

PROTECTION OF CHILD ABUSE VICTIMS UNDER NIGERIAN LAW: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Child abuse is a serious global problem with significant negative influence on children's physical, emotional, and mental health. Both international and national laws provide children with the rights to grow up in enjoyable, safe, healthy, productive, and supportive environments, yet the opposite is becoming the reality as child abuse happens in settings where children should feel safe, like homes, families, schools, and communities. This has an impact on children's safety, development, and general well-being and raises significant concerns. This study uses a doctrinal approach; it examines the laws that protect children from abuse and investigates the social dynamics and underlying risk factors that prevent the protection provided in the laws. The study discovers that Nigeria has a robust legal framework, but it is ineffective due to several systemic problems, such as poor enforcement, poverty, negative cultural norms, social standards, an inadequate child protection system, and a lack of knowledge. The paper recommends a coordinated restorative approach from early detection to quick investigation, protection, improve prosecution of offenders, and restoration of victims.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Children are the foundation of every society, and they are both its most precious resource and its most vulnerable group. They represent both the aspiration for a more wealthy and just future and the guarantee of continuity. For the stability and progress of both communities and countries, their protection, development, and well-being are consequently crucial.¹ The socialization a child receives from adults and the type of household and community they grow up in determine whether they will be abused or protected.²

Child abuse is a serious global problem that cuts over all social, cultural, and economic barriers and impacts society everywhere.³ Words like “child stealing”⁴ “child abuse,” “child labour,” “child molestation”, “street children,” “child trafficking,” and “child marriage” highlight how vulnerable children are everywhere.⁵ One billion children globally are

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¹ Jirah Umar, Sani Aminu and Selkhan Jatan, “Preventing painful futures: A Policy-Focused Study on Reducing Child Abuse and Its Long-Term Effects in Nigeria.” [2025] 2 Taraba International Journal of Social Sciences Research 214

²Chinyere Ajayi, Khatidja Chantler, Lorraine Radford, “The Role of Cultural Beliefs, Norms, and Practices in Nigerian Women's Experiences of Sexual Abuse and Violence.” [2022] 28(2) Violence Against Women 465

³ Lateefat Ajisafe, Beatrice Ohaeri, Iyanuoluwa Ojo, Oluwatoyin Babarimisa, “Child Abuse: A significant Contemporary Community Problem” [2023] 8 International Journal of Public Health, Pharmacy and Pharmacology, 18

⁴ Section 371 Criminal Code Act

⁵ Tracy Omorogiuwa, “Child vulnerabilities in Nigeria: What is the nature of our work as child protection social workers?” [2023] 14 Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences

estimated to experience sexual violence,⁶ 160 million children work as minors, and many between the ages of five and eleven work in dangerous condition.⁷ The prevalence of child vulnerability has alarmingly increased in Nigeria, as it has in other parts of the world. Available data reveals that 39.2% of children work as minors,⁸ and 27% in female genital mutilation or cutting.⁹ International research shows that six out of ten children under the age of five consistently experience physical punishment and/or psychological abuse at the hands of parents and caregivers,¹⁰ the same figure is said of children who experience one or more forms of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse before the age of 18 in Nigeria,¹¹ the country has the largest number of child brides in Africa¹² yet only a fraction of child abuse victims ever get support. Child abuse occurs in households, schools, communities, and institutions,¹³ perpetrators include parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, and other entrusted persons with the child's care. Even while most parents want to love and care for their children in a safe atmosphere, abuse frequently results from the extreme

⁶ National statistics on child abuse <www.nationalchildrenalliance.org> accessed 22 September 2024

⁷ “Global estimates 2020, trends and road forward, International Labour Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund” <www.ilo.org/2021> accessed 10 September 2024

⁸ “Nigerian child labour survey” <www.nigeriansta.gov.ng/2022> accessed 2 October 2024

⁹ UNICEF for every child. <unicef.org> accessed 30 Nov 2025

¹⁰ WHO, “Child Maltreatment” <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment/2024/11/05>> accessed 05 February 2026

¹¹ Samuel Anyanwu, “FG Describes Statistics on Violence Against Children as Alarming”

