

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND PERCEPTION OF CHILD ABUSE AMONG THE PEOPLE OF TALENSIS IN THE TALENSI DISTRICT

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the socio-cultural practices and beliefs, assess, describe and analyze the extent to which perceptions have influenced child abuse among the people of Talensi. The study combined qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. The methods include interviews, focus group discussion. Also simple random sampling technique, purposive sampling technique were used in different stages of the sampling procedure. A sample size of 150 was used for the study. The study ascertains that socio-cultural beliefs, practices and perception influence child abuse. The preference or putting premium on the boy child's education to that of the girl child, Betrothing or giving the girl child in marriage, Children not giving meat and or egg, Not involving children in decisions affecting their lives, Corporal punishment and beating of children. Using of children as labour on farms, markets and earning income and Girl child sexually abused more than boys are socio-cultural beliefs, practices and perceptions that abuse the child directly and indirectly. The study concluded that boy child education was preferred more than girl child education, the girl child is betrothed in early marriage, the girl child is sexually abused, using children as labour etc. All these forms of child abuse to a large extent are been caused by the traditional beliefs and practices people follow and believe in it. From the study these form of child abuse is as a result of the cultural or traditional practices been ahead to among the people of Talensi. The study recommends public awareness campaigns and community engagement process to support positive, responsible parenting and encourage social and behavior change (perception) so that children can grow up in safe homes.

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Beliefs, practices, Perceptions, Child Abuse

Introduction

The protection of children from violence, including harmful practices, is enshrined in international human rights standards adopted by the international community. However, in stark contradiction to this ethical and legal imperative, harmful practices remain pervasive and socially condoned, continuing to severely hamper the enjoyment of children's rights (UNICEF, 2021). The vast majority of national governments worldwide have recognized their responsibilities toward safeguarding and promoting children's rights. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by nearly all countries, calls for protection from child rights violations, equal treatment for all children, and access to essential services such as nutrition, health, and education. It also stipulates that governments have a duty to support caregivers in providing quality care to their children: "States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children" (UNCRC, 1989, as cited in UNICEF, 2019).

Yet every week, reports from across the globe highlight the dramatic and horrific stories of countless numbers of girls and boys who fall victim to harmful practices, including early marriage, neglect, violence, exploitation, child abuse, child labour, and streetism. Many have been abandoned or separated from their homes and families. These stories often end in despair, underscoring the long-term damage these practices inflict on children's well-being and future prospects (UNHCR, 2020; Save the Children, 2019).

In Africa, the protection of children from harmful practices has long been addressed in platforms such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). However, evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) shows that many children continue to experience violations of their rights to adequate care. Recent data suggest that the percentage of children living without parental care ranges widely across countries, with significant numbers growing due to conflict, poverty, and migration (UNICEF, 2022). While some of these children receive care from grandparents or extended family, many others experience poor living conditions, especially when placed with distant relatives or institutional settings, increasing their vulnerability to abuse,

neglect, and exploitation (Better Care Network, 2018). The loss of parental care can severely impact children's education, emotional well-being, health, and development. Studies highlight that children outside of adequate family environments often suffer from discrimination and face diminished opportunities for social and personal growth (World Vision, 2019).

The problem of child abuse is widespread in many developing countries, and Ghana is no exception. Despite the Ghanaian government's ongoing efforts to combat the exploitation of children, Ghana continues to be a source, transit, and destination point for child trafficking, various forms of child labour, and other egregious abuses against children (UNICEF Ghana, 2020). This deeply entrenched problem, while profitable for a few, significantly harms the social fabric and impedes meaningful national development (GSS, 2021).

According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, children under 15 years constitute about 35.4% of Ghana's total population, underscoring the immense responsibility on the part of the government to safeguard children's rights and to intensify efforts against child abuse (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). Although Ghana ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990, violence, neglect, and abuse against children remain prevalent across the country. A growing number of children live and work on the streets, particularly in major cities like Accra and Kumasi, exposing them to extreme risks including exploitation, trafficking, and physical and psychological abuse (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection [MoGCSP], 2019).

Cultural norms and social beliefs continue to hinder the recognition of children's basic rights. Some harmful practices are culturally accepted, while others persist due to gender-based discrimination, misconceptions, and deeply rooted social stigmas. Particularly vulnerable are marginalized children, such as those with disabilities, children with albinism, children accused of witchcraft, and those from low-income or stigmatized communities. These children are disproportionately subjected to severe forms of violence and abuse (UN Human Rights Council, 2019).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse as all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to a

child's health, development, or dignity (WHO, 2020). The most essential characteristic of child abuse is its damaging effect on the child's overall well-being.

Child abuse is often closely linked with socio-economic conditions such as poverty and unemployment. Research shows that the prevalence of child maltreatment tends to be higher in communities with larger populations of low-income households and elevated unemployment levels (UNICEF, 2019). In Ghana, the Upper East Region continues to report high rates of working children, many of whom are subjected to harsh treatment, including physical punishment while on the job (GSS & ILO, 2018). Such incidents reflect deeply embedded beliefs and perceptions about child-rearing and discipline, particularly among caregivers. Consequently, understanding the beliefs and perceptions of caregivers in this region is essential for developing targeted interventions to reduce child abuse and promote children's rights.

