

A Discourse on Child Abuse and Family ‘Disconnect’ in Effiong Johnson’s Drama

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ABSTRACT: *The subject of child abuse is a phenomenon that often attracts universal interest. Children all over the world are daily exposed to this social malaise. Cases of children being threatened by violence, trafficking, neglect, kidnapping, sexual harassment, etc. are very rampant. Various factors contribute to the varying degrees of abuses that children often undergo. Such factors include among others economic, social, cultural forms which may emanate either from within or outside the child’s familial environment. The paper identifies poor family relationship as the reason for the incessant cases of abuse that children experience. The inability of the family to stay within a unified circle, and operate under the bond of love, care and respect for its members has often created a non-conducive environment for the effective physical, mental and psychological development of the child. The paper uses qualitative research method in its analysis of Effiong Johnson’s ‘Son of the Land’ and recommends the need for the family to always work towards genuine connectivity, coordinate its members and events surrounding them with utmost commitment. Among the suggested recommendations is that agencies of government should be empowered to enforce laws against perpetrators of child abuse.*

KEYWORDS: *Discourse, Family Disconnect, Child Abuse, Drama*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The term “abuse” is defined as ‘any behavior or action designed to control, intimidate, threaten, or injure another person. It is a misuse of power which uses the bonds of intimacy, trust and dependency to make the victim vulnerable’ (<https://www.herizonhouse.com>). It refers to a situation whereby something is used wrongly, a condition of ill-treatment. Beyond an object being abused, human beings can be subjected to a situation of mistreatment either by physical or verbal approach. It can also be seen as ‘an improper usage or treatment of an entity, often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit. Abuse can come in many forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, or other types of aggression’ (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). The word “child” has been defined as a young human species between the ages of zero to eighteen years. Meriam-Webster defines a child as “a young person especially between infancy and youth. However, Obinaju (1995:43) states that “a child is determined by the law of the country and that the term is usually specified by legal limits”. She also notes that the limit of childhood in Nigeria is taken to be 18 years. Furthermore, the recognized age in the United Nations document on the protection of the right of the child also stands at 18 years. To this end, it appears that it is universally agreed that age 18 should be the limit of childhood although there could be exceptions within this general acceptance (26). Child Abuse has been a major challenge in developing nations and continents, Nigeria and Africa inclusive. Child abuse occurs when a parent, caretaker, or guardian, physically, emotionally, or sexually abuses, neglects or abandons a child. Eyo (2000:198) quotes The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as defining child abuse and neglect as “the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent 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 child’s health or welfare is harmed”. In 1999 the World Health Organization on Child Abuse Prevention drafted the following definition: “Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (8). Child abuse exists in virtually every environment where the child is found, – in the home, school, church, community, and other social environments.

Child abuse has been in existence for many decades now, the mass media are daily providing the society with updates on diverse forms of abuse on children – abandoned babies by mothers (especially of the teenage and adolescent groups), young children who are beaten and generally maltreated by caregivers, teenagers who are subjected to street hawking by adults who are their masters and mistresses, child trafficking

by adults who make a living from selling and buying of children for better economic status, children of school age who are sexually abused by their teachers, uncles, fathers, neighbours and other close relations, adolescents who are forced to abandon their homes due to parental or guardian molestations and deprivations, toddlers and other classes of children who suffer malnutrition and are deprived of parental care, compassion, emotional and physical comfort, foster children who constantly become objects of cruelty to their foster parents, the list is indeed unending (Ebigbo, 95 – 101). According to Iruloh and Ehibudu (2009:179):

‘from the radio and television, we hear and see cases of child neglect, abuse, maltreatment, etc. It has almost become a regular slot on Nigerian Television Authority’s Newline to see victims of rape, mishandling, over beating, assaults, etc. In the little world around us ... we see children up to school age not being enrolled in school, a mother locking her little child up while going out, sick children not being given adequate medical attention, etc’.

