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## The Nigerian Girl Child and Reality of An Abusive Absurdity: A Reflection on Philosophy for Children in Higher Educational System

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One of the social ills in contemporary Nigeria state is the abusive condition of the girl child. She has been abandoned, starved, beaten, enslaved and sexually molested by the society that ought to care about her but instead tames and guides her. Hence the paper attempts a social re-engineering process through philosophy for children dimension in higher education with a view to minimising, if not curbing, this ugly tragedy. The study employed both philosophical analysis and descriptive survey type. Philosophy for children is not an effort at teaching children the philosophical jargons but rather towards enablement of philosophical skills and its applications to questions of personal significance to the student. Findings revealed that the girl child abuse, though on the rise recently, but could be reversed where she is well trained in philosophical mindset at early age. Also, justice prevails when the abuse is timely reported to the law enforcement agents. Further, the establishment of victim-friendly court system would go a long way in facilitating quick dispensation of justice. Nevertheless, the vigorous pursue of ethical genuine poverty alleviation programmes would undoubtedly reduce the trend of the abuse in the society. The paper concluded that society should endeavour to nip the problem in the bud through conscientious philosophical guidance of Nigerian girl child at all time by all stakeholders. It is stated that the involvement of higher educational system will assist the parents, guardian, girl child, law enforcement agents, the law makers, the clinicians, the theoretician, the researcher and all other concerned with children's welfare in such a way to shed light on a path of progress in decreasing and preventing this affront on our girl child in particular and children in general.

**Keywords:** Abuse, absurdity, girl child, higher education, philosophy for children

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### Introduction

In the history of mankind, children are susceptible to indignities, cruelties and horrors that human beings frequently inflict upon one another. Perhaps, at various times and places, the girl child has been abandoned, starved, beaten, enslaved, sexually molested and put to death. One such horror- girl child abuse- has become a serious social problem and myth which beclouds the clear perception and

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understanding due to its dramatic rise to date in contemporary Nigeria. The country Chief representative on child protection for UNICEF in Nigeria, Rachel Harvey, reported that the survey conducted in 2015 covered all of Nigeria's 36 states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) show that six out of Ten children experience some form of abuse before they turn 18years. Also that about 80percent of children continuously experience this again, and again, and again. Hence it was further revealed that the pathetic aspect of which is that the abused child did not know where to seek help in form of report (Stein, Chris, 2015). The reason for this may not be far-fetched. Though the search for an answer to this widespread discrimination against girls started in the 1990s<sup>1</sup>, using the rubric 'girl child' to elicit support for the cause of girls, but this girl child platform has not translated into effective, sustained or transformative national programmes. **The study employed both philosophical analysis and descriptive survey type.**

The paper attempts to address this 'why' question using the philosophical training for children through higher education. The study will follow this structure: Clarification of concepts: Girl child, abuse and the Nigerian girl child. Afterward, a discussion on the reality of an abused girl child in Nigeria. Finally, the recommendations towards minimising/curbing this absurd tragedy will be considered.

#### **Clarification of Concepts: Girl child, abuse, the Nigerian girl child and Philosophy for Children**

A girl is a female human from birth through childhood and adolescence to attainment of adulthood when she becomes a woman. A child, on the other hand, is a juvenile or immature youth who falls within the age group of 0-19 years. The age bracket is relative, but in Nigeria, according to the Nigerian Labour Act, a child is someone who is 16 years and below.

The fourth UN conference for women, held in Beijing in 1995, elaborates on the essence of girl child in section L of the nine strategic objectives for the girl child which include: elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls in education, health care and cultural biases; protecting girls from exploitation and violence; and encouraging all forms of girls' participation in social, economic and political life (Croll, 2006). Unfortunately, the gender discriminatory pattern of girl child is routine to the extent of being pandemic and virtually invisible in Nigeria society. Croll, quoting from UNICEF pamphlet, that «To be born female is not a crime but you would never know it by looking at the deplorable conditions of girls in many parts of the world.... Beginning from birth, girls in many parts of the world experience that 'apartheid of gender' with her lesser claims decided at the moment when her biological sex is known» (Croll, 2006).