Northern Ghana continues to be a significant region of concern in the national discourse on child abuse and maltreatment. According to the Ghana Statistical Service, more than half of children aged 5–17 in the Upper East (54.7%) and Upper West (53.8%) regions are involved in economic activities—figures that starkly contrast with the much lower rate of 7.2% in Greater Accra (GSS & ILO, 2018). A significant number of these working children are unpaid, laboring on family farms or in family-run enterprises. While such involvement was historically considered part of a child's socialization and preparation for adulthood, worsening economic conditions have transformed it into a necessity for many children, who are now compelled to work regularly to support household income. This often forces them to forgo education or juggle school with demanding labor responsibilities (UNICEF Ghana, 2020).

The prevalence of harmful traditional practices further complicates the situation. Despite legal prohibitions, female genital mutilation (FGM) remains practiced in certain areas of northern Ghana. According to the Ghana Health Service (GHS, 2021), the Upper East Region continues to report some of the highest incidences of FGM, which is often perpetuated under the guise of cultural beliefs regarding cleanliness, fidelity, fertility enhancement, and sexual control. The practice is largely driven by traditional norms and community expectations, with many girls undergoing the procedure in early childhood. Alarming, a 2021 report revealed that more than

50% of women subjected to FGM had the procedure performed before their first birthday (GHS, 2021).

Understanding why parents and caregivers subject children to such harmful practices requires a deeper analysis of community worldviews and belief systems. Information processing theory suggests that individuals interpret and respond to social information based on the data available to them and the mental frameworks they use to construct reality. Thus, cultural perceptions shape how caregivers define and respond to child wellbeing—even when their actions result in abuse or harm (UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2019).

The Talensi people of Tengzug, located in the Tong Hills in the Upper East Region, present a compelling context for such inquiry. This community, characterized by rich intangible cultural heritage—ranging from oral traditions and religious rituals to ecological knowledge—provides a case study of how deeply held cultural beliefs can influence practices that may be harmful to children. Despite multiple interventions by government and non-governmental agencies, including UNICEF-funded programs, progress in curbing child abuse remains slow (UNICEF Ghana, 2022).

One of the most alarming statistics in recent years came from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2017–2018), which identified the Upper East Region as having the highest child marriage prevalence in Ghana, at approximately 28%. This figure includes a significant number of girls aged 15–18 entering marriage—often involuntarily—thereby undermining their rights to education, health, and autonomy (GSS, 2018). Such findings emphasize the urgency of addressing not just the symptoms but the root cultural and perceptual causes of child abuse in the region.

This study, therefore, seeks to uncover the underlying cultural beliefs and perceptions that continue to hinder efforts to combat child abuse in the Upper East Region. Its relevance lies in its potential to inform policy development and foster culturally-sensitive interventions. As part of a broader strategy, UNICEF has recommended public awareness campaigns and robust community engagement to promote responsible parenting and shift social norms. These recommendations are grounded in data suggesting that Ghana remains a source, transit route, and destination for child trafficking, with an estimated 50,000 children living and working on the streets and approximately

200,000 children engaged in exploitative and hazardous labor in sectors such as fishing, cocoa, and forestry (UNICEF Ghana, 2021).

In examining the ecology of physical child abuse, recent literature supports the understanding that risk factors for such maltreatment emerge from a complex and interrelated web of social ecological influences. These include macro-level factors such as economic deprivation and cultural norms, meso-level conditions such as community disorganization and neighborhood disadvantage, and micro-level dynamics within the parent–child relationship (Hillis et al., 2017; Mersky, Janczewski, & Topitzes, 2021). Studies continue to emphasize that physical child abuse cannot be attributed to isolated individual behaviors but must be contextualized within broader socioeconomic and environmental settings.

In the context of Ghana, particularly the Upper East Region, several of these ecological risk factors are markedly pronounced. The region consistently ranks among the poorest in the country, with high levels of unemployment, food insecurity, and limited access to quality education (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Such structural disadvantages not only strain family functioning but also heighten parental stress—an established contributor to physical maltreatment. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that extrinsic religious orientations, often focused on compliance with external authority rather than intrinsic moral development, are linked to harsher parenting practices and a greater likelihood of endorsing physical discipline (Asante & Donkoh, 2019).

Given the confluence of these risk factors—economic hardship, low educational attainment, and rigid religious structures—the Upper East Region provides a critical case for examining the ecological determinants of child abuse. Understanding how these macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors intersect to influence parenting behaviors and child welfare outcomes will contribute significantly to the literature and inform culturally relevant prevention strategies. Such knowledge is essential in designing community-based interventions that are not only sensitive to local realities but also address the structural and perceptual roots of abuse.