In the course of this essay such terms as child maltreatment, child neglect and abuse will be used to describe varying degrees of ill-treatment on the child. Child maltreatment according to Marsh and Wolfe” is a generic term that refers to four primary acts: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Maltreatment can take many forms including acts experienced by the majority of children, such as corporal punishment, sibling violence, and peer assault, as well as acts experienced by a significant minority, such as physical abuse” (2005:404). Child neglect on the other hand according to Polansky (as cited in Iruloh and Ehibudu 2009:180) is “a type of maltreatment that refers to the failure to provide needed age-appropriate care, such as shelter, food, clothing, education, supervision, medical care and other basic necessities needed for development of physical, intellectual and emotional capacities”. Marsh and Wolfe (2005:407) state that “child maltreatment is among the worst and most intrusive forms of stress. It impinges on the child’s daily life, may be on-going and unpredictable, and is often the result of actions or inactions of people the child is supposed to trust and depend on”.

Child abuse is an act that describes the flagrant violation of the right of the child as stipulated in the African Union (AU) Charter on the rights and welfare of the child.

In his reference to Ivan-Smiths, Roberts (2004:240) argues that:

‘The convention on the Rights of the child Treaty spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere-without discrimination – have: the right to survival, the right to develop their fullest potential, the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life’.

Beyond this, it is the neglect on the part of whoever is engaging in child abuse to recognize the natural value of the child as ordained by the sovereign creator – God. It is a devastating social problem which millions of children face every single day. According to Marsh and Wolfe (2005:404), “child abuse and neglect have considerable psychological importance because they occur within ongoing relationships that are expected to be protective, supportive, and nurturing”.

The daily struggle for survival and material gains resulting from limited or no resources for the maintenance of health and physical efficiency presents a picture of poverty – stricken people that the average Nigerians are tagged with. Often, any kind of strategy is embarked upon by families to effect a positive change on their socio-economic status. One of such strategies is sending or selling the child out to serve as a house-help to other families. Cases abound where such young children and youths sent to serve as maids and house-boys are forced by their slave masters to go for street hawking-selling food, clothing and general merchandize. This situation often exposes them to damaging and rugged lifestyle (Ebigbo, 96 – 100). However, in very recent times, government has developed very unprecedented interest in cases of child abuse, maltreatment, neglect, etc. and has abolished these practices. As a way of curbing the trend, free education has been introduced especially at the primary and post primary levels (as it is the case in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria), citizens are also expected to report cases of any kind of abuse of children to relevant government agencies. This new development notwithstanding, people are still culpable of this offence. For instance, the media still report cases of child trafficking and people still travel to local communities to hire house helps. The International Labour Organization submits that children are mostly placed in marginal positions within other families. The essence of this practice is to explicit children’s labour both within and outside the home (UNICEF, 50). Children in domestic servitude are invisible labourers, they work in the home, away from public view. Their life and labour conditions are in the hands of their employers. They are paid little or nothing, over and above food and shelter. They are subject to the beck and call of all family members, thus, they become full- time maid and their education terminated (ILO, 12, 20 and 51). Children who are exposed to domestic servitude are often at risk of physical and psychological abuse. They may be forced to perform chores that supersede their age and physical strength most times, with an empty stomach or malnourished foods (ILO, 51). What about the case of the malnourished children of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) especially in the Northern part of Nigeria? This is a clear situation of child abuse.

Many factors are responsible for the various forms of abuses children and youths are exposed to. Some of these factors are:

- a. Sociological: This relates to the background and the society within which the family operates. The environmental and socio-economic condition have the tendency to expose children and youths to abuse. Corby (2000:146-150) observes that when environmental conditions are not favourable to the family, incidence of abuse are likely to be higher.
- b. Socio-cultural: This has to do with the "general culturally determined permissive attitude towards the use of measure of physical force in the care-taker-child interaction and the related absence of clear-cut legal prohibitions and sanctions against this particular form of interpersonal violence" (Gill 1970: 135). In other words, Gill identifies the culture of a people as giving parents and caregivers the right to expose children to abuse.
- c. Socio-psychological factor: This mostly relates to how a family functions or dysfunctions which produces subsequent negative or positive effects on its members. It is believed that family problem is often taken out on the child, making the child a direct receiver of the impact of family malfunctions. In this way, the child becomes an endangered species in the home. According to Gill (1970:135), "disturbed interfamily relationship, involving conflicts between spouses and/or rejection of individual children often result in abuse of the child. Akpan and Inyang (2000:34) agree that ... "family crisis may cause drastic changes in living condition or financial status. Parents may have limited food, money and many children ... Loss of job, underemployment by either or both parents, inadequate income, inadequate housing ... are sources of child abuse".

