

## **Male Parents' Roles in Female Children's Awareness of Child Sexual Abuse in Ile-Ife, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Male heads of families in Nigeria are regarded as unlikely sex educators to their female children, even in contemporary times when child sexual abuse appears to be on the increase. This study aimed at investigating the roles male parents play in their female children's awareness raising about sexual abuse. This is a case study research design which employed convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The population consists of men who trade in various occupations or business transactions in the Obafemi Awolowo University Central Market, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Fifteen male family heads were selected while a self-designed interview guide was used to elicit information from them. Findings revealed that fathers enlisted their wives' support to teach daughters, equipped daughters with preventive and self-defence skills, and insisted on modesty in dressing to sensitise them about sexual abuse. Furthermore, child sexual abuse has the possibility of affecting male parents, female children, and family members by portraying parents as irresponsible, causing emotional trauma, disrupting plans and resulting in health complications and/or death. Conclusively, male parents are gradually surmounting previous socio-cultural constraints limiting their engagement in preventive child sexual abuse education. Recommendations are subsequently made from the foregoing with implications for adult education and family life education.

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse, sex education, awareness, fathers, informal family life education

## 1. Introduction

The social, moral and cultural decadence in Nigerian society is on the increase. Sofadekan (2016) noted that behaviours deemed wrong in traditional Nigerian society are now tolerated and even praised. The media is awash with reports of shocking incidences of sexual deviance, sexually-driven ritual killings and other crimes perpetrated by young and old against children and young adults (Falayi, 2017; Tribune Online, 2021; Malik, 2022). Focusing on youths, the disturbing trend has been associated with the advent of technology and its enablement on mass media which Adebisi (2018) blamed for exposing innocent minds to polluting contents. For example, in Ogun State, Nigeria, a 17-year-old girl was decapitated by her 18-year-old boyfriend and his friend for money ritual.

The duo, who sourced guidelines for the ritual from a Facebook group found the victim an easy target because she “*was not a decent girl*” and “*liked having sex*” (Malik, 2022). This account shows a link between peer pressure, poverty, the get-rich-quick-syndrome, immorality and waning parental roles in providing children with proper upbringing which are suspected to be contributory to the noticeable societal decay as portrayed in Adebisi (2018). One of the strategies that can address observed abnormalities in society including CSA is for parents to prepare their children early.

In Nigeria, parental upbringing is embedded in indigenous education and Fafunwa (1974) emphasised it to be relevant in instilling in children spiritual and moral values, and social responsibility. Usually, in the African context, female parents teach children about sex and sexuality within their gender roles (Asekun-Olarinmoye, Dairo&Adeomi, 2011). This study would attempt to fill a knowledge gap about the roles played by male parents (also called fathers in this study) in Nigeria as unlikely sex educators according to socio-cultural expectations to raise their female children’s awareness of child sexual abuse (CSA)- an offshoot of moral decadence in Nigeria. To this end, the following research questions were asked and answered in this paper: How do male parents raise their female children’s awareness of CSA? How can male parents, female children and the family be affected by CSA?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is described as the involvement of children (below 18 years) in sexual activities that violates the laws or social taboos of society which may or may not include physical contact that the children cannot understand, are not developmentally prepared for and therefore cannot give consent (Marcdante, 2019; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). It includes sexual behaviours like vaginal or anal penetration (with a penis, finger or other object), oral sex, touching the breasts or genitals, exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposing children or engaging them in pornography (Christensen, 2017).

Studies confirm the devastating consequences of CSA for children and their families. Immediate reactions and long-term impacts on children include psychological and behavioural symptoms such as emotional traumas, depression, low self-esteem; social stigma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), inappropriate sexual behaviour, suicide, mistrust of the opposite sex, and other interpersonal problems (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003; Agbo, 2019; Afolabi, 2020; Oluwaleye & Adefisoye, 2021). Regarding parents, findings by Fong, Bennett, Mondestin, Scribano, Mollen and Wood (2020) reported that parents of sexually abused children experienced emotional and psychological stress typified by anger, depressed mood, guilt and negative thoughts about their parenting abilities. Given these, CSA must be prevented or minimised. Hence, the need for FLE where parents can provide sex education to their children.