2. Literature

2.1 Socio-cultural practices, beliefs that causes abuse to children.

Socio-cultural practices are the distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. In other words, traditional cultural practices reflect values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women. These harmful traditional practices include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); forced feeding of women; early marriage; the various taboos or practices which prevent women from controlling their own fertility; nutritional taboos and traditional birth practices; son preference and its implications for the status of the girl child; female infanticide; early pregnancy; and dowry price. Despite their harmful nature and their violation of international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not questioned and take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practicing them (UNICEF-Ghana, 2022). Children are very highly valued, for many reasons. However, poverty (among other things) can result in a child being fostered, usually by a kinswoman. Children are jural minors, and are expected to obey adults in all things. They have always been expected to work, and this is positively regarded by the actors, but some forms of work may amount to abuse (UNFPA, 2018). In Ghana though religion cuts across all culture but traditional values are accepted and lives across communities. Domestic violence occurs everywhere, and although regarded as a private matter, in extreme forms it is certainly frowned upon. Culturally children's suffer issues like child slavery, child laborers, kayayei (porter girls), trokosi; the dedication of children to the service of religious shrines, FGMs, pedophilia and sexual abuse of children, unwanted children and children abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to kin, usually for spiritual reasons (UNFPA, 2018).

Traditionally certain chores have been designated as 'children's work'. Such chores cannot easily be done by adults, or if they can it is considered below their dignity. The herding of livestock in some parts of the Upper East is considered a boy's chore. At the same time, it is recognized that certain tasks are not appropriate to children. Children are exempted from physically demanding work. Culturally hardworking children has always been praised, but everywhere there was a concept of child labour, and if an adult subjects a child to tasks that are too onerous and likely to

tax the child's strength society can be critical of the abusive parent. For example, The Kassena believes that as a child is engaged in any heavy work, it affects the growth of the child. That is, the child will be stunted in growth as a result of the heavy work he or she is subject to. The Kassena therefore calls a child whose growth is stunted as “o wo fuuli”. However, in spite of the work categorization, children should accompany their parent of the same sex to learn how to perform tasks appropriate to their sex through participant observation. Such association also had emotional undertones. Parents have always had a traditional obligation to see to it that their children are brought up properly and groomed for life. The work of children has been considered necessary to the viability of the domestic establishment, and where a person lacked a child it was possible to foster a relative's child and bring up that child as if it were one's own. Generally, a child should be around to run errands for adults and also peddle goods in towns (UNFPA, 2018). Abuse or violence occurs in both subtle and obvious forms, and is perhaps associated with gender attitudes and conjugal expectations. It is not exclusive to the domestic setting, as it also occurs outside it. It reflects power differentials in the domestic setting and in the communities. As a wider category, domestic violence includes violence to minors and children as well as violence to the aged, a phenomenon that is gradually rearing its head in some communities. Certain types of abuse are an issue of perception. What may be seen as abuse from the perspective of the outsider may not be abuse to the person perceived as being abused.

2.2 Perception of socio-cultural practices on the abuse of children.

Extensive research has been conducted on child abuse, particularly regarding its prevalence, causes, and its intersection with social variables such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Sedlak et al., 2017). However, the *perception* of child maltreatment—how abuse is recognized, interpreted, and understood by individuals and communities—remains a significantly underexplored dimension, especially within developing contexts. Perception is a critical factor not only in determining the recognition and reporting of abuse but also in understanding the propensity to perpetrate maltreatment (Kaur & Bhardwaj, 2019). The paucity of research in this area may be attributed to inconsistencies in the legal definitions and cultural interpretations of maltreatment, variation in terminology, and methodological differences across studies (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

Perceptions of abuse are shaped by a range of sociocultural and psychological influences. These include, but are not limited to, cultural norms, religious beliefs, family structures, and societal attitudes toward discipline and child rearing. Understanding how individuals perceive child maltreatment is especially pertinent in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where formal child protection systems may be underdeveloped, and community responses often reflect traditional or informal understandings of child welfare (Aluko & Olaniyi, 2020). Measuring these perceptions can offer valuable insights into both risk and resilience factors associated with childhood maltreatment and can inform contextually relevant interventions.

Perception, broadly defined, is the process through which individuals organize and interpret sensory input to give meaning to their environment. As Cherry (2020) explains, perceptual experiences are not merely passive reflections of reality but are constructed based on prior experiences, expectations, emotions, and cultural backgrounds. The *perceptual set*—the tendency to perceive information in a particular way—depends on three key elements: the characteristics of the perceiver (e.g., beliefs, motivations), the characteristics of the perceived (e.g., the child and the behavior), and the situational context (e.g., cultural norms, legal frameworks). Therefore, to understand perceptions of child abuse in a given setting, these elements must be examined in tandem and grounded in the local sociocultural ecology.

Such an approach is particularly crucial in regions like Ghana's Upper East, where cultural traditions and community norms play a dominant role in defining what is considered acceptable or abusive behavior toward children. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge by exploring how cultural perceptions shape understanding and responses to child maltreatment in such contexts, with implications for both policy and practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design employed for this study is survey particularly the cross sectional survey. The types of research design adopted for a study very much depends on the type of study and problem to be investigated (Creswell, 2014). This study which is therefore investigating the influence of socio-cultural practices and beliefs of the Talensi people on their perception of child abuse finds

the cross sectional survey design appropriate to enable it takes cross sectional views or responses from a wide spectrum of respondents across a many and varied attributes and characteristics (sex, age, experiences, opinions, educational background etc).