Culture and religion also contribute their measure toward the encouragement of child abuse. Cultures such as the Hausa cultural practice which encourages early girl-child marriage exposes the girl child to under-aged sexual experiences, physical and verbal abuse by partners. In their reference to Ebigbo, Akpan and Inyang (2000:32) cite the Muslim Communities of Northern Nigeria as propagating child abuse issues through their early marriage custom. According to them:

... young girls are made to marry very early in life to avoid premarital pregnancy. Also young girls are used in street trading to expose them to suitors. These girls who marry prematurely also become mothers prematurely. As they are physically immature for the task of childbearing, many of them often end up with the scourge of VVF and consequent abandonment by their husbands and other relations".

According to UNICEF (200:43-45), adults' roles such as marriage pose injurious effects on children's physical and mental being. Yearly, millions of under 18 girls are forced into early marriages because it is a part of their tradition, religion or because of poverty. Being married they are expected to assume wifely roles which include sex, childbearing and other household duties expected of a wife. Erikson (1963:52) also observes that "at times, a family gives away a daughter to a man in place of money owed. In many families, if the head of the family as a debtor cannot pay back to his creditors, he is free to use any of his daughters to pay off his debt. Also, if a member of a family has been treated of any disease by a traditional healer, and on recovery, he cannot meet the demands of the healer, he uses one of his daughters to pay off whatever bill he has incurred. There is also the aspect of primitive cultural customs and traditions such as circumcision – especially of the girl-child genitals and forceful initiation of children into witchcraft or other anti-social groups.

Politically, child abuse can be seen in the aspect of kidnapping of children and their subsequent torture and manhandling by terrorist groups. This kidnapping is often motivated by socio-political conflicts. Kidnappers often hope to settle their scores with their opponents by abducting their opponent's innocent children. Many other situations occur in the society that often expose children to abuse.

The Child and the Family

According to On-line Encyclopedia Britannica, family is a 'group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouse, parents, children, and siblings' -<https://www.britannica.com>(retrieved 01/12/2018).

The child is a member of the family, and the family is a very important social institution whose role in the upbringing and development of the child cannot be ignored. According to Essa (1999:55), the family systems theory "provides a useful approach to understanding the family as an ever-developing and changing social unit in which members constantly have to accommodate and adapt to each other's demands as well as to demand from outside the family". The influence of family members on each other therefore becomes reciprocal. In his reference to Davies, Santruck (2005:460), observes that "as a social system, the family can be thought of as a constellation of sub-systems defined in terms of generation, gender, and role". The family as an institution functions as a propagator and transmitter of social values of a given society. However, very unfortunately the family has failed in its responsibilities and rather, seems to promote societal degeneration because of its inability to discharge its functions and take charge of the activities of its members effectively.

The child, by reason of his position in the family is entitled to welfare and social integration. He is also entitled to “protection and survival rights” (Nwosu, 2006: 32) which subsume his entitlements, privileges and obligations as stated by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, natural justice, fair play and the laws of the land. Rather than threaten the actualization of these rights the family was expected to “guarantee the enforcement, realization and enjoyment of these rights by the children” (Nwosu, 2006: 32).

Writing on the subject of child labour, Singh (2011:27) states emphatically that:

... no nation, community or household can expect to achieve sustainable human development if it tolerates child labour, if it neglects the development of its human resources and if it squanders its most valuable resources, namely the potential capabilities embodied in its children. Child labour is not only morally unacceptable, illegal and an affront to human dignity, it is also extremely poor economics ... It is a violation of human rights, so fundamental that it must be outlawed without compromise.