<<https://fmino.gov.ng/fg-describes-statistics-on-violence-against-children-as-alarming/2025/10/7>> accessed 05 February 2026

¹² UNICEF. “Child Protection” <<https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/child-protection>> accessed 3 April 2026

¹³ Adenike Asaolu, Oladimeji Oladepo "They Will Use Her as a Proverb": Exploring Adolescent Leaders' Perspectives on Barriers to Reporting Child Sexual Abuse in Nigerian Schools. [2026] J Interpers Violence. doi: 10.1177/08862605251414438. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 41582416.

demands of raising children, which can be brought on by stress, exhaustion, poor parenting skills, or a lack of family support.¹⁴

The underlying cause of child abuse is multifaceted, such as cultural, economic, religious, and judicial factors, among others. A comprehensive framework of violations of children's rights in Nigeria provided by the situation analysis from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) discusses several elements that lead to child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, linking them to family dynamics, poverty, and socioeconomic hardship.¹⁵ For example, some newborns have died because of insufficient or absent parenting (from birth and foster parents, as well as guardians). Some parents are not ready to assume responsibility for their children and provide them with the psychological and social support they require.¹⁶ The conventional perception of children as their parents' property, or as households that rely on money,¹⁷ and lack of social means increases the likelihood of child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment, including coerced marriage, child trafficking, and dangerous jobs. Children are the most dependent and vulnerable group in every society and are more likely to be the target of abuses because of their diminutive stature, lack of strength, and limited mental capacity.¹⁸ Nigeria has a high rate of child maltreatment, including forced child labour, child trafficking, early child marriages, and domestic violence, all

¹⁴ "Queensland Government Child Abuse: Community Support" <<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/child-abuse>> accessed 1 April 2026

¹⁵ UNICEF <<https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/5861/file/SituationAnalysisofChildreninNigeria.pdf>> accessed 30 March 2026

¹⁶ David Finkelhor, "The victimization of children: A developmental perspective." [1995] 65.2 *Almer J Orthopsychosia* 177

¹⁷ Maria Corbett, "Children's right to culture: A paradigm shift." <www.artsineducation.ie> <2016> accessed 24 September 2024

¹⁸ Olusegun Olaitan, and Idowu Amos, "Child abuse in Nigeria: Dimension, reasons for its persistence and probable" (2016) 4 *Child and Family Law Journal*. 1

of which have a detrimental effect on children's capacity to exercise their fundamental rights to life and survival.¹⁹ This alarming rate underscores the need for concerted efforts among stakeholders to intensify their commitment to protecting the most vulnerable among us. Thus, this paper examined the legal and institutional framework for the prevention and control of child abuse in Nigeria.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

2.1 Child Abuse

The term "child abuse" has a wide scope. It differs among people, religious organizations, businesses, and social and cultural groupings.²⁰ Though the CRA 2003 did not give a statutory definition of the term, a comparative look at section 3(2) of the US Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defines child abuse and neglect as *“any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”*²¹ Similarly, the World Health Organization defines it as any type of physical or emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation that causes actual or potential harm to a child's development, survival, health, or dignity.²² It includes any deliberate physical, sexual, emotional, or neglectful abuse or mistreatment of a kid. It may have detrimental effects on a child's future growth and relationships, as well as their physical and

¹⁹ Patricia Gbobo, and O W Igwe, ‘Child Rights Law and Practice in Nigeria: A Lesson from South Africa’ (2021) 17 UNIZIK Law Journal 97

²⁰ Lateefat Ajisafe, Beatrice Ohaeri, Iyanuoluwa Ojo, Oluwatoyin Babarimisa, “Child Abuse: A significant Contemporary Community Problem” (2023) 8 International Journal of Public Health, Pharmacy and Pharmacology, 18

²¹ 42 U.S.C. 5101.