It also allows the researcher to use both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather and analyse data especially descriptive statistics. An added advantage is that it is economical and easy to manage even though its outcomes may be questioned with passage of time and changing dynamics of society, science and technology (Badu-Nyarko, 2011).

3.2 Data Sources and Collection

This section covers information on the various data collection techniques that was used for the study. The data collection instruments adopted for gathering the primary data from the field for the study were semi-structured interview schedules and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The semi-structured interview schedule adopted was suitable and appropriate because it affords the study to gather data from both literate and non-literate respondents. It also allows the study to use descriptive statistics to present and analyse the data gathered from the field for easy interpretation and discussions (Twumasi, 2001).

On the other hand, the study used FGDs to gather information to supplement the somewhat practical weaknesses of the semi-structured interview schedules. This is because some people on one on one may not feel free to open up to talk and give information willingly but may do so when in a group discussion. Three focus group discussions, one each from each of the three zones were held. The respective numbers of the focus groups were Central zone nine (9), West zone seven (7), and East zone eleven (11). They were mostly made up of Christians, African traditional leaders, Muslims and heads of households. Discussions were generally on what behaviour and attitude they think was child abuse and why they think so. Other discussions were what cultural practices and beliefs make them think some behaviours people think are child abuse are not child abuse. They were also made to discuss and suggest what Government or NGOs should do to protect the child.

On the part of the focus group discussion the researcher took the leaders role in leading the discussion by asking the questions while a research assistant acting as note taker did recording of the discussions by taking down notes as well as tape recording the discussions with permission sought and granted by the discussants.

Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed using descriptive statistic and narrations to make for easy interpretations and discussions. The primary data gathered from the field were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of tables, frequency counts, percentages, charts and graphs as well as mean scores and standard deviations. The qualitative data were also presented and analysed by narrations. See the next chapter, chapter 4.

4. Empirical Results

Participants Characteristics

Data gather from the field on the sex distribution for respondents reveal that majority of the respondents (80%) were males while females formed the minority (20%). The educational background of the respondents was elicited to determine their level of education and how informed they were about the concept of child abuse. Data gather revealed that over 70% (76%) of the respondents had formal education of a kind; however, 24% of the respondents had no formal education. Marital status of the respondents was sought so as to appreciate the perception of marriage and non-marriage people perception on child abuse. The data suggest that, with significant percentage of the respondents were married (38%), single (24%) and widowed (22%), while (16%) were divorced.

Cultural Practices and Beliefs on Perception of Child Abuse

The study found that majority of the respondents (81%) were in favour of the boy-child while those in favour of the girl-child education were the least (19%) A clear and strong pointer to the fact that, majority of the Talensi people do put premium on the girl-child education and by extension, do not regard the denial and discrimination against the girl-child in favour of the boy-child as an abuse. These responses certainly reflect their beliefs and perceptions with regards to educating the girl-child.

One could therefore conclude that these positions might have or probably be informed and shaped by their geo-social and cultural practices and beliefs as Talensis to a large extent. With regards to the reason why the majority preferred to put more premium on educating the boy child as against

the girl child, they proffered many and varied explanations to back their stands. Some of these include that;

- i. Girls belong to the kitchen
- ii. Girls will marry and will not be at home to take care of parents
- iii. Girls are not serious with education like boys
- iv. Girls will get husbands to marry and need not be educated to look for employment

In view of the reasons given for the unfavourable preference for girl-child education, one can conclude that the influence of beliefs and cultural practices might have shaped their experience and perception with regards to seeing the denial of the girl child education as normal and not an abuse of the child. Since man to the large extent is a product of his environment, so is the effect of the beliefs and cultural practices on issues of what is child abuse or not. What is relevant to changing these stands and shaping attitudes and behavior is education, awareness, conscientisation and exposure particularly on issues bothering on the perception of the capacities and capabilities of the girl child and for that matter women as evidence in the responses. Sadly, these perceptions are rift and pertain or ignore the position of this study or the study is that, there is the need to increase attention and focus and making people de-learn what they hold about women and for that matter the girl child.

Betrothing of the Girl Child

Majority (63%) of the respondents agreed that the practice was not child abuse while (37%) did see or perceive it as child abuse. It therefore still remains that it is not child abuse. With regards to why those who feel that betrothing the girl child or giving her up for marriage even against her will and consent was not child abuse, they advanced the following reasons to buttress their positions. Among these reasons include that; many and varied reasons were given or proffered. That;

- Betrothing the girl child for marriage enables parents who were indebted to restore the family pride by using that to pay or secure resources to pay off the debts for the survival of the family.
- It was also practice to keep family ties between two communities, villages and clans or usually to sustain a continuous royal relationship.

- Betrothing the girl child for marriage was sometimes a last resort of the family to feed the family during famine.

Even though the reasons are not too palatable, they seem to have economic and social touch. This implies that the reasons for some of the Talensi people to hold to betrothing of the girl child as good or acceptable practice is found on social and economic factors. These include the desire of the people to use the girl child to advance their social ego values and pride as well as to abate their economic difficulties. This practice or position of the people can only be borne out of ignorance of the capabilities and the rights of the girl child or shaped largely by the social and cultural practices or the environment.