## ***2.2 Family Life Education***

Family life education (FLE) is the practice of equipping and empowering family members across the lifespan occurring outside a traditional school setting to develop knowledge and skills in strong communication, typical human development, good decision-making, positive self-esteem, and healthy interpersonal relationships that would enhance well-being and strengthen interpersonal relationships in the home through an educational, preventive, and strengths-based approach to foster positive individual, couple, and family development (Goddard & Smith, 2011; National Council on Family Relations, 2021).

Although this indicates that FLE programs and services are delivered by certified family life educators in formal or non-formal structures and settings, FLE may also be provided in informal settings, especially in African countries. Ghana, for example, has formal institutions responsible for family and parenting, and social service delivery, but much of FLE learning is done informally through traditional and cultural practices within the family. Hence, FLE be geared toward preventive measures that provide knowledge and tools needed to equip

individuals and families to enrich their lives (Asiedu & Donkor, 2018). Nonetheless, the nature of FLE is not widely understood, as it is used interchangeably with sexuality education; one of the content areas of FLE (Robila & Taylor, 2018).

### **2.3 Sex Education**

This describes learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality which starts early in childhood and progresses through adolescence and adulthood with the aim of supporting and protecting children's and young people's sexual development to be gradually equipped and empowered with evidence-based and developmentally appropriate information, skills and positive values to understand and enjoy their sexuality, have safe and fulfilling relationships, take responsibility for their own and other people's sexual health and well-being (WHO, 2010). Learning about sex education (SE) can be acquired formally, non-formally and/or informally within various contexts and settings (Akande & Akande, 2008; European Expert Group on Sexuality Education, 2015; Wangamati, 2020).

While there are benefits to providing children with early SE, there are also associated concerns. For example, SE is viewed to deprive children of their innocence, causing them to have sex earlier than expected (The European Expert Group on Sexuality Education, 2015). Moreover, hinging on socio-cultural and religious considerations in some African countries, sex issues are regarded as sacred and meant for adults rather than for children (Asekun-Olarinmoye, Dairo & Adeomi, 2011; Lukolo & van Dyk, 2015). So, how do fathers serve as parents and sex educators to their female children?

### **2.3. Male Parents: Fathers and Educators**

Parenting involves nurturing or supporting children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual abilities from birth through adulthood (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Parents and the family are major sources of child socialisation in shaping character, social virtues, values, customs and mores for immediate and future applications (Nwoke, 2013; Greathead, 2002 in Lukolo & van Dyk, 2015). Relating SE with parent-child interaction, Bornstein and Putnick (2016) found that parents are perceived to interact with their children differently based on their gender. Mothers are expected to adhere to the gender division of labor in providing informal sex education to their children.

This is especially true in the submissions of Mejiuni (2012), Muhwezi, Katahoire, Banura, Mugooda, Kwesiga, Bastien & Klepp (2015) about wives and mothers who are expected to be

closest to their children, especially daughters. Additionally, mothers are recognised to be more involved than fathers in family interactions related to their children's sexual health and sexual activity, according to their adolescent children's preferences (Akande & Akande, 2008; Usonwu, Ahmad & Curtis-Tyler, 2021). Usually, in male-headed families in Africa, men ascertain their masculinity by financially fending for the family, providing leadership, taking final decisions (as permitted by patriarchy and religion).

Their involvement in childcare and house chores are seen as supporting the sole responsibility of wives which conform to traditional gender stereotypes defined by society (Mejiuni, 2012; Alagbada, Adeusi & Iluku-Ayoola, 2021; Olanrewaju & Awogbayila, 2022). Furthermore, Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006) listed some roles of an effective father to his children as: spending time with them; nurturing and disciplining them; serving as a guide, protecting and providing for them.