²² WHO. Child maltreatment. <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>> <Nov. 5, 2024> accessed 31 March 2026

emotional well-being.²³ It covers both omissions (such as neglecting to meet basic requirements) and actions of commission (such as striking or assaulting).²⁴ All forms of physical and emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment, as well as commercial or other forms of exploitation, are considered forms of child abuse.²⁵ It is any action or inaction on the part of a parent or caregiver that causes death, severe physical or psychological suffering, or exploitation or sexual abuse. Although it is frequently underreported, child abuse is widespread in Nigeria.²⁶

Child abuse is a menace that can have harmful impacts on a child's future development and relationships, as well as their physical and emotional well-being. These effects can last a lifetime,²⁷ and sometimes linked to brain trauma and severe impairment in young children, impacting their cognitive and academic performance, all of which are major risk factors for noncommunicable diseases. Due to its harmful immediate and long-term effects on victims' physical, sexual, and mental health, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like HIV, PTSD, anxiety, and depression, it is both a human rights issue and a public health concern. Gynecological problems and unintended pregnancies can also affect

²³ Sharon Daley; Dulce Gonzalez, Arian Bethencourt Mirabal, Muriam Afzal, "Child Abuse and Neglect." < <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459146/2025/04>> accessed 31 March 2026

²⁴ Allison Jackson, Natalie Kissoon, Christian Greene. Aspects of Abuse: Recognizing and Responding to Child Maltreatment, [2015] 45 (3) Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care

²⁵ Sunny Piate, Ekaette Udoh, Phyllis Emeh, "Effectiveness of Laws Against Child Abuse: A Comparative Analysis Between Nigeria and South Africa", [2025] 10(1) Social Scientia Journal <https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SS/article/view/3186/2929> accessed 30 March, 2026

²⁶ Olusegun Olaitan, and Idowu Amos, "Child Abuse in Nigeria: Dimension, Reasons For Its Persistence and Probable," [2016] 4 Child and Family Law Journal 1

²⁷ Lateefat Ajisafe, Beatrice Ohaeri, Iyanuoluwa Ojo, Oluwatoyin Babarimisa, "Child Abuse: A significant Contemporary Community Problem" [2023] 8 International Journal of Public Health, Pharmacy and Pharmacology 18

adolescent girls.²⁸ If not reported in a timely manner, repeated abuse or beating may result in battered child syndrome and cause premature mortality if the child is not quickly withdrawn from the unsafe environment.²⁹ To stop additional injury and advance the kid's wellbeing, child abuse must be identified, reported, and quickly investigated and addressed appropriately.

2.2 Child Protection

Child protection is the protection of children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.³⁰ It is the practice of safeguarding specific children who have been recognized as either experiencing or likely to experience serious harm due to abuse or neglect and includes policies and procedures intended to stop and address abuse and neglect.³¹ In order to stop child abuse, laws are essential. Strict legal penalties, such as imprisonment and fines are necessary to deter people from abusing children.³²

2.3 Child Victims

The UN Guideline 9 provides that *“Child victim or witness means a person under the age of 18 who is a victim of or witness to a crime,*

²⁸Sana Ali, Saadia Pasha, Ann Cox, and Enaam Youssef, “Examining the short and long-term impacts of child sexual abuse: a review study.” [2024] 4: 56Springer Nature. SN Soc Sci 1

²⁹ Olayinka Ibrahim, Fatima Nasir, Abubakar Lugga, Mu’utasim Ibrahim, “A four-year-old Nigerian boy with battered child syndrome: implications for public health.” [2020] 18 Pan Afr Med J. 47. doi: 10.11604/pamj.2020.35.47.19115. PMID: 32537052; PMCID: PMC7250214.

³⁰ UNICEF “Child protection” < <https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-protection-strategy>> accessed 31 March 2026

³¹ “Lagos State Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy” < <https://lagosstatemoj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DSVRT>> accessed 5 March 2026

³² CYPF. “The role of laws in preventing child abuse in Nigeria”<https://cypfnigeria.com/the-role-of-laws-in-preventing-child-abuse-in-nigeria-a-framework-for-protection-and-accountability/> accessed 31 March 2026.

