse Among Muslim Families in Nasarawa State

The prevalence and forms of child abuse across generations in Muslim families, like other communities, vary depending on several factors, including socio-cultural practices, economic conditions, religious interpretations, and family dynamics (Olayiwola, 2020). In Muslim families, particularly in regions such as Nasarawa State, where Islamic traditions intersect with local customs, child abuse can take specific forms that may be transmitted across generations (Abubakar & Bello, 2020).

Prevalence of Child Abuse Across Generations in Muslim Families

1. Cultural and Traditional Influences: In many cases, child-rearing practices are deeply rooted in cultural and traditional beliefs. Some forms of child discipline that may be classified as abusive are normalized within these cultural frameworks (Usman, 2021). In Muslim families, especially in regions like Nasarawa State, such practices may have persisted across generations due to:

- Lack of awareness about what constitutes child abuse.
- Poverty and other socio-economic factors that contribute to harsher forms of discipline.
- Cultural acceptance of physical punishment as a necessary method of instilling discipline (Olusanya, 2019).

2. Intergenerational Transmission: Child abuse often occurs across generations, meaning abusive behaviours are passed down from parents to their children, who in turn may continue these practices when they become parents (Widom et al., 2015). In Muslim families, this may be reinforced by:

- Learned behaviour: Parents who experienced abuse as children may adopt the same abusive methods when raising their own children.
- Cultural reinforcement: Community norms and lack of intervention can create a cycle of abuse, where families don't question the practices because they have become normalized over time (Sulaiman, 2022).
- Religious misunderstanding: In some cases, harsh disciplinary methods are incorrectly justified through misinterpretations of religious teachings, particularly the idea that physical discipline is a necessary part of raising children with proper morals (Ahmad, 2018).

3. Statistical Data on Prevalence: While specific studies on child abuse in Muslim families in Nasarawa State may be limited, general trends in Nigeria suggest a high prevalence of child abuse, especially in rural and low-income areas (Ebigbo, 2003). Physical punishment, emotional abuse, and neglect are the most reported forms, often continuing across generations due to the above-mentioned factors (Felitti et al., 1998).

Forms of Child Abuse Across Generations

1. Physical Abuse:

- Description:** This includes corporal punishment, such as beatings, whipping, slapping, or other forms of physical violence used to discipline children (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).
- Generational Transmission:** Parents who were physically punished as children may see this as an acceptable or effective way to discipline their own children. The normalization of corporal punishment is often tied to cultural practices rather than religious mandates (Akmatov, 2011).

2. Emotional Abuse:

-Description: Emotional abuse involves verbal humiliation, excessive criticism, threats, or isolation. Children subjected to emotional abuse may suffer from long-term psychological effects (Spinazzola et al., 2014).

-Generational Transmission: Emotional abuse can be subtle and ingrained in communication patterns within families, passed down from one generation to the next as a means of controlling behaviour or expressing authority (Teicher et al., 2016).

3. Neglect:

-Description: Child neglect refers to the failure of parents or caregivers to provide necessary care, such as food, shelter, education, and medical attention. In many low-income families, neglect may stem from economic hardship rather than intentional abuse (Dubowitz et al., 2005).

-Generational Transmission: Neglect can become cyclical, particularly in families experiencing poverty. Parents who were neglected as children may have fewer resources or knowledge about how to care for their own children properly (Knutson et al., 2005).

4. Sexual Abuse:

-Description: Sexual abuse involves inappropriate touching, exploitation, or assault. While this form of abuse is less commonly discussed due to its sensitive nature, it can have severe and lasting effects on the victim (Pereda et al., 2009).

-Generational Transmission: In some cases, sexual abuse may be passed down within families due to a culture of silence and shame, where victims do not speak out, and perpetrators are not held accountable (Merrick et al., 2017).

5. Child Labor and Exploitation:

-Description: Some forms of child labor, particularly in rural areas, involve children working in difficult conditions, such as on farms or in domestic service, to contribute to the family's income. In some cases, children are deprived of education or forced into labor against their will (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005).

-Generational Transmission: Economic hardship can lead to child labor being accepted as a norm, especially if previous generations were involved in similar practices. This exploitation can become part of family expectations over time (Basu & Van, 1998).

Islamic Teachings on Child Abuse

Islam emphasizes the protection, care, and fair treatment of children. It advocates for kindness, compassion, and fairness in child-rearing practices (Olayiwola, 2020). Misinterpretations of religious teachings can sometimes be used to justify abusive practices, but Islamic principles clearly oppose any form of harm to children (Ahmad, 2018).

1. Protection of Children:

-In Islam, children are considered a trust from God, and parents are responsible for their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized gentleness and kindness toward children (Al-Hilali & Khan, 2000).

2. Disciplinary Practices:

-Although Islam allows for moderate discipline, it strictly prohibits any form of excessive physical punishment, cruelty, or harm to a child. The goal of discipline in Islam is to guide, educate, and correct behaviour in a way that preserves the dignity of the child (Sulaiman, 2022).

3. Breaking the Cycle of Abuse:

-Islamic teachings encourage self-reflection and personal improvement. This includes parents recognizing harmful practices in their upbringing and choosing to break the cycle of abuse for the benefit of future generations (Usman, 2021).

Recommendations for Breaking the Cycle of Abuse in Muslim Families in Nasarawa State

1. Islamic-Based Parenting Programs

-Rationale: Religious teachings play a central role in shaping parenting styles in Muslim families. Misinterpretations can lead to the justification of corporal punishment or abusive behaviours (Olusanya, 2019).

-Recommendation: Develop Islamic-based parenting education programs emphasizing Quranic principles of compassion, mercy, and non-violence (Ahmad, 2018).

2. Addressing the Misuse of Religious Teachings

-Rationale: Some abusive practices are perpetuated due to misinterpretations of Islamic teachings that emphasize obedience and discipline (Sulaiman, 2022).

-Recommendation: Religious scholars should clarify texts that have been historically misused to justify corporal punishment, focusing on Islam's emphasis on compassion in discipline (Abubakar & Bello, 2020).

3. Economic Empowerment Programs for Muslim Families

-Rationale: Poverty is a significant contributor to child abuse (Felitti et al., 1998).

-Recommendation: Introduce economic empowerment programs targeting vulnerable Muslim families, incorporating microfinance opportunities and vocational training (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020).

4. Establishing Child Protection Units in Mosques and Islamic Schools

-Rationale: Mosques and Islamic schools can serve as institutions for identifying and addressing child abuse (Ebigbo, 2003).

-Recommendation: Create child protection units offering counselling, mediation, and support services (Olusanya, 2019).

5. Community Engagement and Awareness Campaigns

-Rationale: Cultural norms deeply influence parenting practices (Akmatov, 2011).

-Recommendation: Launch culturally relevant campaigns to address child abuse using Islamic teachings (Olayiwola, 2020).

6. Trauma-Informed Care and Counselling for Families

-Rationale: Many abusive parents have experienced childhood trauma (Spinazzola et al., 2014).

-Recommendation: Provide counselling services integrating Islamic teachings and modern psychological practices (Teicher et al., 2016).

7. Legal Reform and Enforcement of Child Rights Laws

-Rationale: Weak enforcement of child protection laws contributes to continued abuse (Ebigbo, 2003).

-Recommendation: Strengthen legal enforcement while integrating Islamic perspectives on child protection (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020).

8. Peer Support Networks for Parents

-Rationale: Breaking the cycle of abuse requires community support (Usman, 2021).

-Recommendation: Establish peer-led parenting support groups within Muslim communities (Abubakar & Bello, 2020).

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