While fathers may sometimes be seen as overprotective of their daughters, Bennett, Harden and Anstey (2018) established that they are hindered from having an intimate relationship with their children to perform the role of sexuality educator by the gendered norms of fatherhood. Stuart (2022) affirms that fathers want to protect their daughters from making mistakes including those related with sexuality. Such concerns may not be unconnected with statistics about sexual abuse of the girl-child. Globally, at least 12 million girls under the age of 20 (about 1 in 10) have been forced to engage in sexual acts (WHO, 2022; UNICEF, 2022). Although children of both genders could be victims of sexual abuse, girls are more prone than boys as one in four girls have been sexually abused in Nigeria (UNICEF; n.d.; Afolabi, 2020; Obiweluzor, Onyishi & Okpoko, 2022).

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Role Theory**

The role theory explains how individuals who occupy particular social positions in life are expected to behave and how they expect other individuals to behave. It is based on the observation that people behave predictably and that individuals' behaviours are context-specific, based on their social position and situation (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007; Van der Horst, 2016). It also refers to the cultural norms regarding psychological and interactional aspects of members of the society such as mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and grandparents (Georgas, 2004). In functional role theory, roles are considered to be prescriptive and based on a shared understanding of expectations. These roles are learned and individuals are

expected to conform to roles and sanction others who deviate. The social system is considerably stable and individuals within this perspective learn roles which are normative expectations that dictate appropriate behaviour (Hindin, 2007). The role theory helps gain insight into the role fathers are expected to play as societal expectations permits and what they actually do within their reality towards their daughters' sexual health and general wellbeing.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The case study research design was adopted for this qualitative study. Case studies help to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to a case (Yin, 2018). The case study research allows the questions of why, what and how to be answered with a relatively full understanding of the nature and complexity of the complete phenomenon (Meredith, 1998 in Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018).

Fifteen participants were selected for this study from The Obafemi Awolowo University Central Market, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria which is one of the important commercial hubs of the University campus. The choice of sample size of 15 participants was regarded as appropriate stemming from submissions in Dworkin (2012) cited in Akpomuje (2019) which indicated that in qualitative research, saturation should be the guiding factor when thinking about sample size, and that 5 to 50 participants have been suggested as adequate size for in-depth interviews. The participants were either business owners or randomly transacting businesses at the Central Market. They were selected using both convenience sampling technique (based on their willingness to participate in the study) and purposive sampling technique (being biological fathers of at least one female child aged 5 and above). Informed verbal consent was duly sought from participants and pseudonyms were assigned to them to ascertain their privacy rights.

A self-designed interview guide was used to elicit information from participants. The fieldwork was done in November 2021 and the entire interview lasted approximately 1 hour 36 minutes. Interviews were mostly conducted in English while a few done in Yoruba language were transcribed in English. All interviews including verbal consents were audio-recorded while participants were identified by pseudonyms. Data obtained from the interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows fifteen male participants, assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality; aged 33 to 68 from different tribes in Nigeria, Ghana and Togo. Participants practice Christianity or Islam and are married, divorced or widowed with daughters aged between 5 and 34, although four participants did not specify their daughters' ages. Participants are land surveyors, graphic designers, tailors, lecturers, civil servants, traders, vulcanizers and drivers by profession. Results of the analysis of data are presented within each research question.