*regardless of his or her role in the offence or in the prosecution of the alleged offender or groups of offenders.*³³ Any child who has been harmed by crime, abuse, exploitation, neglect, or rights violations, either individually or collectively, is considered a child victim.³⁴

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This article reviewed existing literature and laws using a doctrinal library-based research methodology. The research utilised primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data comprised the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, the Child Rights Act 2003, Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015, Criminal Code Act Cap C38 Laws of the Federation, and case law. Secondary data included textbooks, academic journal articles, regulatory reports by child rights advocacy institutions such as UNICEF, National Human Right Commission, internet materials and other relevant documents on child protection. The doctrinal method is especially suitable for this work because it enables a thorough analysis of the laws and institutions protecting the right of children who are victims of child abuse in Nigeria.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 LEGAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

There are special offences like child prostitution, child slavery, and child sexual exploitation³⁵ intended to specially protect children's right because they are inherently unable to support themselves in some

³³ Guideline 9 (a) UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime (2005)

³⁴ Reimagine justice for children.
<<https://www.unicef.org/media/174686/file/Reimagine%20Justice%20-%20Technical%20Brief%207%20-%20Child%20Victims%20and%20Witnesses.pdf.pdf>> accessed 03 December 2025

³⁵ Sections 216- 226 of the Criminal Code Act, Section 23 of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015

situations.³⁶ They need special care and attention in social protection policy as they constitute the most vulnerable population worldwide and are naturally powerless at enforcing their rights.³⁷ Coordinated teams that promote child welfare, child justice, victim advocacy, mental and medical health treatment and child protection in a child friendly manner should come together in handling cases of child abuse.

Nigeria's legal framework on child protection is based on federal statutes such as the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) (as amended), Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003, supplemented by the Criminal Code, Penal Code, Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) 2015, and Trafficking in Persons Act, with implementation varying by state domestication due to the nation's federal structure and the legislative power of each state's legislature to enact laws on subjects outside the exclusive list of the 1999 CFRN (as amended).

At the international level, Nigeria is one of the countries that has ratified two important international agreements pertaining to children's rights. The first is the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Nigeria accepted in March 1991 and included into the Child's Rights Act of 2003. The second is the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which was approved in February 2003. Nigeria is bound by the terms of both agreements as a signatory.³⁸ The CRC has received almost universal ratification and is the foundation upon which regional and some national legal instruments pertaining children's rights are formulated. Article 19 (1)³⁹ enjoins state parties to take all

³⁶ Olorunwa Towolawi, Victor Ayeni, "Legal Protection of Child's Rights in Nigeria" [2025] 21 2 UNIZIK Law Journal 117

³⁷ "Building Blocks for Peace Foundation. Protecting the Nigerian Children from Violence" <<https://bbforpeace.org/>> accessed 10 March 2026

Olorunwa Towolawi, Victor Ayeni, "Legal Protection of Child's Rights in Nigeria" [2025] 21UNIZIK Law Journal 117

³⁹ UNCRC 1989

necessary legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures and states that:

‘Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.’

At the national level, the 1999 CFRN (as amended) recognized as "the grundnorm," from which all other laws receive their legitimacy. Chapter 4 of the constitution is devoted to fundamental human rights, which is applicable to everyone, including minors under the age of eighteen.⁴⁰ Section 17(3)(c) mandates the state to protect children from exploitation and foster their healthy growth. However, the protection of Nigerian children's rights is more entrenched in the CRA, 2003. Sections 1 and 158 of the CRA affirm the best interest of a child as the paramount consideration in all actions affecting the child.⁴¹ The CRA provides that no child should be subjected to any form of abuse and that every child is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person.⁴² The Act prohibits certain conduct against children such as child marriage,⁴³ which is void and has no legal significance, section 23⁴⁴ stipulates the punishment as a fine of ₦500,000 or five years in prison, or both, section 25⁴⁵ forbids exposing a child to the use, production, or trafficking of narcotic drugs; and section 28 forbids child labour. In cases of investigations, arrests, and the initial

⁴⁰ Section 3(1) & (2) CRA, 2003.

