

SEX ABUSE AS A HINDRANCE TO PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL GROWTH: THE IMPERATIVE FOR REORIENTATION STRATEGIES AS A HOLISTIC REMEDY

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Abstract

This article explores the complex issue of sex abuse and its implications for both individual development and national growth. It underscores how various forms of sex abuse pose significant challenges not only to the physical and psychological well-being of victims but also to the moral and social integrity of the abuser. According to the discussion, if left unaddressed, such behaviours will contribute to the erosion of values and norms essential for cultivating wholesome individuals capable of achieving personal life goals and contributing meaningfully to societal development. It posits that values and moral reorientation are critical in addressing the pervasive problem of sex abuse. Reorientation is presented as a strategic tool for behavioural change, necessary for redirecting individuals towards healthier, adaptive, and socially acceptable sexual behaviours. The article outlines several strategies to this effect, including curriculum reforms, sex education, behavioural counselling, legislation, and public sensitisation campaigns. These strategies aim to restore core societal values such as honesty, integrity, self-respect, and accountability. Ultimately, it is hoped that the recommendations offered will foster a positive change in attitude and behaviour, thereby reducing the incidence of sex abuse and enhancing the development of morally upright individuals who can contribute to national development.

Keywords: sex abuse, Challenge to personal development and achievement, life goals, Reorientation Strategies

Introduction

Sex abuse remains a deeply troubling phenomenon in contemporary society, especially as the world grapples with rising incidences of moral decline, distorted sexual ethics, and the normalisation of deviant behaviour. While the phenomenon is not exclusive to any one region, its effects are particularly devastating in developing countries like Nigeria, where poverty, ignorance, systemic failures, and cultural silence often enable its perpetuation. According to Adebayo and Ojo (2021), sex abuse in modern societies has assumed

“psychopathological and criminal dimensions,” leaving victims traumatised and institutions overwhelmed. In such a climate, meaningful development becomes nearly impossible, as the trauma and disempowerment associated with sex abuse create ripple effects across social, economic, and political sectors. The importance of reorientation and public enlightenment cannot be overstated. As society advances in knowledge and technology, there is a parallel need for psychological and moral re-education. Reorienting both the perpetrators and the potential victims is crucial in addressing the root causes and correcting distorted notions about sexual behaviour. The objective of this discourse is not only to highlight the nature and dimensions of sex abuse but also to encourage proactive intervention through policy, advocacy, counselling, and institutional frameworks aimed at curbing this hydra-headed monster.

Sexual activity, in its basic form, is often an expression of intimacy and mutual pleasure. As posited by Crooks and Baur (2005), sexual acts may include various behaviours such as oral, anal, and vaginal intercourse, kissing, caressing, and even virtual engagements like sexting or pornography consumption. These acts, however, must be based on mutual consent and respect for the individual’s autonomy. When this foundational element of consent is absent, the act transitions from mutual pleasure to coercion and abuse. Sex abuse, therefore, refers to any sexual act perpetrated against another person without their consent. This encompasses a wide range of behaviours, including molestation, rape, sexual harassment, and exploitation. According to Okeke and Musa (2022), sexual abuse involves the misuse of power and trust to obtain sexual gratification, often using intimidation, manipulation, or outright force. It may occur in various contexts, homes, schools, religious institutions, and even online spaces, making it a multidimensional issue requiring multifaceted responses.

Understanding the root causes of sex abuse necessitates theoretical inquiry. Among the prevailing theories is the Power-Control Theory, which suggests that individuals, particularly men in patriarchal societies, engage in sexually abusive behaviour as an assertion of dominance (Makanjuola, 2020). This theory is often applied in analysing abuse within hierarchical institutions where power differentials are sharp, such as in schools or religious bodies. Another useful framework is the Social Learning Theory, which posits that behaviours, including sexually deviant ones, are learned through observation and imitation (Bandura, as cited in Nwachukwu & Thomas, 2021). In a society where pornography, sexual objectification, and toxic masculinity are prevalent in media, individuals may normalise or replicate such behaviours without appreciating their harmful implications. The Cognitive Distortion Theory also explains that abusers often hold irrational beliefs or justifications for their actions, such as “the victim wanted it” or “it was just a joke” (Yusuf & Ajayi, 2023). Such cognitive biases not only perpetuate abuse but also hinder accountability and justice.