Denial of A Child Egg and Meat is Child Abuse

The study indicates that majority (53%) agreed that denying the child egg and or meat constitute child abuse while a minority (47%) though significant statistically saw it not to be child abuse. This implies that, a significant percentage of the people of Talensi in the Talensi District still hold that denying the child egg or meat is not child abuse. Reasons advanced by those (47%) people in Talensi support their positions were many and include the following. The most cardinal ones were that;

- When children are given egg, they will become thieves.
- The means of getting egg is not available so it is not good to make them get use to eating egg, that is, one should not start what he or she cannot continue.
- It is in line with the taboo of the Talensis that first born child should not eat fowl meat or egg.

Again from the reasons given leave no doubt that they were shaped and informed by the geosociocultural practices and beliefs of the Talensis. The bad news however, is that a significant percentage of the respondents still hold the view that denying children meat and or egg is ok and not a child abuse. By implication a significant percentage of children in Talen land may still be abused to this effect.

Involvement of Children in Decision Making as Child Abuse

that a significant percentage (41%) acknowledge the need to involve children in decision making while majority (59%) of the respondents held that the child should not be consulted or be involved in taking decisions that affect them directly. This implies that, decisions on issues and interest of the child is decided outside their control by other people on their behalf. Thus, suggesting that the child has no rights to determine freely what is in his or her interest. This thus confirms a disregard of his/her constitutional rights and for that matter evidence of child abuse.

In support of their stand by those (59%) who do not think the child should be involved or consulted on matters that concern him/her, many varied reasons were advanced. These reasons include that;

- i. The child cannot decipher good for him or herself and need not be consulted.
- ii. The child is ignorant of what will be best for him/her.
- iii. Children of that age have no right to accept or reject what parents decide for them.
- iv. Children are not allowed to take part in decision because of tradition.
- v. Children are not allowed to part take in decisions because parents are the ones taking care of them and their needs.

It is clear from the above responses that, the rights of the child is overlooked and by extension abused in the name of he/she is not matured enough, experience enough, have no means of caring for him/herself and above all not in the place of tradition to consult children. These positions and conclusions clearly might have been informed or shaped and for that matter practices reflect the influence of their geo-sociocultural practices and beliefs.

Child Labour as an Abuse of the Child

The study suggest that majority of the respondents (57%) do not see child labour as an abuse while 43% of the Talensi people respondents acknowledged and perceived it as child abuse. These implies that, majority of the respondents do not agree with the United Nation and other International Bodies that the practice is against the child's human right and for that matter abuse of the child. With regards to why these people (57% of respondents) perceive child labour as not child abuse, they advanced the following reasons. That is;

- i. It is a form of training and apprenticeship in learning trades of parents or family that might have been carried down from generation to generation.
- ii. It is a duty or role the child also plays to assist parents for their up-keep.
- iii. It is a form of assisting parent at old age when they cannot work on their own.
- iv. Children are future parents and must learn to work for the maintenance and sustenance of the family.

Clearly, the reasons show that child labour as child abuse is still not held and accepted by many particularly with economic and social reasons. Perhaps punitive and stringent measures need to be employed coupled with education for it to be accepted and complied with. This however may not be easy as they are or may be informed by perceptions borne out their beliefs and cultural practices of the traditional area.

Corporal Punishment or Beating as a Corrective Measure is Child Abuse

The study sought to know from the respondents whether corporal punishment or beating a child as a corrective measure is child abuse or not, so as to find out their perception of corporal punishment as child abuse. Those who felt corporal punishment is child abuse were 47% while the majority 53% of the respondents saw it as proper practice and did not constitute child abuse. It is clear that people still hold to beating as a proper and legitimate, punitive and corrective measure of the child and not as child abuse.

Reasons advanced for these include that;

- a. The beating of children is the correct way of training the child when they go wrong.
- b. Beating up the child is a correct and fastest way for children to learn good lesson.
- c. Beating of children changes their lives for the better.
- d. It serves as reminder to the child due to the pains and marks inflicted on them

From the above reasons, it is obvious the child is treated inhumanly in the name of correcting him or her to, take learning seriously and never to repeat and as a positive punitive measure to scare them from wrong doing.

Child Challenging and Questioning Decisions of Parents as a Right

The study sought information on opinions of the respondents with regards to whether they will support children questioning or challenging decisions and opinions of parents in family discussions so as to determine their perception of the child rights. It is obvious that majority (63%) of the respondents conspicuously are against challenging and questioning decisions of parents by children as a right. This implies that the Talensi people do not think children have right to challenge or question any opinion or any decisions of their parents or elders.

In support of their position that not allowing children the opportunity to questing or challenge decisions of parents or the family in discursions is not child abuse, they put forward the following reasons.

1. Children or young people do not have experience in life enough and hence cannot offer meaningful advice and options.
2. Traditionally and culturally children must not or aught not challenge or questing grown-ups.
3. That children have the tendency and potential to go against the long standing beliefs of their area.