⁴¹ S.1 CRA, 2003 provides that "In every action concerning a child, whether undertaken by an individual, public or private body, institutions or service, court of law, or administrative or legislative authority, the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration"

⁴² Section 11 CRA, 2003

⁴³ Section 21 CRA 2003

⁴⁴ CRA 2003

⁴⁵ CRA 2003

reaction to child abuse, neglect, trafficking, and other crimes against children, the CRA envisions a police department dedicated to children's cases, manned by policemen qualified to deal with child-related issues.⁴⁶ The officers at the specialised children's police units are supposed to be police officers who are trained on how to go about the child justice system. Particularly investigating crime where the child is the offender and handling offences committed by adults against the child. A child divisional crime officer should be available at the divisional unit level, especially in rural areas where the specialized unit may be somewhat remote.

Through court-ordered evaluations and emergency protection, the CRA offers a systematic method for evaluating and safeguarding child abuse victim in need of a safe home.⁴⁷ The CRA mandates the establishment of various types of housing, including registered children's homes, community homes, emergency homes, and volunteer homes, for children in need.⁴⁸ For instance, where the specialised children police unit or officer believes that the child would likely suffer significant harm, he is to relocate the child to a suitable accommodation.⁴⁹ Keeping a child victim in a safe shelter away from the vicinity of the offender relieves the victim of the memory of the abuse and the shock he or she might encounter at every contact with the offender and also reduces stigmatisation in cases of sexual abuse. The CRA establishes a child justice system that is distinct from the adult criminal justice system.⁵⁰ It creates Family Courts to handle matters concerning children, such as criminal cases involving child

⁴⁶ Zaynab Bashir, "An evaluation of the impact of the child rights act in regulating the rights of a child in Nigeria." (2023) <
https://iawj.org/content.aspx?page_id=2507&club_id=882224&item_id=4600#:~:text=c hild%20labour/> accessed 26 June 2026

⁴⁷ S. 41 (8 &9) and 42 (1a) CRA, 2003

⁴⁸ S. 50 Ogun State CRL 2006

⁴⁹ Section 46(1)(a) Ogun State CRL 2006

⁵⁰ Sections 204-210, CRA 2003.

victims or offenders,⁵¹ at both the high court and magisterial levels. The courts in prosecuting crimes against children, have specialized procedures under the CRA where children can give evidence in-camera, without the presence of the public encouraging child-friendly justice.⁵² Proceedings involving children preserves their privacy and dignity,⁵³ thus, no person should publish the name, address, school, photograph, or anything likely to lead to the identification of a child in a matter before the Court, except as required under the law.⁵⁴ proceedings may be held in camera, or privately, with only those directly involved such as the parties to the case, their solicitors and counsel, parents or guardians of the child⁵⁵ allowed to attend to prevent trauma⁵⁶ and the identity of the child is protected, which includes preventing the disclosure or publication of his/her personal information, especially in the media.⁵⁷ The CRA enjoins the use of a pseudonym or no disclosure at all. This is a laudable innovation, as it prevents the name and identity of the child victim from being mentioned in any media or law report. Thus, the media report of a case of a child sexually abused by her stepfather was reported with a false name.⁵⁸ Prior to this, law report usually includes the name and identity of the victim. For instance, in *Major Bello M. Magaji v. The Nigerian Army*⁵⁹ the details of the prosecutrix were included in the proceedings.

⁵¹ Sections 149 & 150 CRA, 2003; Sections 136-137 Lagos CRL 2007

⁵² *Ibid* s 155

⁵³ *Ibid* s 11

⁵⁴ Section 144 Lagos State CRL 2007

⁵⁵ S. 156 *ibid*

⁵⁶ Iyabo Ogunniran, "Elusive justice? An assessment of child justice in the tripartite court system in Nigeria" [2014] 10 Acta Universitatis Danubius, juridica. AUDJ 51

⁵⁷ Emem Ette, "Child friendly justice system: does the child rights act, 2003 tick all the boxes?" 2020 Fida Nigeria Week/ Annual General Meeting, <<https://fida.org.ng/>> <2020>. accessed 22 August 2025

⁵⁸ < <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/news/nigeria-brave-girls-are-ending-silence-around-gender-based-violence>> <16 January 2020> accessed 14 April 2026