Sex abuse is not a random or isolated behaviour; it is often the outcome of underlying social, psychological, and economic factors. According to Akintola and Edem (2022), poverty and economic desperation have made young girls and boys vulnerable to transactional sex, often coerced or manipulated. Unemployment and underemployment increase dependency, especially among women, creating imbalanced power dynamics that

can be exploited sexually. Another cause is cultural silence and stigma. In many communities, victims are often blamed, shamed, or coerced into silence, which emboldens perpetrators. As opined by Chukwuemeka (2020), cultural taboos around sexuality discourage open conversation, making it difficult for victims to report incidents or seek redress. Moreover, family dysfunction, such as parental neglect, domestic violence, and substance abuse, has been linked to higher susceptibility to both committing and experiencing sexual abuse (Olumide & Alabi, 2021). In homes where affection and supervision are lacking, children and adolescents may fall prey to predators within or outside the family.

Empirical research in recent years has shed light on the alarming frequency and psychological impact of sex abuse. A national study by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2021) revealed that one in four women reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 18. This underscores the vulnerability of young individuals, especially in environments where safeguarding structures are weak or absent. According to Edeh and Bassey (2023), survivors of sex abuse often suffer long-term psychological issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. The academic and economic consequences are also significant, as victims may drop out of school, lose jobs, or become socially withdrawn. The authors further posit that effective interventions must be multi-layered, involving schools, religious bodies, health institutions, and legal frameworks. For instance, in a study conducted in Lagos State, counselling services in schools were found to reduce both the incidence and recurrence of sex abuse by equipping students with coping and resistance skills (Ibrahim & Bello, 2022).

Sexual abuse remains a deeply troubling issue across the globe, and Nigeria is no exception. This concern is further exacerbated in a contemporary era marked by a decline in moral values, the distortion of societal ethics, and the increasing normalisation of overt sexual behaviours, many of which border on criminality and psychological pathology. According to Adie (2019), the widespread incidence of sexual abuse poses a formidable challenge to societal development by undermining the moral fabric of communities and adversely affecting the psychological well-being of individuals, particularly young people. The persistent nature of this issue, as he opined, calls for a comprehensive reorientation of societal values to address the multidimensional facets of abuse effectively. Sexual activity, when conducted with mutual consent, serves as a natural expression of affection and intimacy between individuals. However, when consent is absent or when such behaviours deviate from social norms, they transition into the domain of sexual abuse. Crooks and Baur (2005) posit that sexual behaviour encompasses a wide array of practices, including oral, vaginal, and anal intercourse, in addition to non-penetrative acts such as kissing, caressing, and the use of sex toys. These behaviours, when imposed without the consent of one party, constitute abuse and can result in significant emotional and psychological harm.

Sexual abuse manifests in numerous forms, each bearing its defining characteristics and consequences. One of the most common is sexual assault, which includes rape, attempted rape, gang rape, and serial rape. These acts often involve the forced insertion of body parts or objects into another person's sexual organs and are typically perpetrated through coercion, manipulation, or physical violence. Another form is incest, which involves sexual relations

between close blood relatives, such as siblings, cousins, or uncles, and represents a gross violation of cultural taboos and legal boundaries. Pedophilia is yet another form, where adults or adolescents experience sexual attraction towards children, leading to exploitative interactions that result in deep psychological and emotional trauma for the victims. These forms of abuse, whether physical or psychological, are characterised by maltreatment, degradation, violence, and long-lasting harm. They often occur in familial settings, educational institutions, or broader community environments. As Fagbemi (2024) reported, the prevalence of sexual abuse in Nigerian schools has prompted governmental interventions aimed at safeguarding students and prosecuting offenders.

Beyond these overt forms of abuse are behaviours considered deviant due to their divergence from accepted social norms and their capacity to cause psychological or physical harm. One such behaviour is transgenderism, which involves altering one's biological sex through surgical or hormonal procedures. While accepted in some parts of the world, transgender identities remain heavily stigmatised in conservative societies like Nigeria. Similarly, homosexual behaviour, including gay and lesbian relationships, is criminalised under the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2013, reflecting Nigeria's strong religious and cultural opposition to such expressions of sexuality (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2024). Other sexual behaviours regarded as perverse or morally objectionable include fetishism, the arousal from inanimate objects or specific body parts, and bestiality, which involves sexual activity with animals and is considered both unethical and illegal. Practices such as flagellation, where individuals derive sexual pleasure from inflicting or receiving pain, can escalate to physically harmful levels. Necrophilia, or sexual attraction to corpses, is another extreme example that not only violates legal codes but also signals severe psychological disturbance.

