Human Trafficking Risk Perception of Parents of Children with Autism in Nigeria

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Abstract

Given increasing challenges faced by parents of children with autism. It is imperative to investigate what might be the perception of such parents on human trafficking. Therefore, the objective of this study was to ascertain the human trafficking risk of parents with autism in Nigeria. The design the study adopted was a descriptive survey design. 40 autism parents were selected from Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State Nigeria participated in this study. The instrument used for data collection was HTRPQ developed by the researchers. The instrument was administered to the participates at the Special Education Centre in Nsukka LGA. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The result obtained showed that parents had high human trafficking risk perception. Gender differences were observed. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that all stakeholders, education planners, childhood educators, teachers, governments, and other agencies are urgently called to strategically design implementable policies, programs, and activities that will rescue the current autistic children victims of human trafficking and also protect this category of children from falling prey into the hands of the traffickers.

Keywords: Human trafficking risk perception, parents with autism children, Nigeria

I.   Introduction

Children with autism may face a higher risk of human trafficking. This is because children with autism face a lot of challenges including poor communication, coordination problem, and social skills (Nnamani et al., 2019). Nnamani et al (2019), further emphasized that autistic children are prone to have trouble in sharing conversation with others, talking about a variety of topics, and maintaining a good voice tone. The authors also pointed out that children with autism might have confusion in understanding language. Consequently, they might speak in an unusual tone of voice and have difficulty in reading with the body language or tone of voice to visualize when they are in danger. A recent study observed that children with autism have problems observing eye contact, reading other people's body expressions, and identifying danger due to their poor social skills, low cognitive abilities, low adaptive skills, and high irrational thought (Akabogu et al., 2020). These problems have resulted in involvement in social activities such as friendship-making and environmental

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awareness. In line with the Akabogu et al observation, poor involvement in social activities among autistic children is currently a universal alarm that requires vital attention because of the increasing rate of autism in children and the incessant risk of human trafficking.

The news about human trafficking has been rampant in Nigerian society in recent times. It was observed that due to economic recession, globalization, conflicts, poverty, lack of adequate legislation, ignorance and poor legal system, human trafficking in Nigeria has assumed a revocable dimension (Okeshola & Adenugba, 2018). To this end, human trafficking is not new, it is an ancient practice established in almost all human society and it is a serious threat to human security (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). It has become so bad that (UNESCO, 2006) confirmed Nigeria as a country where transit and destination for human trafficking are originated. Traditionally, human trafficking has taken many forms, across diverse periods and different places. More so, in the context of globalization, it has acquired dreadful new dimensions that differ from the dynamic of the trade from one zone to another (Onuoha, 2014).

Onuoha, also stated that most human trafficking cases begin with the more dreadful decision to migrate with the assistance of a smuggler, or to pursue a particular economic opportunity, kidnapping and force at the outset. Iyanda & Nwogwugwu (2016), pointed out that there two major kinds of trafficking: internal and external trafficking. Internal trafficking is in the form of slavery where the individual lacks freedom and subjected to street begging, while external trafficking is generally tagged as sex trafficking, where women and children are trafficked both locally and internationally for sex and forced labor as it has incorporated with a crime of exploitation. Recent studies indicated that Nigeria had taken a new aspect of trafficking as it involves baby-selling and organ harvesting for selling. This indication creates more anxiety on parents of children with autism, because these children behave in ways that are typical and difficult to predict, walk away without parents knowledge, and can be easily trapped due to their low cognitive abilities, low adaptive skills, and high irrational thought (UNESCO, 2006). Additionally, baby trafficking is another form of trafficking where babies who are victims are sold for a huge sum of money in return because of the high demand for the babies in the black market (Zulaikha et al., 2018). Trafficked babies are sold for a high price; they were smuggled and bought by individuals or groups of people that are involved in the consortium.

A variety of things moved people to take decisions to move from their place to another place (Olooto & Oladeji, 2017). But in the case of children with autism, they may be forcefully or trickly taken away by traffickers who trafficked them for organ trafficking to get a huge sum of money. Organs are mostly obtained from the children, poor, most vulnerable people in the underdeveloped countries (Franks, 2018). Organ trafficking is made by exploiting the victims in the country or smuggled illegally by human traffickers (Bruckmüller, 2020). According to the World Health Organisation's estimate, 10,000 black market operations where human organs were sold yearly by the hackers for a huge sum of money (Campbell, 2012). Whereas, it seems that some of the children with autism could be among the victims.