This 'apartheid of gender' is reflected in the global figure for out-of-school children estimated at 121million with 53% (65million) being girls, over 80% of these girls live in Sub-Saharan Africa. The National School Census (NSC) of 2006 revealed that a Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) of 80.6% suggesting that a substantial proportion (19%) of primary school age population (6-11 years) is not enrolled in primary school nationwide. It implies almost 5 million Nigerian children of school age (6-11) are not in school. This is prominent in Northern part of the country where the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 3 boys. This gender gap varied across states and zones with the North Central and North West presenting worst scenarios. Besides, the Net Attendance Ratio (NAR) is at 60.10%, making

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<sup>1</sup> The following United Nations organs are responsible for the 'girl child' challenges: Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD) and Children and Development (CAD).

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about 40% level of non-attendance among primary school age children, with the proportion that girls' enrolment rates will be low. Most importantly, it is likely that those who do not participate in education are girls (tabl.).

Geographic differences in both Net and Gross Attendance Ratios are substantial. The primary school Net Attendance Ratio in the South- West (83%), in the South-South (82%), and in the South-East (80%), are nearly twice as high as the NAR in North- West (42%) in North- East (44%) (Jaulmes, 2007).

The table below further strengthen our discussions on Gender apartheid:

Education	Enrolment	Female %	Male %	Year
Pre-Primary Participation	GER	13.8	14	2008-12
Primary School	NER	79.3	87.1	2008-2012
Primary School	NAR	68	72	2008-12
Secondary school	NER	-	-	2008-12
Secondary school	NAR	54.3	54.2	2008-12

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER); Net Enrolment Ratio (NER); Net Attendance Ratio (NAT)

Source: Voice of America Sept., 10, 2015

From this statistic, it shows that parents in Nigerian setting culturally have different expectations of girls and boys in that sons are uniformly expected to live with or near parents, provide long-term support and succeed in education, career or other income-generating activities; whereas the girls need not be lettered but rather trained in the art of household maintenance in order to be useful to their would be suitors.

Moreover, abuse is being provoked from the above culturally grounded mind-set. This engenders all forms of psychological, structural and cultural stress on the girl child. The word abuse has a plethora of definitions which make its meaning inscrutable. The phenomenon applies to a wide range of actions that a true understanding of the concept is lost within its multiple conceptual and operational definitions. The reason for this could be as a result of incidence of rates of abuse and neglect which depend on the definition employed; and the interchange between professionals concerned with the problem of child abuse is difficult because professions and professionals do not always agree on what is or is not child abuse. However, abuse can be narrowly qualified, according to David Gil, as whence a caretaker injures a child, not by accident but in anger or deliberately (Gelles, 1976). This merely confines its abusive definition to a physical aspect of mistreatment. But a more broaden definition of abuse, from the American Public Law 93-237 on the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment act of 1973, affirms:

The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, neglect treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby (Gelles, 1976:136).

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It implies that child abuse is an outcome of dysfunctional adult-child relationship or sometimes even child-child relationship. We can further deduce that the action and inaction on child abuse are as a result of commission or omission of the culprits. Hence action which involve physical violence should be conceptually distinct from those which are emotional violent. Physical includes battering, burning, homicide, abandonment, inattention to health care, deprivation of basic necessities. While the non-physical (emotional) violence constitutes verbal attacks, deprivation of attention and confinement (Tadele, 2001). However, the causal factors of girl child abuse will be considered in the next section. Meanwhile, who is a Nigerian girl child?

The Nigerian girl child as a concept, though particularised, cannot be detached from the universal claims of the girl child most importantly on the rights and obligation as reinforced by the African Charter which declared that 'the state shall ensure the protection of the rights of the women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions' (Ogunyemi, 2000) Moreover, the Charter recognises 31 articles from the subsisting Article 66 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in June 1995 and endorsed by resolution to elaborate a protocol in protecting the rights of girl child and women in Africa (African Commission...,2003). Besides, the Nigerian Population Policy emphasized adequate punitive sanctions to discourage men who impregnate underage child. In our analysis of the Nigerian girl child, there are some features peculiar to her. Thus there are metropolitan and rural breed girl children. The Former is exposed to not only western acculturation but also celebrates globalised identity grounded in individualism. Individualism, in the sense, that she is trained not to recognise cultural norms and values of her milieu. While the latter girl child may be opportune to being schooled in western education but well-grounded in the cultural identity of her community. Hence she upholds the communitarian ideal of brotherhood, respects and affinity. Be that as it may, the experience of cultural dislocation, among other alienating factors, of the urban trained girl child engenders various abusive absurdities at which she finds herself today.