⁵⁹ SC.204/2004

The testimony of a child witness may be presented unsworn and regarded as though it were provided under oath, which makes it admissible in both civil and criminal trials.⁶⁰ This provision preserves the integrity of the legal system while enabling children, especially those under 14, to testify in a way that is more familiar to them and suitable for their developmental stage.⁶¹ Section 207⁶² provides for the establishment of a specialised police unit, during investigations or prosecutions, child victims must be shielded from dangers such as secondary victimization, retaliation, and intimidation.⁶³ The unit is also saddled with the responsibility of relocating a child victim whose safety is under threat to an emergency protection centre. Remarkably, the CRA considers specialized protection mechanisms, such as family courts, child-focused procedures, and a dedicated children police unit. However, state adoption and enforcement are crucial to the practical implementation of these rights.⁶⁴

Complementing the CRA is the VAPPA, 2015 which forbids all types of violence against people in both private and public life and offers victims of violent crime in Nigeria the best possible protection and remedies. The VAPP Act, which is applicable in the Federal Capital Territory and is implemented differently in each state,⁶⁵ is a crucial piece of legislation for safeguarding child abuse and violence in Nigeria. It specifically criminalizes various forms of abuse including sexual violence, harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation,⁶⁶ and abandonment.

⁶⁰ S. 160 CRA; S. 147 Lagos CRL,

⁶¹ Emem Ette, 2020.*Op.cit.*

⁶² CRA 2003.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Zaynab Bashir, “An evaluation of the impact of the child rights act in regulating the rights of a child in Nigeria.” (2023) <
[https://iawj.org/content.aspx?page_id=2507&club_id=882224&item_id=4600#:~:text=c
hild%20labour](https://iawj.org/content.aspx?page_id=2507&club_id=882224&item_id=4600#:~:text=c%20labour)> accessed 26 June 2026

⁶⁵ Lagos State has not ratified the VAPP Act but has the Lagos State Protection Against Domestic Violence Law (PADVL) 2007 with comparable rights.

⁶⁶ S. 6 (1) VAPPA prohibits the circumcision or genital mutilation of a girl child.

To shield children from abuse, pressure, or harm, typically in cases of family or domestic violence. A youngster or anybody acting on their behalf may request a protective order from the court under Section 28(5).⁶⁷ The protection order when granted helps to: prevent further abuse, harassment, or intimidation of the child and to prevent the accused abuser from having direct contact with the child; to safeguard the child's welfare; to determine temporary custody or supervision and protect the young victim from harm; and to provide legal support for social interventions and law enforcement initiatives.⁶⁸

The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015 (TPPEA) is another principal Act that forbids acts and omissions that violate children's rights such as engagement of children for prostitution, child abandonment, child trafficking among others. Majority of victims of human trafficking, both domestically and internationally, are children.⁶⁹ The TPPEA aims to combat the evil of human trafficking by prohibiting child trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation. Trafficked individuals are entitled to reimbursement for economic, bodily, and psychological harm. In the same vein, the Nigeria's criminal code in addressing children's rights prohibits the indecent abuse of boys under the age of fourteen.⁷⁰ Section 218⁷¹ provides that anyone who has illicit carnal knowledge of a girl younger than thirteen is guilty of a felony and faces a life sentence in jail, with or without caning. The Criminal Code Act restrains a homeowner to deliberately allow young girls to be defiled

⁶⁷ VAPPA 2015

⁶⁸ Protection for domestic violence victims and relief granted < <https://resourcehub.bakermckenzie.com/en/resources/fighting-domestic-violence/africa/nigeria>> accessed 1 October 2025

⁶⁹ Jiyah Ndana, and Aminat Abdulrahman, "The implementation and enforcement of the rights of children in Nigeria," [2020] 3:12 Int. J. Social Science & Humanities Research. 27

⁷⁰ Section 216 Criminal Code Act

⁷¹ Criminal Code Act

on his property.⁷² Also, section 295,⁷³ which deals with child correction, provides that the age of the child, his physical and mental health should all be considered before making any unjustified corrections. Section 372⁷⁴ forbids child desertion, it states that anyone who, as the parent, guardian, or other person legally responsible for the care or charge of a child under the age of twelve and capable of providing for the child, wilfully and without a valid reason deserts the child and leaves it without support shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, which carries a one-year jail sentence.