As a part of the social system, the family was expected to possess a certain degree of ‘fit, integration and harmony “with the society through cultural education that demonstrate values and social norms to the effect of producing a well-groomed and coordinated personality” (Haralambos and Heald 1989:330). According to them, “unless culture is internalized, society would cease to exist since without shared norms and values, social life would not be possible. “Culture as observed by them is not just learned or acquired but internalized as a part of the personality structure” (332). This therefore implies that the child’s personality is often molded in terms of the central values of his culture in such a way that they become part and parcel of him. The family of course is the only place where this cultural ethos that help form and define the child’s personality can be learned. Santruck (2001:460), states that “family development does not occur in a social vacuum. It is rather affected by important socio-cultural and historical influences”. By its very nature, and structure, the family is a kind of factory which major duty is to produce human personalities who will eventually depend on it for “warmth, security and mutual support. The overall development of the child – the physical, social, moral, mental, intellectual and spiritual depends on the interest the parents have in the child and what level of commitment and investment they are willing to make towards him. However, most families have exhibited little or no serious interest in the welfare of their children, as well as failing to present parents who live as models and good examples for their children to emulate, a situation which often results in children and youth seeking for help outside the home. This situation more often than not expose these young ones to all kinds of antisocial behaviour

The family therefore is guilty of being responsible for the diverse forms of unpleasant experiences children have. Marsh and Wolfe (2005:404), opine that:

... family violence occurs in numerous forms, from mild acts of frightening or yelling at children, to severe acts of assaulting them with fists and weapons. Moreover, violence and abuse wax and wane in a cyclical manner that creates tension, uncertainty, and fear in children, forcing them to cope with harsh realities and fearful demands.

Children can also become exploited as a result of the poor socio-economic conditions of the family that compel them to be involved in forced labour, sex, and other kinds of immoral and corrupt practices. Poverty, cultural attitudes and all kinds of discrimination against these human species have contributed immensely to the prevalence of child abuse in our society. Quoting the report of the American Psychological Association in 1996, Marsh and Wolfe (2005:405), argue that because children are dependent on the people who harm or neglect them, they face other paradoxical dilemmas as well “the victim wants to stop the violence but also longs to belong to a family. Loyalty and strong emotional ties to the abuser are powerful opponents to the victim’s desire to be safe and protected”. A look at the play in focus shows that the inability of parents to take responsibility of their children can bring unexpected and unpleasant outcome as it is the case in ‘Son of the Land’

Synopsis of the play

The play, *Son of the Land* by Effiong Johnson is an analysis of the experiences of Ekpema in the household of Usua and Ibom. First, Usua, Ekpema’s foster father is in a rift with Ekpema over Ekpema’s disobedience to his instructions. He expresses his unwillingness to continue accommodating Ekpema in his house seeing that he is ‘another man’s son’. According to Usua, he has been exposed to unpleasant experiences “rearing somebody else’s son for twenty years”. Usua confesses that he only admitted to the paternity of Ekpema because he needed to gain Ekpema’s mother’s hand in marriage. However, twenty years after the death of Nneka (Ekpema’s mother), Usua begins to exhibit hatred and bitterness towards Ekpema. Because of this situation, Ekpema embarks on a search for his true identity. In the midst of Ekpema’s confusion, and quest for his identity, Ibom appears and claims to be Ekpema’s father. When finally Ibom succeeds in taking Ekpema away from Usua, attempts by the village council to summon and discipline Ibom are unsuccessful. However, the story reveals that Nneka (Ekpema’s mother) was pregnant for Ibom, but because she loved and preferred

Usua to Ibom, she collaborated with Usua and lied to the village council when summoned claiming that Usua was the true father of her unborn child.

While in Ibom's house, Ekpema wants to choose stockfish trading as a business career, but Ibom would not have his son trade on the same commodity that his enemy, Usua traded on, because according to him, that is what attracted Nneka to Usua. However, Ekpema, is uncomfortable with Ibom's position on the subject, and so is bent on pursuing his interest. This quest to satisfy his business urge perhaps, is what leads him into searching for, and taking money from Ibom's sacred raffia bag that also leads to the breaking of the ancient skull. This action attracts Ibom's unquenchable anger and leads to Ekpema's mental derangement, rejection and ejection from Ibom's house. With this new development therefore, Ekpema loses everything – his paternity, his sanity and good life.

Theme of Child Abuse in the Play

Literary works are socially conditioned to provoke change and the needed transformation in the society. The playwright's ability to improve the living conditions of the society demands the creation of dramatic situations that will provide a climate of readiness for change to happen – a change of all backward social behaviour. This is exactly what Johnson has done using his play *Son of the Land*.