Thus, parents with autism children are always at risk for high levels of distress because of their children's developmental impairment. Estes et al. (2009) stated that parents experience distinctive challenges related to the development of children with autism, unlike other forms of developmental impairments. The authors also stated that social interaction and communication impairs may have an adverse psychological impact on their parents because of their low cognitive abilities and high irrational thoughts that expose them to danger.

Sometimes, children with autism display a very odd language and communication pattern that is not easily understood and interpreted. However, such abnormality in cognition may create problems for these children when they are left alone in the public without the assistance of their parents or caregiver who knows and understand their problems.

Furthermore, parenting children with autism is characterized by rising levels of stress burnout. Consequently, parents with autism children may face an increase in parenting responsibilities, such as giving the children greater assistance with a variety of basic activities such as dressing, bathing, toileting, and protection from danger by the traffickers (Hall & Graff, 2012). Thus, it becomes imperative to investigate what could be the perception of parents with autism on human trafficking in Nigeria.

Previous studies show the perceptions of some stakeholders in the country, except parents with autism children, on human trafficking. For instance, an investigation of police's perception of human trafficking showed that human trafficking is similar to crimes like prostitution or sexual abuse of children (Farrell et al., 2015). Osakue et al (2002), maintained that there is a notable distinction in the perception of human trafficking by men and women. It was observed that females are more easily fascinated by riches and want to emulate others without not minding the means they acquire wealth. Human trafficking was also observed as a means of making fast money instead of being dependant on men. Olujide et al (2011), posited that males and females parents of victims who were involved in a focused group discussion gave different views as to what human trafficking is all about. The authors maintained that females perceive human trafficking as a business that gave a huge sum of money; the males on their own side see it as a means for the exploitation of human labor and salary. To this end, it was demonstrated that there are differences that exist between genders in the perception of human trafficking.

Other findings show that people do not understand and have general knowledge about human trafficking (Zulaikha et al., 2018). Similarly, Madunagu (2002), revealed that people who live in rural areas have a negative perception about human trafficking but their knowledge on human trafficking is low due to their low income, low educational level. This in line with (Ngban et al., 2009) which revealed that people living in urban locations will perceive the realities of human trafficking better, this is because it has to do with exploitation than those in rural locations.

Ofuoku et al (2012), also stated that human trafficking has an unpleasant result on agricultural production due to sometimes young rural dwellers that are supposed to help in agricultural production were deceived by human traffickers. Moreover, Jones et al.(2007), further pointed out that trafficking of humans occurs in forms other than criminal migration, which may involve other countries. However, the human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children is not known. The present study seeks to fill this gap. Therefore, the objective of the study was to ascertain the human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children in Nigeria. The hypothesis which states that male and female parents with autism children do not differ significantly in their human trafficking risk perception was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

II. Method

Design: The study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children in Nigeria. According to Ali (2009), descriptive survey design is mainly on describing events as they are, with no manipulation of what caused the event. In this study, the design is used by the researchers to describe the human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children in Nigeria.

Participants: The study participants were 40 autistic parents drawn from Nsukka autism center in Enugu State, Nigeria. The 40 parents were made up of 12 males and 28 females with autism children, drawn through the simple random sampling technique of balloting.

The instrument for data collection: The instrument used for data collection in this study was the Human Trafficking Risk Perception Questionnaire (HTRPQ) developed by the researchers. The items of HTRPQ have been adapted from Nsonwu et al. (2017)'s Perceptions, Knowledge, and Attitudes about Human Trafficking Questionnaire (PKA-HTQ) and other related literature. The HTRPQ has 22 items in a four-point rating scale of: Agree (A) = 4, strongly Agree (SA) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 Strongly Disagree (S) =1 response. HTRPQ was validated by experts from a Federal University in Nigeria. The reliability coefficient of HTRPQ which was determined through Cronbach Alpha was .727.