The prominent of such abuse is sexual (rape and prostitution). The rural trained girl child is susceptible to sexual abuse most often factored by early marriage dictated by tradition and culture; father- daughter incest; and by Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). By and large, the dramatic rise of this abusive absurdity of girl child is prominent in Nigerian metropolitan setting.

Philosophy for children could be viewed from two perspectives. While the latter, Children, needs not be over flogged but the Former, Philosophy, is basically concerned with the quest for something grounded in the principle of wonders. As such, it emphasises the tools of critical analysis, evaluation and expository accounts of subject matters in aids of its schemes. However, philosophy for children is not an effort at teaching children the philosophical jargons but rather towards enablement of philosophical skills and its applications to questions of personal significance to the student. Besides, the study debased the principle of indoctrination for alternative thinking methods in logical and objective process of reasons for belief system (Bynum, 1976). By and large, it stimulates discourse in children questioning ability in respect to thinking, knowledge, education, society, art and man. This initiates the easy alternative foregone whenever faced dilemma and forced to make a difficult decision. This further provokes creative works with intrinsic interest and value for children that, on the long run, revamp imaginative thinking and generate wonder which encourage thoughtful discussion of questions of importance to children. The mastery skills are discerned to encourage further objective and impartial attitude, a commitment to consistency and a respect for other people as important sources of information, ideas and attitudes (Bynum, 1976: 3-5). We shall next discuss the causes of this unfortunate celebration in the next section.

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### The Reality of an Abused Girl Child in Nigeria

From our line of thought in the last section, we are able to narrow discussion on the abuse to sexual abuse. Hardly does a day gone by without reportage on the sexual violent inflicted on a girl child in Nigerian tabloid. Sexual abuse is any act by an adult toward a child that can be linked to sex in one way or another. Dimensions to this abusive act include indecent exposure, rape, child prostitution, abduction, incest and sexual intercourse with children (Tadele, 2001: 117).

According to 2009 study in Clinical Psychology Review that examined 65 studies from 22 countries: 'the global prevalence of child sexual abuse has been estimated at 19.7% for female and 7.9% for male child. (The Eagle: 2016) The Lagos State Police Command revealed that between March 2012 and March 2013, 678 cases of rape were recorded. This is an understatement as the true statistics could not be gathered as most rape victims do not have their cases reported to the appropriate authorities and therefore the rapists go scot free. This sexual assault cases are underreported due to some extraneous factors in Nigeria communities. However, a statistic gathered between January 2008 and December 2012 shows that out of 287 case notes analysed, 83.6% were below the 19years, 73.1% knew their assailants (Neighbours), most assaults (54.6%) occurred in the neighbourhood and over 60% of victims presented after 24hours of assaults. More so, 77.3% of assault committed at daytime; and underage were taken advantage of during the day while adults assaulted at night (Akinlusi, et. al., 2016). We need to be conscious of the fact that the overall genesis of this systemic fallout is the poverty of both mind and material. Material poverty over time generates multiplier effects of deprivation. Once a person is poor in terms of income there is the possibility of suffering trickling down to other deprivations. The offspring of this setting, under resourced and unsupervised situations, are targets of child abuse to a greater extent. The Nigerian girl child lurks within this confinement which adversely affects the child's experiences of exploration, growth and development (RAPCAN, 1997). In other words, the effect of girl child sexual abuse can include: depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, propensity to further victimisation in adulthood, and physical injury. Poverty of the mind is borne out of illiteracy and ignorance engendered through aping global practices and the alarming rate of illiteracy in the country is also a contributory factor to this abuse. This abuse is prominent in a well to do family where incest is committed. It is intra-familial sexual abuse and perpetrated on a child by a member of the child's family. This includes not only sexual intercourse, but also any act designed to stimulate a child sexually or to use a child for sexual stimulation, either of the perpetrator or of another person (Pettis, Hughes, 1985).