In view of the above reasons one can conclude that it is still difficult to get children accepted to express themselves and defend their interest and right obviously child abuse by way of giving them the opportunity to express their interest and contribute to decisions that directly concerns their lives in the name of tradition and young age. The study sought further to find out from the respondents whether their perception of child abuse was informed by their geo- socio cultural practice and beliefs data gathered from the field from the respondents and presented on the table.

Table 1: In your opinion do you think the child is generally abused by the family with regard to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi District?

No	Assessment	Frequency	%
1	Yes.	98	65.3
2	No.	52	34.7

Source: field work, 2024

Table 2: If yes to question 8, to what extent do you think the child is abused with regards to the following in the table?

No	Assessment	VERY LARGE EXTENT (5)		LARGE EXTENT (4)		NOT CERTAIN (3)		LIMITED EXTENT (2)		VERY LIMITED EXTENT (1)		$\bar{x}$	Sd
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F		F	%		
1	Girl Child Education	38	38.8	23	23.5	11	11.2	14	14.3	12	12.2	3.6	5.0
2	Child Labour	32	32.6	29	29.6	9	9.2	18	18.4	10	10.2	3.6	5.0
3	Betrothing/ Child Marriage	47	48	31	31.6	10	10.2	7	7.1	3	3.1	4.1	5.9
4	Beating of children as corrective measure(physical abuse)	16	16.3	10	10.2	17	17.3	33	33.7	22	22.4	2.6	4.8

5	Support & Care given to children born out of wed log	24	24.5	21	21.4	28	28.6	14	14.3	11	11.2	3.3	4.7
6	Use of girl child as collateral/mortgage for loans of animals(cattle, sheep & goat)	18	18.4	21	21.4	33	33.7	21	21.4	5	5.1	3.3	4.9
7	Sexual abuse	35	35.7	33	33.7	10	10.2	14	14.3	7	7.1	3.8	5.2
8	Accuses Children of witchcraft	18	18.4	21	21.4	27	27.6	25	25.5	9	9.2	3.2	4.8
9	Children with Disability	18	18.4	18	18.4	24	24.5	24	24.5	14	14.3	3.0	4.5
10	Child with albinos	18	18.4	18	18.4	20	20.4	18	18.4	24	24.5	2.9	4.5
11	Recruit, transport, transfer and harbor or receipt of children for exploitation. (Child trafficking)	38	38.8	27	27.6	8	8.2	16	16.3	9	9.2	3.7	5.2
12	Deny Children the provision of the needed food, clothing, shelter	28	28.6	18	18.4	17	17.3	18	18.4	17	17.3	3.2	4.5

and medicine care.
(child neglect)

Source: field work, 2024

4. Discussion of Findings

Out of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents, fifty-two (52) respondents representing (34.7%) of the total respondents indicated that child are not generally abused by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi district. Moreover, ninety-eight (98) respondents representing (65.3%) of the total respondents admitted that child is generally abused by the family with regard to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi District. This means that a larger number respondents of the total respondents admitted that child is generally abused by the family with regard to the beliefs and perception of the child in Tongo in the Upper East region of Ghana.

From the quantitative analysis, respondents who responded to abuse with regards to girl child education had a mean and standard deviation of ($M=3.6$; $SD=5.0$). Respondents recorded a score of 62.3% admitting that in a large extent girl child education is been abused by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi. A score of 11.2% of respondents were not certain if the children are being abused or not. There was a score of 26.5% suggesting a limited extent of abuse on girl child education. The statistics showed that majority of respondents admitted that girl child education is been abused by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi.

With the issue of child labour, respondents recorded a mean and standard deviation ($M=3.6$; $SD=5.0$). From the table, the respondent indicated that to a large extent, child are being abused in terms of child labour recording 62.2%. Respondents that were not certain recorded 9.2% whiles 28.2% were recorded by respondents revealing a limited extent of child abuse. Based on the scoring from the respondents, a large number of respondent admitted that there is high rate of child labour and admitted that the child is been abused by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi.

With Betrothing/ Child Marriage, respondents recorded a mean and standard deviation ($M=4.1$; $SD=5.9$). From the table, a large number of respondent recorded 79.6% scores indicating the large extent by which child are being abused with regards to betrothing/child marriage. 10.2% scores were recorded by respondents who were not certain. 10.2% was also recorded by respondents indicating a limited extent by which child are being abused. The analysis revealed that majority of the respondents admitted that the child is been abused when it comes to betrothing and child marriage by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi.

With the issue of Beating of children as corrective measure (physical abuse), respondents recorded a mean and standard deviation ($M=2.6$; $SD= 4.8$). Respondents recorded 56.1% scores which indicated a limited extent by which child is been abused. A score of 17.3% of respondent were not certain if the children are being abused or not when it come to the issue of beating of children as a corrective measure (physical abuse). Also respondents recorded 26.5% scores indicating the large extent by which the child is been abused with the issue beating of children as corrective measure (physical abuse). The results therefore indicated that majority of respondents see beating of children as a corrective measure (physical abuse) limited extent by which child is been abused by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi.