Procedure: Researchers introduce themselves and the objective of the study to the supervisor of the center. Seek approval to conduct the study in the center. In response, the supervisors inform the researchers about the PTA meeting. On the day of the PTA, the supervisor introduced the researchers to parents. The autism parents were encouraged to give an honest response to the researchers. Then the researchers randomly selected 40 parents with autism children to participate in the study through balloting. The copies of the instrument were administered to the parents with autism children. Parents with autism children returned the questionnaire individually after responding to all the items. The researchers collated the responses in SPSS version 23 software for analysis. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

III. Results

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of human trafficking risk perception of parent with autism children

S/N	Items	Male		Female		Overall mean		Mean diff
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
1	Human trafficking is a dilemma for society at large	3.58	0.51	3.46	.57	3.50	.55	0.12
2	Human trafficking is a universal problem	3.75	0.45	3.60	.50	3.65	.48	0.45

3	Present there are different forms of human trafficking	2.83	0.94	3.25	.59	3.12	.77	-0.42
4	Parents should be readily available to every autism child.	3.00	0.73	3.10	.73	3.07	.72	-0.1
5	Autism children cannot be victims of human trafficking	1.91	0.90	2.39	.96	2.25	.96	-0.48
6	I am aware of human trafficking and ways to save human trafficking victims.	2.75	0.87	2.96	.80	2.90	.81	-0.21
7	People are always not compassionate with victims of human trafficking.	2.16	0.83	2.50	.89	2.40	87	-0.34
8	I have not heard about human trafficking in my area.	1.75	0.75	2.29	1.01	2.13	.97	-0.54
9	I do not have comprehensive knowledge of human trafficking.	1.50	0.52	1.92	.86	1.80	.79	-0.42
10	Human trafficking is a looming problem in Nigeria.	3.42	0.67	3.00	.81	3.13	.79	-0.42
11	People are not able to know when an autism child is a victim of human trafficking.	2.00	0.85	2.75	1.08	2.52	1.06	-0.75
12	I do not know the risk factors of human trafficking autism children	1.83	0.83	2.39	1.13	2.22	1.07	-0.56
13	All autism children victims of human trafficking are taken away without their parent's consent.	2.17	0.94	2.75	1.04	2.56	1.03	-0.58
14	Human trafficking is a misdeed against humanity	3.67.	0.65	3.46	0.84	2.52	0.78	0.21
15	Autism children from the poor parents are always the victims	2.08	0.99	264	1.06	2.48	1.06	-0.56
16	Autism children may be used as sex worker	2.58	1.08	2.64	0.95	2.63	0.98	-0.06
17	Autism children may be used for organs trafficking to make huge sum of money	3.08	1.16	2.64	0.76	2.93	0.89	0.22

18	Autism children are the major victims of human trafficking.	2.33	0.89	2.86	0.96	2.43	0.93	-0.13
19	I don't have a basic understanding of the different needs of autisms children victims.	2.50	0.67	2.46	0.82	2.38	0.77	0.18
20	All autism children victims do not willingly reveal their situation to officials.	2.67	0.65	2.32	0.79	2.83	0.74	-0.22
21	I do not have an understanding of the emotional effects of human trafficking on autism children victims.	1.83	0.72	2.89	0.85	2.05	0.81	-0.31
22	Autism have more fears of being victims of trafficking	2.75	0.97	2.42	1.03	2.53	1.01	0.33

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of human trafficking risk perception of the parent with autism children. The parents had high risk perception in items 1, 2, 3, 4,6, 10,11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20,22. However, they had low risk perception in items 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15, 19, and 21. Also, gender differences were observed in items 8, 11, 12, 13, 15. In item 1, the mean score of male parents was 3.58 with a standard deviation of 0.51 while the male score of female parents was 3.46 with a standard deviation of 0.57. The mean overall was 3.50 with a standard deviation of 0.55 and a mean difference of 0.12.

Likewise, in item 2, the mean score of male parents was 3.75 with a standard deviation of 0.45 while female parents had a mean score of 3.60 with a standard deviation of 0.50. The mean overall was 3.65 with a standard deviation of 0.48 and a mean difference of 0.45. Moreover, in items 3, the mean score of male parents was 2.83 with a standard deviation of 0.94 while the mean score of female parents was 3.25 with a standard deviation of 0.59. The mean overall was 3.12 with a standard deviation of 0.77 and a mean difference of -0.42. Also, in items 4, the mean score of male parents was 3.00 with a standard deviation of 0.73 while the mean score of female parents was 3.10 with a standard deviation of 0.73. The mean overall was 3.07 with a standard deviation of 0.72 and a mean difference of -0.1. Furthermore, in items 5, the mean score of male parents was 1.92 with a standard deviation of 0.90 while the mean score of female parents was 2.39 with a standard deviation of 0.96. The mean overall was 2.25 with a standard deviation of 0.95 and a mean difference of -0.48.