In the play, we see Usua constantly spitting out curses and demeaning words at Ekpema. He likens Ekpema to a dog and uses all kinds of humiliating verbal attacks on him. In situation one, the stage direction reveals:

... a plate and a cup crash on the ground and Ekpema dashes out from the USL with a morsel of garri still in hand. Usua charges after him. Ekpema runs to the door DL. Usua flings a shoe at him. He ducks, opens the door and runs out (p.1).

Immediately after the above – described action, Usua's verbal outburst goes thus:

Go! Run! Fly! Nine days are for the thief. The bird that flies in the air will someday perch on the ground. Run, the God above will surely punish you ... (p.1).

Usua's abuse and ill-treatment of Ekpema are also reflected in the dialogue below:

Usua: Tell that creature, if you know him that he should not step into this house again! ... since both of us have now become equal, he should leave my house before one of us kills the other. ... Tell him if he values his life, he should avoid me and this house like a plague, because I will not hesitate in using this matchet any time he misses his way to this place. Bastard thing! (p.12).

Ekpema suffers both physical and verbal abuse from Usua simply because he is not his biological child. Marsh and Wolfe (2005:409), see this form of abuse as "multiple acts of aggression that include punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or otherwise physically harming the child". The result of this constant abuse is Ekpema's loss of dignity and self-worth. According to Davidoff (quoted in Akpan and Inyang 200:33) "an abused child usually shows indiscriminate or superficial affection for strangers. He may generally refuse to comply with parents' instructions until the parent raises his/her voice. Most of them are seen to be exceptionally quite or overrating eager to obey. As a way of avoiding further abuse, they maintain low profile and avoid being noticed by the abuser. ... on the other hand, an abused child often exhibits aggressive tendencies, and attention getting devices. In the play Ekpema describes his reaction towards Usua's abusive attitude thus:

.... I started to be very stubborn only recently. I was forced into that. I had to become strong-headed as a last resort to force his mouth open for me to know the truth ... (p.11).

In every child, the loss of self-esteem often leads to violent and rebellious attitude towards the nearest people to him. According to Ormrod (2003:63), "children whose parents use harsh disciplinary methods can be defiant, explosive and unpredictable; those from exceptionally abusive homes tend to have emotional difficulties and low self-esteem and can be oppositional and aggressive". This is supposedly the child's way of creating security for his emotions and defending himself from further attacks. The manifestation of radical traits in an abused child often translates to the affected child becoming a menace and terror to the society in future. Any sign of insecurity and threat to life and personality is often very devastating and can send the victim away from home into the devouring hands of bad companies and truants. In situation one of the play, Ekpema says:

I Again, he says:

... the man I live with doesn't have any am sure you would have felt the same way if the man you regarded as your father aimed at killing you every day, when a little mistake on your part got him offended. I am sure you would wonder whether you were really his son if he always cursed you and called you "child of doom, son of the oil bean tree" and other horrible names ... (p. 6 – 7).

The above expression is a typical example of the level of disillusionment that Ekpema is exposed to as a result of abuse. Marsh and Wolfe (2005:412), classify such as “repeated acts of omissions by the parents or caregivers that have caused, or could cause serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders” as emotional abuse. According to them, this form of abuse also includes verbal threats and put-downs, ... as well as habitual scape-goating, belittling and name-calling”. In sharp reaction to Koko’s comment that Usua is his father, Ekpema says:

Please don’t make me sad Koko. What is a father? When you say that somebody is a father, it should mean that he has children who enjoy him, children whom the father cater for, cares for them, have their needs in his mind, helps and watches them grow up to become adults. But when a man always attempts to kill and to destroy some other person, who probably, accidentally happens to live with him, when he is not interested at all in your wellbeing and doesn’t even care about your going to school, then he is not a father (p’7 – 8).

The above scenario is diametrically opposed to the submissions of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child which one clearly states that in recognition of the fact that for the full and harmonious development of the child’s personality, he should be raised up in “a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (Olanmi, 2007:54). The Charter also states that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in the society “and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity” (Olanmi,2007: 54). Again, the play further reveals Usua’s maltreatment of Ekpema in Udo’s dialogue below:

Udo:What pain, Usua? Does this boy cost you half of what your other children have cost you? Does he eat more than all of them? Even if he ate more than others in the house, doesn’t he do the bulk of the work in this house? I have seen what this boy does in this house that few times I have come in here. He is the one that goes to the market, the farm, feeds the goats, washes all the dirty clothes in the house and does all the cooking. Even your daughters there, do practically nothing in this house. They’re always busy plaiting their hair, changing clothes as they like because they have got a free “washman” in the house. Tell me, what pain has this boy caused you that is so unbearable to the extent that you disown him and threw him out of the house? (p.33).