Table 1. *Participants' Profile*

PSEUDONYM	AGE	GENDER	NATIONALITY/ ETHNICITY	RELIGION	MARITAL STATUS	NO. AND AGE OF DAUGHTER(S)	OCCUPATION/ DESIGNATION
Michael	33	Male	Ghanaian/ Fante	Christianity	Married	2 /8; 10	Land Surveyor
Olayiwola	42	Male	Nigerian/ Yoruba	Islam	Married	2 /12; 19	Graphic Designer
Adetunji	45	Male	Nigerian/ Yoruba	Christianity	Married	1/14	Tailor
Maza	40	Male	Togolese/ Éwé	Christianity	Married	1/-	Tailor
Adeola	47	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	1/-	Lecturer
Owolabi	53	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Widower	1/19	Lecturer
Kayode	59	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	3/ 14, 31; 34	Civil Servant
Benjamin	43	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	1/11	Vulcanizer
Goodluck	38	Male	Nigerian/Ij aw	Christianity	Married	1 /5	Trader
Adegboyega	45	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	2/8;13	Civil Servant
Ayoko	37	Male	Togolese/É wé	Christianity	Married	1/ 15	Land Surveyor

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Kolawole	67	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	3/ -	Trader
Lukman	44	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Islam	Married	2/6;10	Vulcanizer
Morakinyo	59	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Divorced	1/ 9	Trader
Akinro	51	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	2/ -	Driver
Akeem	36	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Islam	Married	1/9	Civil servant
Ige	50	Male	Nigerian/Y oruba	Christianity	Married	2/ 11;15	Trader

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Source: Field work, 2021.

### ***5.1 How Do Male Parents Raise Their Female Children's Awareness of CSA?***

Analysis of data showed that fathers enlisted wives' support to teach daughters; equipped daughters with self-defence skills; sexual abuse prevention skills and insisted on modesty in dressing in a bid to sensitise them of CSA. These themes are presented hereafter.

#### ***Enlist wife's support to teach daughter***

Micheal, Olayiwola, Adetunji, Ige, Kayode and Owolabi appear to find themselves in awkward situations while trying to sensitise their daughters of CSA as male parents hence, they sought their wives' support to teach or co-teach them. For example, Olayiwola was mindful of his limits in interacting with his daughters once they reached adolescence. He explained:

I knew I had to talk to them about sex and sexual abuse but culturally, they are not comfortable with their dad talking to them about these things, so I engage their mom to talk to them about the dos and don'ts of sex, sexual abuse...after which I'll ask them what they've discussed ...because we, men would just say things straight but the mother would know how to go about saying it without shame.

Similarly, Kayode shared:

I especially enjoy my wife's support in teaching the children in this regard. I told her: "you have to help me o!" My wife teaches them how to behave with males, and doesn't allow them go out after 7:00 pm. These are parts of her duties as their mother.

The above is in line with the findings from a scoping review by Schaafsma (2022) on fathers' role in the sexual health education of their children which reported that fathers took on a more passive role and talked less to their children about sexual health than mothers. Similarly, Usonwu, Ahmad and Curtis-Tyler (2021) found that mothers in Sub-Saharan Africa are recognised to be more involved with home-based interactions on sexual health with adolescents than fathers. Here, gender, gender norms and gender roles determine the communicator and content of sexual health messages relayed to boys and girls, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes. While not opposing husbands leveraging the support of their wives, Owolabi opined that fathers needed to do more in providing SE to their daughters than delegating the responsibility to their wives as expected by cultural expectations. He said:

We fathers need not be ashamed of talking about sex and sexual abuse with our daughters because too many girls are being abused sexually...maybe because fathers are leaving the teaching of the children to the mothers alone. In our culture, talking on these issues is not permitted, it is taboo.

There is a connection between this finding and the emphasis in role theory on cultural norms regarding psychological and interactional aspects of members of the society (Georgas, 2004) which undergirds the roles fathers are expected to play with their female children. Findings show that fathers found it culturally unacceptable to freely discuss sex with children which aligns with Asekun-Olarinmoye, Dairo and Adeomi (2011) that in many African communities, talking about sex, with children is considered a taboo. While some fathers have learned to defy social roles and expectations about who engages female children in sex education, a few others still find this task awkward and thus enlist their wives' support.