#### Consultation

Characteristics	Day Time	Night Time
Teenagers (3-17)	208 (87.0%)	31 (13.0%)
Non-teenagers (18 +)	13 (13%)	34 (72.3%)

#### Disclosure Interval

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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Within 24hrs	102	35.5
24hrs-6 days	129	45.0
7 days-1 month	31	10.8
1 month and above	25	8.7

## Assailants

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Neighbours	157	54.9
Stranger	77	26.9
Acquaintances	36	12.6
Family Member	13	4.6
Boy friend	3	1.0

## Place of Assault

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Neighbour's house	156	54.6
Victim's home	60	21.0
Uncompleted building	34	11.9
Street Corner	27	9.4
Friend's house	9	3.1

The types of incest include siblings' incest, mother-child incest, and father-child incest. The common in our climes is the father- child incest. Herein, the child becomes a little mother around the house, assuming household tasks and child care duties which would normally be assigned to the mother. The mother might be conscious of the infidelity but out of fear of opting out of marriage and shame that she consented. In a nutshell, the girl child would not voice out her predicament on the ground that she will be taken away from her parents and lose the only security she knows or that she will be blamed for the punitive sanction of her father and possibly victimised again when he returns. This complex set of inter-relationship makes detection, intervention and treatment very difficult.

## Literacy Differences in Nigeria (Rural and Urban Setting)

Item	Male	Female	Rural	Urban	Gap	YEAR
Literacy rate	58 %	41%			17%	2005
Literacy rate	75%	58%		Yes	16%	2005
Literacy rate	51%	34%	Yes		17%	2005

Source: *The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (Technical Consultation, Beijing, China 26-27 Nov., 2005).*

Nevertheless, some of the reference cases of sexual abuse on girl child in Nigeria are thus:

1. A case of defilement of a three-year-old girl by a fifty-year-old man in Minna, Niger state. The man sneaked into the room where the baby was sleeping and forcefully had sex with her when the mother had gone to the market (Ogbeche, 2016).

2. A case of a thirty-year-old man who raped a twelve-year –old sister of his girlfriend and then gave her N20.00 (twenty naira) only in order to conceal the crime (RADAR, 2016).

3. The celebrated Ese Oruru saga is still fresh in our memory. It was a case of parental neglect and failure. Ese, a thirteen-year-old girl, ignorantly eloped with Yunusa Dahiru to Kano state from Bayelsa state in August 2015. Yunusa abducted and co-habited with her in his father's compound in Kura area of the state. Yunusa's father, on his part, saw nothing wrong in living under the same roof with a teenage who was brought in by his teenage son and whose parents he, the father, knew nothing about. This thought provoking saga gave birth to a baby girl some few weeks ago.

4. Besides these cases of sexual and carnal abuses, another reality of girl child in Nigeria today is prostitution. The girl child is seen as a means of income by way-ward adults, her guardian, through sexual exploitation. The impact of this on the girl child is that it falls into her everyday life experience and become normalised. This culture of impunity conditions her as property and not as an individual with rights. This is ubiquitous in our urban centres, perhaps commercial areas, where children of school age are aimlessly roaming about our local bars, streets and brothels for 'survival sex'. However, this is a common reality in poverty stricken and densely populated communities in this country.

5. Incest is often a grave practice in our wealthy homes where uncles and friends of the family take undue advantage of the girl child. Most often, out of sincere love and respect, the girl innocently submits to the paedophilia. This further places the girl child in peril in a manner that is so routine but virtually invisible.

6. Sometimes, children are forced to share sleeping space with uncles and families. This situation exposes the girl child to sexual abuses.

Having itemised the challenges confronting the Nigerian girl child above, we shall next explore some possible means of ameliorating this excruciating pains of abuse.