Comparing one child with another in the family or showing favoritism and preference for one above the other for whatever reason as described above, is detrimental to the development of the affected child. According to Marsh and Wolfe(2005:408), “the incidents of maltreatment that affect children’s health and wellbeing involves abuse and neglect by adults”. The immediate outcome of this situation is anger, resentment, discouragement and feeling of inferiority. No two children are the same, they could exhibit differences in academic ability, intelligence, physical appearance, etc. and these characteristic traits make them unique personalities with definite identities and demand that they be accepted for what and who they are.

The family is also notable in the aspect of creation of social control using an elaborate system of law and order. Though often slated to instill discipline, laws and order have a way of creating clashes within the family circle, especially when violated. This is typical of the case between Ekpema and Ibom – Ekpema dares to open Ibom’s mysterious raffia bag, takes some naira notes and mistakenly splits the human skull in it to pieces. The result is the spiritual and physical attack on Ekpema that lead to his mental derangement.

Though family laws are of this nature are often set by parents to create a system governed by discipline and orderliness, the children often view it as an attempt to impale their identity and hence, often tend to resist such a system and the result of such resistance is often conflict, chaos, and total disintegration of the family unit. By the creation of laws the atmosphere is not set for conditions that promote free “assumption of identity”. In the play, Ibom is guilty of setting laws that lead to the final destruction of Ekpema, because Ibom consulted an herbalist and brought a sacred bag containing an ancient skull that was not to be touched or broken in order not to attract doom, Ibom was indirectly setting limits on the family members thereby contravening the laws of their natural inclination to interact freely with things and people within the household. The stage description and dialogue below speak of the effect of Ekpema’s violation of the law.

... light gently comes on the scene again. The door DSL opens. Ibom enters, hits his right toe on the ground and immediately looks at the bag on the window. ... removes the bag from the window gently. He examines the contents.

Ibom:I used them two nights ago. ... Did I leave these things like this? (He puts his hand into the bag, but he immediately removes it shocked). Uko Abasi! What is this? What happened? (He drops the bag and folds himself in shock) Chei! It happened as he said it would, forty years ago, Doom! Doom! My ancient skull broken into two? ... Two pieces, he said, was madness, and from three, death ...

In the play, Obot accuses Ibom of being responsible for Ekpema’s misbehavior.

Ibom: ... if I die now, I shall be glad without leaving behind a thief to prolong my name (p.69).

Obot: Only few people have been born thieves in this world. The majority of others have been forced to become thieves ... (p.69).

Ibom:Forced?

Obot:Why not? When a child has been denied everything he ever wanted. When a man has no opportunity to have his needs met or when the world refuses to give love to the lonely hearted, stealing provides one source of comfort and survival. Look for your son. It is six months now since he was dragged out of this house (p.69).

The above statement is an indictment on Ibom, and by extension, parenthood. Obviously, Ibom has failed in his responsibilities as a father thereby exposing his son to destruction. It is an indication that neglect of social responsibility by parents to their children will always produce an adverse effect on the children. When the family fails to provide adequate security to its members the effect will be felt not just by the children, but also by the society. The societal relationship between the child and his or her parent is vital in determining the level of security that a child could have. Schultz and Schultz (2005:155), state that "a child's security depends entirely on how the parents treat the child. The major way parents weaken or prevent security is by displaying a lack of warmth and affection for the child". Schultz and Schultz (2005:156) go further to note that "parents can act in various ways to undermine their child's security and thereby induce hostility. These parental behaviors include obvious preference for a sibling, unfair punishment, erratic behaviour, promise not kept, ridicule, humiliation, and isolation of the child from peers". This situation is typical of Ekpema's experiences in the play as captured in the following dialogue:

Ekpema:No! let's face it, Koko, I am more of a slave here than a child. All the difficult tasks in the house are given to me. All the dirty things are packed to me to clean up. You can see a big difference between his true children and myself in everything. The clothes they wear, the love they receive from him and so on. But not so with me. Sometimes I wonder whether it is because I had a different mother ... (p.9).