From the table, respondents who responded to the Support & Care given to children born out of wed log had a mean and standard deviation ($M=3.3$; $SD=4.7$). Respondents recorded 45.9% score indicating a large extent of child abuse, and a score of 28.6% from respondents were not certain. Respondents recorded 25.5% scores indicating a limited extent of abuse with regards to the Support & Care given to children born out of wed log. From the results, majority of the respondents admitted that to a large extent child is being abused when they are being born out of wed log by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

Again, respondents who responded to the issue of Use of girl child as collateral/mortgage for loans of animals (cattle, sheep & goat) had a mean and standard deviation of ($M= 3.3$; $SD= 4.9$). The results showed that respondent scored 39.8% indicating the large extent by which the child is been abused when they are being used as collateral/mortgage for loans. 33.7% score of respondents indicated that they are not certain if is considered as child abuse or not. 26.5% scores of respondent indicated the limited extent by which the child is been abused. The analysis revealed that a small difference between respondents who admitted that to a large extent, the child is been abused in

terms of using them as collateral/mortgage and respondents who are not certain by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

From the table, respondents who responded to the issue of Sexual abuse had a mean and standard deviation of ($M=3.8$; $SD=5.2$). 69.4% scores were recorded by respondents who admitted a large extent of abused of a child with the issue of sexual abuse. 10.2% scores were recorded by respondents who were not certain of child abuse or not. 24.4% scores were also recorded by respondents who indicated a limited extent of abused of a child with regards to sexual abuse by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

With the issue of Accuses Children of witchcraft, respondents had a mean and standard deviation of ($M=3.2$; $SD= 4.8$). Respondents scored 39.8% for a large extent of child abuse for accusing of children of witchcraft. 27.6% scores were recorded by respondents who were not certain of child abuse. 34.7% of the scores were from respondents who indicated a limited extent of child abuse with the matter of accusing children of witchcraft by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

In the area of Children with Disability, respondents had a mean and standard deviation of ($M=3.0$; $SD=4.5$). For a large extent of abuse of children with disability, respondents recorded 36.8% scores. 24.5% scores were recorded by respondents who were not certain of child abuse. 38.8% of the scores were from respondents who showed a limited extent of child abuse with the issue of Children with Disability by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

From the table, respondents who responded to the issue of Child with albinos had a mean and standard deviation of ($M=2.9$; $SD=4.5$). For a large extent of abuse with regards to issue of child with albino, respondents scored 36.8%. 20.4% scores were from respondents which indicated of not certain of child abuse with the issue of child with albinos. For a limited extent of abuse with regards to child with albinos, respondents scored 42.9%. This results showed that majority of respondents indicated a limited extent of child abuse with the issue of child with albinos by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

For the issue of Recruit, transport, transfer and harbor or receipt of children for exploitation. (Child trafficking), respondents recorded a mean and standard deviation of ($M=3.7$; $SD= 5.2$). From the table, the results showed a scores of 66.4% from respondents who indicated a large extent of abuse

with the matter like Recruit, transport, transfer and harbor or receipt of children for exploitation. (Child trafficking). 8.2% scores were recorded by respondents who were not certain of abuse with regards of Recruit, transport, transfer and harbor or receipt of children for exploitation. 25.5% scores were also recorded by respondents which indicated a limited extent of abuse with matters of Recruit, transport, transfer and harbor or receipt of children for exploitation. (Child trafficking). This means majority of respondents admitted to a large extent an element of child abused with regards to Recruit, transport, transfer and harbor or receipt of children for exploitation. (Child trafficking) by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

Finally, respondents had a mean and standard deviation of ($M= 3.2$; $SD= 4.5$) concerning the issue of Denying Children the provision of the needed food, clothing, shelter and medicine care (child neglect). Respondents with a scores of 47% indicated a large extent of child abused with the issue of denying children the provision of the needed food, clothing, shelter and medicine care (child neglect). 17.3% scores by respondent indicated not certain with child abused. 35.7% scores from respondent out of the total respondents indicated limited extent of child abused with the issue of denying children the provision of the needed food, clothing, shelter and medicine care (child neglect). The results revealed majority of respondents indicating the large extent by which a child is been abused with the matters of denying children the provision of the needed food, clothing, shelter and medicine care (child neglect) by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi.

Child abuse have been a major phenomenon that has receive a lot of scholarly attention because of it adverse effect on children's future(Better Care Network, 2018). Socio-cultural practices and beliefs of a society have been one of the major factors that influence the perception of child abuse. Every society or social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs. Some traditional practices and beliefs can be beneficial to children and at the same time act as a driving force for the perpetuation of child abuse in various societies (Ministry of Gender and Social protection, 2019).

With reference to girl child education, majority of respondents (88%) in Talensi community suggested that they prefer boy child education to girl child education because girls belong to the kitchen, girls will marry and will not take care of parents; girls are not serious with education like boys; girls were used for butter trading and will not be of any use to the society; girls will become

pregnant at early ages when they are still in school etc. Again, most respondents admitted that (69.4%) the girl child is susceptible to sexual abuse due to traditional practices and beliefs at Talensi.