#### ***Equip daughters with self-defence skills***

As a father of two girls, Akinro did not only raise his daughters' awareness of CSA verbally, he also armed them with defensive skills. He shared, "*I also teach them combat skills so they can defend themselves...my girls have mastered these moves well.*" The aforementioned aligns with Kenny, Capri, Ryan and Runyon (2008) that children as young as three could be effectively taught self-protection skills against CSA while emphasising that parental and family involvement in such training was important.

#### ***Teach sexual abuse prevention skills***

The responses of Owolabi, Goodluck, Adegboyega, Benjamin, Olayiwola, Ayoko and Kolawole showed that they considered it essential to teach their daughters ways of preventing

sexual abuse rather than remediating situations after the abuse. Thus, Owolabi, a widower shared the preventive skills he employed, *“I have told her that she should not walk alone in lonely areas because these are areas where rapists mostly strike. She should not ask for unnecessary favours so that she will not be taken advantage of.”* In addition to teaching his daughters against walking alone at night, Adegboyega averred, *“I teach them not to allow the opposite sex play with them to the extent of touching their breasts, kissing or having sex.”* Olayiwola explicitly taught his daughters to *“scream”, “run away” and “capture the face”* of the assailant(s) trying to touch their private parts and report to him. From another perspective, Benjamin and Morakinyo believed in interacting with their daughters about their physiological makeup to prevent sexual abuse. For example, Morakinyo believes that it was his duty as a single parent to make his daughter conscious of her body. His reason? *“many children have been sexually abused due to their parents’ carelessness in educating them about their bodies.”* Fathers’ prevention education are in line with contents of CSA prevention books for children which emphasised informing and empowering children about their bodies, knowing what their ‘private parts’ are, equipping them with necessary skills to identify abuse as well as essential safety skills knowledge to differentiate appropriate/‘good touch’ and inappropriate touching/‘bad touch.’

### ***Modesty in dressing***

These fathers- Owolabi, Adetunji, Kayode and Maza associated the way girls dress with being vulnerable to CSA. Saying he is a Christian who attends the Deeper Life Bible Church, a church that encourages its congregants to dress modestly, Kayode shared how he conveys his religious views in his daughters about dressing modestly to prevent sexual abuse, *“I am not a careless father. I teach them to dress as Christians...not to dress seductively in order not to attract boys who will lust after them.”* Similarly, Owolabi shared the principles he uses to guide his daughter in dressing, *“I insisted that my daughter should be properly dressed not to attract unnecessary attention from males...their sensitive body parts...thighs,breasts should be properly covered.”* Also, sticking to the point of dress simplicity, Maza seems to blame the female CSA victims for what happened to them when he said, *“the females are also causing sexual abuse. Sometimes, it depends on the dress they wear.”*

Some parents too should be blamed for not guiding their daughters on why they should dress decently so that they will not be raped. *“These fathers’ views are corroborated in the findings from an investigation of the implications of child rape on the education of the child in Nigeria*

where parents identified indecent dressing as one of the causes of CSA (Agbo, 2019). Similarly, in a study on community attitudes towards CSA, participants linked the inadequacy of parental care to monitor children who wore indecent clothing with predisposing them to sexual abuse because tight and revealing clothes made them attractive to men (Chitundu, Mwape & Kwaleyela, 2020).

## **5.2 How can male parents, daughters and the family be affected by CSA?**

CSA has been viewed by participants to possibly affect fathers, daughters and the family by portraying parents as irresponsible, causing emotional trauma, disrupting plans and resulting in health complications and/or death.

### ***Portrays parents as irresponsible***

To Michael, Ige, Akeem, Olayiwola and Maza, the sexual violation of a daughter does not affect the child alone but the father as well by making him appear and feel irresponsible as a parent. In this wise, Michael said, *“it will make you feel irresponsible and tarnish your image as a father because you could not take care of her. It looks like we’re failing as parents...”* Connecting the effects of CSA on parents and children, Olayiwola submitted, *“it’s a bad experience for a child ...the child will blame the parents that they should have talked to her about sexual abuse.”* The fathers’ apprehensions are logical particularly when Fong, Bennett, Mondestin, Scribano, Mollen and Wood (2017), Chitundu, Mwape and Kwaleyela (2020) reported that negligent parenting was contributory to the increase in CSA cases. Parents of sexually abused children also had negative beliefs about their parenting abilities.