The economic and social insecurity that Ekpema is exposed to in the play, is as a result of the fall out in family relationship which has automatically led to his becoming a nuisance and a societal reproach. Discipline produces security that draws the limit on behaviour. Security can be attained by a child through quality discipline from parents and guardians, and this in turn saves parents from anguish emanating from children's misdemeanors.

The Concept of Family Disconnect

The term disconnect is defined by Merriam-Webster to mean "to separate (something) from something else, to break a connection between two or more things ... to sever the connection of or between ... a break in connection, consistency, or agreement" (web dictionary). Wikipedia online dictionary defines the term disconnect to mean a "break or interruption in an existing connection, continuum, or process; ... a lack of connection or accord; a mismatch ... The deliberate severing of ties with family, friends, etc. (retrieved 14/09/16).

Effect of Family Disconnect on the Society

In the context of the above definitions this work is accessing the subject of family breakup or disunity that often produces some negative and discomfoting experiences for members of the family, because it is generally believed that peace in the society depends on peace in the family (Marsh and Wolfe, 2005: 403), the family has a great deal of responsibility within its borders to make its members dwell peaceably and work towards the common goal of all. Family disconnect therefore, is a breach in the unity of the family. Once the family fails to respond to and discharge its responsibilities effectively, unfriendly atmosphere is set for unpleasant experiences to occur. This is the case in the play, *Son of the Land*, because Usua and Nneka agreed to tell a lie and hide the true paternity of Ekpema, the current domestic contention between Ekpema and Usua becomes an unavoidable outcome. This break in the accustomed friendly relations that existed between Ekpema and the other members of Usua's household is the reason for the traumatic experiences that Ekpema is being exposed to in the play. From the moment Usua and Nneka decided to play pranks with the pregnancy, they had violated the law of unity and harmony and as such created a vacuum in life. Marsh and Wolfe (2005:416), assert that "Episodes of child abuse and neglect, whether chronic or sporadic, can disrupt the important process of attachment and interfere with children's ability to seek comfort and to regulate their own physiological and emotional process. As a result, maltreated children are more likely than well- treated children to show an absence of an organized attachment".

Sociologists have over the years assessed the role of the family in reforming or deforming the society. By their assessment and submission, the family is regarded as the pillar upon which the society's structure stands, by implication the human society cannot be said to function effectively without the family. Various issues arise within the family setup that result in a dysfunctionality in the system that in turn hamper the effectiveness of the society. According to Santruck (2001:460), family changes may be as a result of such factors like "great upheaval in a nation, such as war, famine, or mass immigration. Or they may be due to transitions in ways of life (460). Many a times quarrels emerge in the family that sometimes create violent

reactions between the husband, the wife and children. Oftentimes, the strain created by emotional disturbance of this nature becomes too enormous for the members of the nuclear family which places a demand on the extended family's intervention, and sometimes escalates to the larger society. Quoting Leach, Haralambos and Heald (1980:335) observe that:

Thrown back almost entirely on its own resources, the nuclear family becomes like an overloaded electrical circuit. The demands made upon it are too great and fuses blow. In their isolation, family members expect and demand too much from each other. The result is conflict.

The inability of the family to stay coordinated and united often breed disadvantages which often rob off on the society very terribly. One of such effects is that sometimes children from such families are denied the right to total education. Some of them may become school dropouts or stark illiterates who latter pose a terrible distraction to the peace of the society. The presence of all forms of banditry – armed robbery, pick pocketing, thieves, Advanced Fee Fraudsters (Popularly called 419), etc. can be said to be, to a large extent an offshoot of failed families. Again, the following dialogue in the play reveals Ekpema's experiences:

Ekpema:..., the man I live with doesn't have any consideration for me at all. He doesn't plan anything for me except, maybe, death. We were in the same class, Koko. I was not so terribly bad at school; I never repeated any class throughout the six years in the primary school. And in the First School Leaving Certificate Examinations I passed well. I told my father ... well, so I thought then ... that I wanted to go to the secondary school but he wouldn't even give me money for the entrance examination (p.8).

Koko:But you took the examination. You wrote the examination with us ... (p.8).