Narcissism, particularly in the sexual context, denotes an obsessive self-admiration, often fixated on one's own body or sexual features, which can contribute to unhealthy relational patterns. Exhibitionism, characterised by the public exposure of one's genitals or private parts, is frequently associated with indecent dressing and a need for attention. Pansexuality, where individuals are attracted to others regardless of gender, challenges traditional binary understandings of sexual orientation, though it remains controversial in conservative settings. In addition, body modifications such as tattoos or adornments that glorify violent or dark symbols, like skulls or serpents, may suggest deeper psychological or identity-related conflicts. Sodomy, generally defined as anal intercourse, is also deemed unlawful in many jurisdictions, including Nigeria, where it is condemned on both moral and legal grounds. Voyeurism, which involves gaining sexual gratification from watching others in private acts without their knowledge or consent, is another behaviour that breaches ethical and legal standards. As highlighted by reports from *UNIJOS Echo* (2024) and other sources, such behaviours are not only criminalised but are also considered detrimental to the nation's collective morality and social stability.

The prevalence of these abusive and deviant sexual behaviours has dire implications for both personal development and national growth. On an individual level, victims of sexual abuse often grapple with intense psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and

post-traumatic stress disorder. These mental health conditions can significantly impair one's ability to form healthy relationships, pursue life goals, or function productively within society. Offenders, too, may suffer from internal conflict, social rejection, and legal repercussions that impede their ability to rehabilitate or integrate. At the societal level, widespread sexual abuse undermines national cohesion, elevates healthcare expenditures, and contributes to a general decline in moral standards. These factors collectively retard economic progress, stretch social welfare systems, and compromise cultural identity. Fagbemi (2024) underscores that confronting sexual abuse is imperative for fostering a secure and enabling environment, particularly within educational institutions, that supports learning, innovation, and national development.

In contemporary society, the challenge of sexual abuse poses a significant threat to the development of wholesome individuals capable of achieving personal goals and contributing meaningfully to national development. Achievement, in this context, denotes the successful realisation of heroic deeds or significant milestones through courage, hard work, and integrity. A nation aspiring for growth must nurture individuals who are morally upright and psychologically sound to lead in diverse domains, be it politics, religion, education, commerce, or public service. According to Adebayo (2021), personal achievement is largely a function of social stability, internal coherence, and psychological resilience, all of which are undermined when sex abuse becomes a widespread social ill.

Society must reorient its citizens, particularly the youth, on acceptable sexual behaviours that align with the principles of dignity, respect, and societal values. Sex abuse, when left unchecked, disrupts the social fabric, disorients moral reasoning, and stalls the development of virile, sane, and resilient individuals. As posited by Eze and Nwosu (2022), no society can develop on a foundation riddled with sexual violence, promiscuity, and disregard for moral decorum. The historical backdrop of moral codes given to the Israelites, as documented in the Book of Deuteronomy, exemplifies the divine imperative for ethical sexual conduct. God, through Moses, provided guidelines to correct the moral decadence of the Israelites during their exodus, a necessary reorientation for achieving the divine promise of Canaan. Similarly, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as recorded in the Bible, serves as a grim reminder of the consequences of unchecked sexual immorality.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) also offer a framework within which personal and national achievements can be understood. Among the key elements of the SDGS are strategic wealth creation, youth employment, peace-building, agricultural development, improved healthcare, and environmental sustainability. According to Okafor and Akinbode (2023), none of these goals can be effectively achieved without the contributions of mentally stable, morally upright individuals. In this vein, fostering adaptive and socially acceptable sexual behaviours is not merely a moral obligation but a prerequisite for sustainable development. Wealth creation, for instance, thrives in a society where individuals are focused, goal-oriented, and free from trauma induced by sexual abuse. The psychological toll of such abuse diminishes productivity, saps creativity, and weakens the spirit of enterprise. Peace-building efforts, too, are hampered in communities plagued by gender-based violence and abuse, as they foster resentment, distrust, and recurring conflict (Uzoho, 2020). Similarly,

advancements in agriculture and industrialisation are less likely to thrive where societal energies are diverted towards resolving the consequences of moral decadence.