Again, in items 6, the mean score of male parents was 2.75 with a standard deviation of 0.87 while the mean score of female parents was 2.96 with a standard deviation of 0.80. The mean overall m was 2.90 with a standard deviation of 0.81 and the mean difference of-0.21. In items 7, the mean score of male parents was 2.16 with a standard deviation of 0.83 while the mean score of female parents was 2.50 with a standard deviation of 0.89. The mean overall was 2.40 with a standard deviation of 0.87 and a mean difference of -0.34. More so, in items 8, the mean score of male parents was 1.75 with a standard deviation of 0.75 while the mean score of female parents was 2.29 with a standard deviation of 1.01. The mean overall was 2.13 with a standard deviation

of 0.97 and a mean difference of -0.54. Likewise, in items 9, the mean score of male parents was 1.50 with a standard deviation of 0.5 while the mean score of female parents was 1.92 with a standard deviation of 0.86. The mean overall score was 1.80 with a standard deviation of 0.79 and a mean difference of -0.42. However, in items 10, the mean score of male parents was 3.42 with a standard deviation of 0.67 while the mean score of female parents was 3.00 with a standard deviation of 0.81. The mean overall score was 3.13 with a standard deviation of 0.79 and a mean difference of 0.42. Moreover, in items 11, the mean score of male parents was 2.00 with a standard deviation of 0.85 while the mean score of female parents was 2.75 with a standard deviation of 1.08. The mean overall score was 2.52 with a standard deviation of 1.06 and a mean difference of -0.75. Furthermore, in items 12, the mean score of male parents was 1.83 with a standard deviation of 0.83 while men score of female parents was 2.39 with a standard deviation of 1.13 The mean overall score was 2.22 with a standard deviation of 1.07 and a mean difference of -0.56. Also, in items13, the mean score of male parents was 2.17 with a standard deviation of 0.94 while the mean score of female parents had a score of 2.75 with a standard deviation of 1.04 The mean overall score was 2.56 with a standard deviation of 1.03, and mean difference of -0.58. More so, in items 14, the mean score of male parents was 3.67 with a standard deviation of 0.65 while the mean score of female parents 3.46 with a standard deviation of 0.84. The mean overall score was 3.52 with a standard deviation of 0.78 and a mean difference of 0.21.

Likewise, in items 15, the mean score of male parents was 2.08 with a standard deviation of 0.99 while the mean score of female parents was 2.64 with a standard deviation of 1.08. The mean overall score was 2.48 with a standard deviation of 1.06 and a mean difference of -0.56. Again, in items 16, the mean score of male parents had a score of 2.58 with a standard deviation of 1.08 while the mean score of female parents was 2.64 with a standard deviation of 0.95. The mean overall score was 2.63 with a standard deviation of 0.98 and a mean difference of -0.06. Moreover, in items 17, the mean score of male parents was 3.08 with a standard deviation of 1.16 while the mean score of female parents was 2.86 with a standard deviation of 0.76. The mean overall score was 2.93 with a standard deviation of 0.89 and a mean difference of 0.22. Also in items 18, male parents were 2.33 with a standard deviation of 0, 89 while the mean score of female parents was 2.46 with a standard deviation of 0.96. The mean overall score was 2.43 with a standard deviation of 0.93 and a mean difference of -0.13. However, in items19, male parents were 2.50 with a standard deviation of 0.67 while the mean score of female parents was 2.32 with a standard deviation of 0.82. The mean overall score was 2.38 with a standard deviation of 0.77 and a mean difference of 0.18.

Furthermore, in items 20, the mean score of male parents was 2.67 with a standard deviation of 0.65 while the mean score of female parents was 2.89 with a standard deviation of 0.79. The mean overall score was 2.83with a standard deviation of 0.74 and a mean difference of -0.22. More so, in items 21, the mean score of male parents was 1.83 with a standard deviation of 0.72 while the mean score of female parents was 2.14 with a standard deviation of 0.85. The mean overall score was 2.05 with a standard deviation of 0.81 and a mean difference of -0.31. To this end, in items 22, the mean score of male parents was 2.75 with a standard deviation of 0.97 while the mean score of female parents was 2.42 with a standard deviation of 1.03. The mean overall score was 2.53 with a standard deviation of 1.01 and a mean difference of 0.33. The following hypothesis was tested to confirm this result.