### ***Emotional trauma***

All participants affirmed that CSA inflicts some form of emotional trauma on fathers, female children and/or their family members. Pouring out on the emotional impact on the child and family, Owolabi shared, *“The scar of sexual abuse remains not only with the child, it hurts the father and the family as well. It can lead to anxiety, depression, PTSD...it is bad for everybody...a life trauma.”* To Adetunji, CSA leads to stigma which traumatises the abused and their family members, *“the child, as well as the family will be disgraced and stigmatised. The parents will be blamed for their carelessness...your daughter has to live and walk in shame”* Also, Olayiwola averred that CSA also has long-term psychological effects on a child, when he submitted, *“the child might be emotionally traumatised to the extent of not trusting men for marriage. As a father, you’ll be expecting her to bring a man home but due to the experience, she cannot move on.”* Similar emotional impacts of sexual abuse on

children and parents are reported in Fong, Bennett, Mondestin, Scribano, Mollen and Wood (2017), Agbo (2019), Afolabi (2020) and Oluwaleye & Adefisoye (2021).

### ***Disrupts plans***

Michael, Ayoko, Akeem and Akinroopined that CSA had the possibility of disrupting the plans of both the girl and/or her parents. In this regard, Michael said abuse CSA, *“It will jeopardise your plans...it will destabilise the prospects you have for her.”* Focusing on the child, Akeem averred, *“If she gets pregnant due to the abuse...it can disrupt the child’s life.”* This tallies with reports from a research on child sexual exploitation in Coy, Sharp-Jeffs and Kelly (2017) which recommended the rehabilitation of sexually exploited youths who look down on themselves and have lost vision for a future.

### ***Health complications and/or death***

For Kayode, Akinro and Morankinyo, CSA could lead to serious health complications and even death. According to Kayode, *“some abused girls get pregnant and attempt to abort it. In the process, they can die, that will be a loss to the parents.”* To Morankinyo, *“the child can contract an STI, or even worse, it can lead to death”* This finding is similar to those in Abera, Aliye Tadesse and Guta (2021) which documented unwanted pregnancies, abortion, contracting STIs as some of the reproductive and health consequences of CSA.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study focused on how fathers in Nigeria raised their female children’s awareness on CSA through informal family life education despite socio-cultural constraints and given dissipating social, moral and cultural values in society. When discussing CSA and male parents’ roles in raising their female children’s awareness about it, we recognise that not all male parents will identify with the roles ascribed to the male parents from this study. Consequently, the findings that emanated from this study cannot be generalised for all male parents in Ile-Ife where male parents of different religious beliefs, ethnicity and nationality reside.

This study, therefore, concludes that fathers are gradually breaking free from constraints limiting them from engaging their female children in preventive sex education of CSA. As informal adult educators, fathers have a fair grasp of the learning contents necessary for CSA prevention as well as the possible effects of CSA on both female children and the family. It is therefore recommended that early introduction of CSA education to female children be

prioritised by fathers to prevent rather than remediate the consequences of sexual abuse. Also, efforts should be made to sensitise hesitant fathers on the need to protect their female children against CSA despite socio-cultural constraints. Mothers/wives should not be solely saddled with the responsibility of having sex-related talks with female children; fathers should be equally involved and bond with daughters.

## **7. Implications for adult education and family life education**

1. Male parents can function effectively as adult educators and informal sex educators in preventing CSA.
2. Taken-for-granted informal male parent-daughter interactions should be leveraged as opportunities to educate female children on CSA.
3. CSA has the possibility of affecting individuals and family well-being negatively.

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