The reason behind these negative perception towards girl child education and sexual abuse has to deal with the kind of socio-cultural practices and beliefs concerning girl child education within their vicinity. These traditional practices and beliefs with regards to girl child education causes child abuse with references to girl child education at the vicinity and are prone to sexual abuse. This abuse is as a result of their traditional practices and beliefs with regards to gender differences and marginality of girl child. A study done by GLSS (2018) suggested that girl child is mostly sexually abused than boys. These findings are consistent with the assertions made by (UNFPA, 2018) and (UNFPA, 2018). It was revealed that certain traditional practices and beliefs can be harmful by putting detrimental implications for the status of the girl child; sexual abuse; early marriage; the various taboos or practices which prevent women from controlling their own fertility; nutritional taboos and traditional birth practices. Moreover, the current study findings is in line with the research conducted by (Cherry, 2020) which postulated that girl child are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than boys and that most of these sexual abuse comes about as a result of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator and these relationship are been influenced by the family with regards certain socio-cultural practices as is the case in Talensi.

Child labour has been one of the major form of child abuse. Some of the socio-cultural practices and beliefs at the Talensi causes child labour which is a major form of child abuse. From the quantitative statistics, respondents indicated that to a large extent child are being abused in terms of child labour recording 62.2% due to certain cultural beliefs and practices practiced by the natives of Talensi. Some of these reasons includes; the idea of training them into business; is a form of duty the child also performs to help the family financially; encourage them to be trained as their parents which is form of life they live; use them as labour because of poverty; use children on farms because parents are old and they can't work on their own again etc.

Moreover, physical abuse is one of the common child abuse as a result of beating, and other actions that cause physical injury, leave marks, or cause pain. This act was dominant at Talensi as they regard it as a medium of correcting the child from bad act. Majority of the respondents indicated it as a limited extent of child abuse at Talensi. These cultural practices and beliefs brings

about child labour and physical abuse which in a large extent, a major form of child abused. According to the (Rodriguez et al., 2022) anything thing that causes physical harm is considered as abusive and regarded as child abused. These findings however, confirm the research done by Hills et al (2017) asserting that children have been viewed as property or possessions for adults and parents to use and dispose of as they wish. Similarly, in Ghana children were treated as any other property likewise and could be used as one wish. A trace of history on child abuse shows children has been used in order to provide their families with financial stability. Children were sold to slave traders, were used to services family debt or exchange to cancel debts, many remained as farming assistants and continues to happen(MoGSP, 2019).

The usage of girl child as collateral/mortgage for loan was one form of child abused practiced by the natives of Talensi as a results of the kind of cultural or traditional practices and beliefs been held to at the community. Respondents that admitted child is generally abused (39.8%) in terms of usage of girl child as collateral by the family with regard to the beliefs and perception of the child in Talensi. The reason for this act has to do with the fact that; they belief the girl child is a property and should be given out for marriage for four (4) cows as dowry; she has the potential of making wealth through dowry when she grows; to meet demands of in-laws who come asking for their dowry; Pressure from in-laws will make you give out your girl child for something in return etc.

On the contrary, 33.7% of respondents were not certain of child abuse of the usage of child as collateral/mortgage for loans. Child trafficking stands at 66.4% and 47% for child neglect from respondents indicating a large extent of child abuses by the family with regards to the beliefs and perception of child in Talensi. The explanation is that their cultural practices and beliefs allowed them to use their child as collateral/mortgage in times of difficulty. These traditional practices and beliefs is a critical major source of child abuse been practiced. A study conducted by (Mersky et al., 2021) revealed that concepts of ethnicity and culture are more influential in child abuse especially in the issue of usage of girl child as collateral or mortgage. Moreover, the current study findings is in line with the study done by (Asante & Donkoh, 2019) which postulated that parenting practices and social norms specifically constitute mistreatment with regards to girl child as collateral constituting a major form of child abused. The study also consistent with the study done in 2019, Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) that scored Ghana a notch higher (28%) for age of marriage before 18 and about 6% for marriage before 15 years. The study confirms (Aluko

& Olaniyi, 2020) study suggesting a child neglect as a result of adult refusal to acknowledge the child's worth and the legitimacy of the child's needs as is the case in Talensi.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established in this current study that, certain socio-cultural practices and beliefs by the Talensis attributed to child abuse directly or indirectly. It was indicated that boy child education was preferred more than girl child education, girl child is betrothed in early marriage, girl child is sexually abused, using children as labour etc. All these form of child abused to a large extent are been caused by the traditional beliefs and practices people follow and believe in it. From the study these form of child abuse is as a result of the cultural or traditional practices been ahead to among the people of Talensi in Talensi district. To reduce the problem of socio-cultural beliefs, practices and perception that influence child abuse, the study recommends that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and other relevant stakeholders involved in protecting children's right should commit resources to creating intensive awareness on the effect on child. Furthermore, the study recommend public awareness campaigns and community engagement process to support positive, responsible parenting and encourage social and behavior change (perception) so that children can grow up in safe homes. The limitations acknowledged open up the opportunities for future studies. Future research should include the extended coverage of sample size, focus on inclusion of diverse geographical areas (other metropolitan cities and regions) and sample selection must be expanded across diverse traditional beliefs and practices in other parts of Ghana.

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