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**Recommendations**

1. The society should be conscious of the fact that the training of a girl child determines the futuristic qualities of a nation. Hence, intervention initiatives would be appropriate in identifying and preventing situations that may encourage girl child sexual abuse at the various organs of the society (Ogunyemi, 2000: 51). A male child, for instance, should be trained on the means of approach with his female counterpart. He should be informed and educated on how and when a lady consent to sexual behaviour rather than the feeling that the female gender is merely an appendage to him.
  2. Higher education should inculcate in her curriculum the study of philosophy for children as a compulsory course for not only leadership preparedness but also to enabling a training ground for the teacher-in-training support against dogmatic enslavement of children in all ramifications.
  3. Also, higher education training support should be encouraged in teaching philosophy for children at elementary and post primary levels as a starter towards encouragement for moral development and epistemic involvement among children.
  4. Sexually abused girl, parents, guardian and the general public should be encouraged to report this abuse cases to the police and bring the culprit to book. Though public and victim may thought otherwise for fear that the victim might be stigmatised by her peers or parents if the case was publicised, but the girl child must be empowered to report at all time her experiences of sexual abuse whenever challenged to the appropriate quarters other than keeping the agony to herself and become a tool of manipulation by the rapist(s).
  5. The girl child's right to protection against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation is necessary given the incidence of domestic and public sexual exploitation in our society nowadays. In addition, higher education should intensify efforts empowering civil rights organisations and other non-governmental agencies to engage and arouse the consciousness of the girl child at school and other public places on her rights in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1998, and where and how to report such abuses by the community.
  6. As appendage to above, health motivation and the Police in particular are the first source of help for abused girl child. There is a need to advocate for support of the healthcare system to develop more sensitive approaches and police with clear guideline on how to deal with girl child sexual abuse.
  7. Higher education tinker on creating a judicial system to facilitate rapid dispensation of justice in order to change the societal attitude on girl child and abuse. The substantive laws on sexual abuse and rape must be dealt with at federal, state and local government levels with the aim to bringing about significant change within the court system and make conviction likely, despite the insensitive and ill-trained nature of police personnel, judicial officers and others involved with the girl child predicament.
  8. It is important to emphasise that the girl child abused by her parent or guardian be encouraged to forgive and forget in an effort to improve family ties and assisting parental care for her psychological needs and helping her re-integration into the family.
  9. Government should design and adopt community based intervention strategies for an abused girl child which must be culturally sensitive in order to reinforce our cultural beliefs and practices (Tadele, 2001: 132-137).
  10. In addition to above point, government needs to vigorously pursue poverty alleviation measures to ameliorate the general socio-economic status of majority of her citizens. This is informed
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by the fact that one of the consequences of girl child sexual abuse is the system fallout of poverty discussed in the paper.

### **Conclusion**

Higher educational institutions have a major stake and role to play through its curriculum monitoring and evaluations primarily designed to emphasize philosophy for children which will on the long run downplay abusive reality experienced today on girl child in particular. It is hope that the involvement of higher educational system will assist the parents, guardian, girl child, law enforcement agents, the law makers, the clinicians, the theoretician, the researcher and all other concerned with children's welfare in such a way as to shed light on a path of progress in decreasing and preventing this affront on our girl child in particular and children in general.

Most importantly, the magnitude of girl child sexual abuse, among several forms of abuse, and its effects can be prevented if the above recommendations are put to task with the resolve by the concerned personnel to conscientiously nip the problem in the bud and put the society on track of visionary and dream of a better future.

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### Нігерійська дівчинка і реальність гвалтівного абсурду: роздуми про філософію у системі вищої освіти

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Однією із соціальних проблем у сучасній Нігерії є жорстоке поводження з дівчинкою. Їх залишають без захисту, морять голодом, б'ють, поневолюють та сексуально розбещують у суспільстві, яке мало би піклуватися про них, але натомість приборкує їх та керує ними. Тому в статті робиться спроба процесу соціального реінжинірингу через філософію для дітей у вищій школі з метою мінімізувати, якщо не приборкати цю потворну трагедію. У дослідженні використовувався як філософський аналіз, так і описовий тип опитування. Філософія для дітей — це не спроба навчити дітей філософської термінології, а скоріше, намагання прищепити їм філософські навички та їх застосування до питань, що мають особисте значення для учня. Результати показали, що жорстоке поводження з дівчатками, хоча останнім часом і зросло, але його можна було б редукувати, якщо вони були би добре навчені філософському мисленню в ранньому віці. Також справедливість восторжествує, якщо про зловживання вчасно будуть повідомляти правоохоронцям. Крім того, створення системи судів, дружньої до потерпілих, значною мірою сприяло б швидкому вчиненню правосуддя. Крім того, енергійне впровадження етичних програм боротьби з бідністю, безсумнівно, зменшило б тенденцію зловживань у суспільстві. У документі зроблено висновок про те, що суспільство має намагатися знищити проблему в зародку завдяки сумлінному філософському керівництву нігерійських дівчаток в будь-який час з боку всіх зацікавлених сторін. Зазначається, що залучення системи вищої освіти допоможе батькам, опікунам, дівчаткам, правоохоронцям, законодавцям, клініцистам, теоретикам, дослідникам та всім іншим, які мають відношення до благополуччя дітей, пролити світло на шлях прогресу у зменшенні та запобіганні цього скривдження нігерійських дівчаток зокрема та дітей загалом.

**Ключові слова:** насильство, абсурд, дівчинка, вища освіта, філософія для дітей