Ekpema:Yes, I took the examination. I will tell you how I managed to do that, I stole some money from the house. I thought he would be encouraged to ask me to go to school if I passed that entrance examination ... when the results came out, I passed, and I was given a good school not very far away from home. I even preferred to be a day student just to win some favour from him, but he would never spend his kobo on me because I am a male dog according to him ... (p.9).

Again, lack of good moral foundation exposes children and youths to all kinds of occultic practices making them to become menace to the society. As earlier pointed out, cultural and traditional demands force young teenage girls into early marriage who, lacking good experience may not be able to impart quality training – formally and informally (especially in situations where one partner abandons responsibilities to the other partner alone). The implication of this is indiscipline, rebellion, disorderliness and truancy in the home and society. Marsh and Wolfe (2005:404), note that “children from abusive and neglectful families grow up in environments that fail to provide consistent and appropriate opportunities that guide their development; instead, these children are placed in jeopardy of physical and emotional harm” ..., so child victims may feel torn between a sense of belonging and a sense of fear and apprehension”. The effect of this maltreatment is summarized by Santruck (2001:467) thus: “maltreated children appear to be poorly equipped to develop successful peer relations, due to their aggressiveness, avoidance and aberrant responses to both distress and positive approaches from peers”.

This situation only further hampers the development of the child's potential and his possible usefulness to society. Santruck (2001:13) affirms that children who do not reach their potential, who are unable to contribute effectively to society and who do not take their place as productive adults diminish the power of society's future”.

Again, unresolved family issues can deteriorate into accusation and all kinds of names calling (for instance children and parents accusing one another of witchcraftcy). This situation more often than not lead to abandonment, segregation of victims, discrimination and social stigmatization forcing the affected person to be withdrawn, become depressed lose his self esteem and dignity and therefore become unwilling or incapable of participating in social issues to make necessary contributions toward the development of such a society. Ormrod observes that children who do not become closely attached to a parent or some other individual early in life can be immature, dependent, unpopular, and prone to disruptive and aggressive behaviours later on ... (62). According to Eyo (2000:202)“an abused child cannot have proper social development, because an emotionally deprived or psychologically neglected child often suffers from frustration which creates heightened emotion leading to anti-social tendencies, deviant acts, and withdrawal syndrome which hamper his social and personality development”.

II. RECOMMENDATION

1. It is the hope of this study that with the ideas so far expressed, communities and traditional leaders, parents and guardians will be educated on why they should let go of all forms of prejudices against the child and ultimately compel them to change those norms and cultural practices that overtly or covertly abuse the right of the child.

2. As the bedrock of children upbringing the family should strive to stay together and discharge the responsibilities expected of them to one another – children to parents and parents to children.
3. It is needful that the government enforces laws governing the rights of the child as stipulated in the United Nation's Charter.
4. To effect discipline in children, parents should avoid bullying, names calling, or making crappy remarks which only help to humiliate the children and destroy their budding self-esteem.

III. CONCLUSION

The paper has been assessing the subject of child abuse in Effiong Johnson's play, *Son of the Land*, and has established that child abuse is an attack on the personality of the child that makes the child lose his integrity and identity as an important member of the family and society. The paper attributes a greater percentage of child abuse cases to family malfunctions – the failure of the family in the effective discharge of its responsibilities. It exposes the child to physical and psychological repression and rejection. Being an infringement on the rights of the child, child abuse presents the adult (or parents) as a tyrant who vigorously fights to debase the integrity of the child through physical or verbal approach or a combination of both. Santruck (2001:465) registers his displeasure with parents who abuse their children thus:

Child abuse is such a disturbing circumstance that many people have difficulty understanding or sympathizing with parents who abuse or neglect their children. Our response is often outrage and anger directed at the parent. This outrage focuses our attention on parents as bad, sick, monstrous, sadistic individual who cause their children to suffer.

Using Effiong Johnson's play as a paradigm therefore, the study has shown how much agonies and pains children living under abusive conditions are exposed to. On this note, this paper concludes that a child would turn out just fine if the parents loved and showed that love to the child. And through conscious, continuous and conscientious training, the child also learns to love other people around him. Through this training the child learns such traits as respect for parents and other members of the family, exposure to acceptable societal values, goal-setting, godly obedience, submission to authority, self-discipline and hard-work.

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