Reorientation, therefore, becomes indispensable. The concept of reorientation suggests a return to a previously known but abandoned moral compass. According to Salisu and Ibrahim (2021), reorientation involves reshaping societal values, educating the populace anew on long-established truths, and reinforcing standards that promote cohesion and development. It is particularly vital when individuals or communities have deviated from core values due to the influence of foreign or corrupting cultural elements. The emergence of what scholars describe as a "new culture", marked by the overwhelming acceptance of external influences that challenge traditional values, has resulted in widespread disorientation. This cultural confusion leads to conflicting lifestyles and moral ambiguity. As posited by Emeka and Yusuf (2024), such disorientation manifests in social vices such as sex abuse, the objectification of the human body, and a diminishing regard for human dignity and integrity. These, in turn, give rise to criminal behaviours like fraud, ritual killings, corruption, and the destabilisation of families and communities.

To build a sane and prosperous nation, the issue of sex abuse must be tackled head-on through comprehensive reorientation. The prevalence of reported cases of sexual abuse, especially in schools, families, and religious settings, calls for urgent action. According to Olatunji and Ibeh (2023), the increase in sexual abuse undermines social trust, instils fear, and results in psychological trauma conditions that are inimical to the development of a wholesome personality capable of achieving set goals. Victims of sexual abuse often suffer from anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and diminished self-worth. These outcomes make it nearly impossible for them to contribute positively to national growth.

The reorientation process should begin with educational reform. At the basic, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, curricula must be reviewed to incorporate elements of traditional values, cultural identity, and moral instruction. This approach is supported by Akinwale (2021), who opined that education is the most effective tool for moral reconstruction. General Studies (GST) courses in higher institutions should include dedicated modules on cultural values and ethical living. Sexuality education must be repositioned within the family and community structure. Parents, guardians, and religious leaders should be at the forefront of teaching children and youths about respectful and responsible sexual behaviour. Schools and workplaces should establish counselling units manned by professional counsellors trained to deploy behavioural therapies such as cognitive restructuring, assertiveness training, modelling, and chaining techniques. These interventions have been found effective in modifying maladaptive behaviours and reinforcing positive behavioural change (Adesina & Garba, 2022).

Additionally, government and non-governmental organisations should collaborate to sponsor workshops, seminars, and campaigns aimed at sensitising the public on the dangers of sexual abuse and the importance of upholding core societal values such as honesty, accountability, professionalism, and self-respect. Legislation also has a critical role to play. There should be stringent laws against sex offenders, with mechanisms for public shaming,

prosecution, and rehabilitation. As posited by Adegbite (2020), the enforcement of moral standards through legal means enhances societal compliance and deters deviant behaviours. Sexual education must be integrated formally into school curricula, delivered with emphasis on mutual respect and the sanctity of human dignity. School-based clubs that promote moral renaissance and personal development should also be encouraged. These clubs can become avenues for fostering leadership skills, civic engagement, and value rearmament among youths.

Furthermore, the glorification of materialism and sexually deviant behaviour must be discouraged. Communities should adopt strategies for publicly shaming rather than celebrating promiscuity and morally reprehensible conduct. In extreme cases, psychological evaluations should be employed to identify individuals exhibiting behaviours suggestive of psychopathology. According to Nwachukwu and Bello (2024), public perception and communal judgment often shape behavioural outcomes, and societal rejection of immoral acts can foster compliance with ethical standards. Government policies must reflect a commitment to the moral health of the populace. Deliberate policies must be enacted to punish all forms of sexual abuse and deviance. These policies should be backed by robust implementation frameworks and monitored for effectiveness. As argued by Johnson and Akpan (2022), sustainable development is not only a matter of economics and infrastructure but of morality and social well-being.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analyses, the paper clearly highlighted forms of sex-abuse, their consequences for the abuser and the abused, the challenge the phenomenon poses to the development of the individual and state and recommendations on the way forward. It is hoped that the desired change in behaviour to do what is right in term of attitude change will help in addressing the issues of sex-abuse as challenge to individual development for achievement life goals contribution to national growth.

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