The legal framework is heavily involved in at least three stages of a child abuse case: detection, investigation, and adjudication. The identification and reporting support determines the rate of suspicion that would be reported, prompt and thorough investigation also assist in the success of cases tried and deter the public from involving in conducts that could amount to abuse.⁷⁵ The existing laws undoubtedly revealed that the government has excellent intentions when it comes to combating child abuse; but the country must adopt a practical approach when it comes to putting these laws into practice and protecting the best interests of the child victim. There is more to justice for a child abuse victim other than prosecution of the offender. Several child rights implementation institutions and committees such as the child rights implementation committee, National Human Right Commission (NHRC), family courts, child-focused units in ministries, and specialized or partner institutions and child advocacy NGO centres saddled with the implementation of the laws must be more proactive in the prevention of abuse cases, and where detected, a prompt response with the aim of restoring the victim and reducing the impact of the abuse should be their main focus.

⁷² Section 219

⁷³ Criminal Code Act

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁷⁵ Dickson Reppucci, and Carrie Fried, *Child Abuse and the Law* [2001] 5 CIL 70

The child rights implementation committee oversees and directs the execution of the CRA.⁷⁶ Its goal is to guarantee that children's rights outlined in legislation are put into practice through oversight, collaboration, and action by pertinent organizations.⁷⁷ It oversees that ministries, departments, agencies, and municipal entities fulfil their responsibilities related to child protection and routinely evaluate how well the government is carrying out the CRA.⁷⁸ The NHRC also receives and investigates report of child-rights violations directly from individuals; however, funding sometimes affects the timely investigation of cases reported, and where evidence needs to be preserved, failure to get such necessary and essential evidence may affect the success of the case at trial. Aside investigation, NHRC runs school based human rights clubs to enlighten and increase child rights advocacy. This has helped and empowered some child victims to speak up.⁷⁹ The case of Tunbosun who reported that her stepfather had sexually molested her for a period of five years, is one out of many.⁸⁰ Advocacy is highly necessary as little public knowledge discourages cooperation and reporting. If the public is enlightened, it will reduce negative societal attitudes in the treatment of children and enhance the remedial approach to take if child abuse is suspected.⁸¹ The CRA committee and the NHRC should do more by

⁷⁶ Section 265, CRA 2003.

⁷⁷ RoLAC partners CPN Lagos to re-establish Child Rights Implementation Committee in LGs to end violence against children. < <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/11/rolac-partners-cpn-lagos-to-re-establish-child-rights-implementation-committee-in-lgs-to-end-violence-against-children/> 2024/11/19 > accessed 4 April 2026.

⁷⁸ Section 265 (i) CRA, 2003

⁷⁹ In Nigeria brave girls are ending the silence < <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/news/nigeria-brave-girls-are-ending-silence-around-gender-based-violence> > accessed 10 April 2026

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Olayinka Ibrahim, Fatima Nasir, Abubakar Lugga, Mu'uasim Ibrahim, "A four-year-old Nigerian boy with battered child syndrome: implications for public health" [2020] 18 35Pan Afr Med J. 47. doi: 10.11604/pamj.2020.35.47.19115. PMID: 32537052; PMCID: PMC7250214.

ensuring that detected cases of abuse are tracked and follow through police, social welfare, and courts.

Government social welfare institutions and NGOs supervise and serve as referrals to the specialized child police units when the case requires prosecution and when the child victim requires protection they manage, supervise, care for, and provide a safe home for the victim.⁸² However, after child victims are identified, protection is limited by inadequate child-specific support systems such as shelters, and referral systems.⁸³ The family court present a justice system evolving towards empathy, healing, and restoration of the child victim to mitigate the impact of the victimization suffered by the abused child. The court allows a parent, guardian, schoolteacher, police officer, or social worker to file an *exparte* application for a protection order for a child which is expeditiously considered.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Despite the efforts of the child protection institutions, child abuse is still on the increase, the NHRC reported an alarming rate of child desertion in 2024⁸⁴ yet recorded very few prosecutions of guardians or parents of the deserted children. This alarming gap is attributed to low penetration of the institutions into rural areas, where many abuses take place, insufficient

⁸² Child rights manual, Nigeria. Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) & The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), (2013) <https://barhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/The-Child-Rights-Manual_Nigeria-29.10.13> accessed 26 March 2026.