Hypothesis: Male and female parents of children with autism do not differ significantly in their human trafficking risk perception.

Table 2: T-test analysis showing difference between in human trafficking risk perception of male and female parents with autism children

GENDER	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.	Dec.	
Male	12	56.16	5.47	38	-1.327	.127		H_o
								not rejected
Female	28	60.25	7.8					

The findings in table 2 show that male and female parents of children with autism do not differ significantly in their human trafficking risk perception, t= -1.327, df=38, sig.127. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that male and female parents of children with autism do not differ significantly in their human trafficking risk perception was not rejected. This implies that male and female parents of children with autism have the same human trafficking risk perception.

IV. Discussion

The objective of this study was to ascertain the human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children in Nigeria. The results revealed that the parents with autism children had high human trafficking risk perception. For instance, they perceived that human trafficking is a dilemma for society at large; that it is a universal problem, and that presently human trafficking exists in different forms. Also, the parents had the perception that, generally, parents should be readily available to every autism child and that they should know enough about human trafficking to save human trafficking victims.

Furthermore, human trafficking was perceived as a looming problem in Nigeria, a misdeed against humanity, and as a method usually used by sex workers to exploit and abuse children. The parents added that autism children may be used for money rituals and that many adults do not have a basic understanding of the different needs of autisms children victims. Besides, the parents noted that autism children victims do not willingly reveal their situation to officials and that they have more fears of being victims of trafficking.

The findings of this study are supported by Estes et al. (2009) finding which stated that parents experience distinctive challenges related to the development of children with autism. Also, the findings are in line with Zulaikha et al., (2018) who found that babies trafficking victims are sold for a huge sum of money. Furthermore, the findings agree with (Fukuda-Parr, 2003) who stated that human trafficking is a serious threat to human security. The findings of this study also supported by Jones et al. (2007) which pointed out that trafficking of humans occurs in other forms other than illegal migration

Also, the gender difference in the human trafficking risk perception was not significant. This report does not support Osakue et al (2002) who maintained that there is a notable distinction in the perception of human trafficking by men and women. Also, Olujide et al (2011), posited that parents of victims both males and females who were involved in a focused group discussion gave different views as to what human trafficking is all about. It has become clear that there is an urgent need for parents with autism children to be always at the alert of their children that is; know the whereabouts of their children, the person they left their children with. This has become highly crucial because of the increasing rate of insecurity trail in Nigeria. In respect to the above, this study was conducted to investigate human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children in Nigeria.

V.   Conclusion

The conclusion reached in this study is that the human trafficking risk perception of parents with autism children is high and that the perception was not different significantly based on gender. This would mean that parents with autism children have a lot to do to prevent the increasing tragic experience of human trafficking among their autism children. Also, there is a need to draw various safety measures which is suitable for autism children. Therefore, all stakeholders, education planners, childhood educators, teachers, governments, and other agencies are urgently called to strategically design implementable policies, programs and activities that will rescue the current autism children victims of human trafficking and also protect this category of children from falling prey into the hands of the traffickers.

Implication for policy development and research in childhood education and counselling

Seeing the conclusion of this study, it is pertinent that policy development and research are carried out in childhood education to investigate the measures of protecting children with autism against human trafficking. Also, intervention policy must be carried out to complement provisions of a well conducive child-friendly environment for children with autism to curtail human trafficking.

Implementation and inclusion of human trafficking strategies in the school curriculum of children with autism will play a vital role in fighting against human trafficking. Furthermore, constant counselling for parents with autism children will help them to take responsibilities more seriously. Moreover, conferences and seminars for parents with autism children and their teachers will serve as tools to create awareness about human trafficking and its tragic implication. Also, conferences and seminars will expose the parents and teachers to the areas that need urgent attention to the protection and safety of the autism children against the risk of human trafficking. Adding to these, the government and parents should take proactive measures against insecurity which may promote human trafficking.

Limitation

The researchers observed that participants were few since some parents with autism children do not want to share their experience. Therefore, further studies with a large sample size are required to further ascertain the findings and generalization. Also, the researchers analyzed only quantitative data, and as such, further studies should consider the qualitative data to further determine the risk perception of parents. Moreover,

the researchers could not analyze the demographic data; therefore, further studies that will show demographic mediation of the data provided in this study are required.

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