⁸³ <[Nigeriarights.gov.ng/nhrc-media/news-and-events/477-children-s-day-nhrc-expresses-concern-over-the-increasing-cases-of-violation-of-the-rights-of-the-child.html](https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/nhrc-media/news-and-events/477-children-s-day-nhrc-expresses-concern-over-the-increasing-cases-of-violation-of-the-rights-of-the-child.html)> accessed 25 March 2026

⁸⁴ <<https://www.nigeriarights.gov.ng/nhrc-media/data-and-infographics/463-nhrc-raises-the-alarm-over-child-abandonment-in-nigeria.html>> <Feb. 2024> accessed 14 April 2026

financing; weak enforcement mechanism;⁸⁵ poverty; corruption; the failure to rehabilitate sexual offenders; parents' unfavourable attitudes, and ineffective legal procedures.⁸⁶ Other reasons are poor implementation, sociocultural, and religious concerns, inconsistent statutes, and resistance in some communities.

The goal of ending child abuse or reducing it to the barest minimum is achievable if a multifaceted approach with concerted and intentional efforts of all stakeholders, institutions, and development partners is adopted. Everyone involved in raising, caring for, and protecting children, including parents, professionals, and volunteers in the fields of education, healthcare, and child protection should support and uphold the rights of children.⁸⁷ The child rights committee must implement, monitor and coordinate the child rights institutions and ensure they perform their duties and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children appropriately. Synergising their efforts will enhance and improve the implementation of child rights protection. Advocacy should be taken to grassroots to promote positive parenting and non-violent disciplinary methods. Report additional socioeconomic issues that jeopardize the enforcement of children's rights, such as poverty, inequality, and illiteracy, and suggest empowerment initiatives to reduce them.

⁸⁵ National Human Rights Commission. Protecting and promoting the rights of street children in Nigeria. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Children/Study/NHR_Commission_Nigeria.doc#:~:text=limited%2F%20inadequate%20funding%2C%20accessibility accessed 1 March 2026

⁸⁶ Olusegun Olaitan, and Idowu Amos, "Child Abuse in Nigeria: Dimension, Reasons for Its Persistence and Probable," [2016]4 Child and Family Law Journal, 1; Article 2. < <https://lawpublications.barry.edu/cflj/vol4/iss1/2>> accessed 3 March 2026

⁸⁷ Jaap Doek, Lothar Krappmann, Yanghee Lee "The Role of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Guiding and Monitoring the Right of the Child to Health Care and the Right to Protection from Abuse and Neglect." [2022] 10 Ann Pediatr Child Health 126.

Government and key stakeholders should strengthen the capacity of child rights institutions within child justice systems by conducting a needs assessment to identify specific financial requirements for creating and maintaining child-friendly environments. Funds should be allocated for training staff specialized in the child protection and support unit.

The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and social development and its state counterpart should develop a policy to embark on initiatives and institutionalize mechanisms to enlighten the public, particularly care givers on child rights. Outreach programs and accessible support services, including counselling and legal assistance should be provided in schools and community-designated centres.

The NHRC and its state and local government counterparts should engage rural and religious leaders in the advocacy of child rights to increase the awareness in rural communities where child labour and child marriage are prevalent.

The commissioner of police in every state command should ensure that divisional crime officers are trained to handle child abuse cases in a child friendly manner to avert situations where child victims are being re-traumatized by officers handling investigations. Establish and furnish each divisional unit with child-friendly, safe, and welcoming areas with age-appropriate amenities; and put in place effective case management systems to expedite procedures and cut down on delays in investigation.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Nigeria has ratified several regional and international agreements to prevent violence against children yet lack of strong enforcement, ineffective policy making, lengthy court systems, corrupt or poorly trained police child unit officers, among others are the major problem. The foremost way to protect children from all forms of abuse is to prevent it from occurring, hence efforts should be made at combating the root causes of child rights violation.