Chibuzo Leonard Agu

# Nwaja:
## The effects of family structure on the phenomenon of physical child abuse in Igboland, Nigeria

Tectum

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Chibuzo Leonard Agu

## Nwaja

The effects of family structure on the phenomenon of physical child abuse in Igboland, Nigeria

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## DEDICATION
I dedicate this work to my late father Lawrence N. Agu
and to children in general especially the abused children

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| PCA | Physical Child Abuse |
| BMS | Behaviour Modifying Strategy |
| CPSA | Child-Parent-Society-Approach |
| ANPPCAN | African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect |
| ELCS | External Locus Control Syndrome |
| ILSC | Internal Locus Control Syndrome |
| DSD | Delayed Self-order Differentiation |
| UNN | University of Nigeria Nsukka |
| MWASD | Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development |
| UN | United Nations |
| OAU | Organization of African Unity |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |

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Chibuzo Agu

Horn-Bad Meinberg, Germany

November 2013

### Nwaja:    The effects of family structure on physical child abuse in Igboland

## Part One

#### Ethnographic Research in Igboland

This part of the dissertation consists of four major chapters. The first chapter dwells on the formulation of the problem of our research endeavour, establishing the antecedents to the choice of our study and its ethnographic justification. Chapter two concentrates on the research methodology, techniques, and theoretical perspectives.

Chapter three seeks to understand the ethnographic profile of the Igbo people, their basic social and political institutions. Finally, chapter four gives insight into the economic activities and realities of the Igbo. The aim is to underpin their social and cultural values through an insight into the interconnectedness of the several basic institutions. Grappling with the fundamental social and cultural values of the Igbo is the key to understanding the social and cultural identity of the people. This paves the way for comprehending Igbo family and its structure, which is taken up in part two of this research work.

Generally, this part unveils the position of the *village* as a social space for power and domination. The social and domestic functions of the family at the micro-level are taken over by the village at the macro-level. In this connection, the village, through its politics and social programmes, makes enormous contributions in shaping the future of the citizens. There exists a kind of group syndrome empowerment which is at the base of the on-going struggle for social mobility and identity among the Igbo people.

# Chapter One:    Issues and perspectives

## 1.1    Introduction, problem and its significance

### The dynamics of physical child abuse in a culture where physical punishment thrives

> *Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, institutions, or processes do or fail to do which directly or indirectly harms children or damages their prospects of safe and healthy development into adulthood.*
>
> *Physical child abuse includes non-accidental injury of all kinds where the injury is caused as a result of actions or omissions on the part of a carer (Hobbs 2003:. 62–63).*

At the beginning of the year 2006, UNICEF reports that in the rich countries of the world an estimated number of 3500 children die every year as a result of child abuse and neglect. In Germany, an average of 2 children die every week just as in England, 3 in France, 4 in Japan and 27 in the United States of America. In Nigeria the number is much higher. Children under the age of 1 year are particularly at risk.

Since the 1970s, the number of children dying as a direct result of child abuse has slightly gone down in 14 out of 23 industrialised countries. UNICEF attributes this to ever-growing public sensitivity and awareness, expanded and better organised prevention and protection programmes, and above all, the progress made sofar in emergency medical services. Let us not forget that the focus here is on the number of children who die as a direct or even indirect result of child abuse. UNICEF, however, underscores the fact that cases of actual child abuse not leading to death are ever on the increase. The actual incidence of child abuse from a physical viewpoint (physical punishment) is the real concern of the present ethnographic research project.

It is of little help to argue as if there could be a vivid distinction between physical child abuse and physical punishment. One of the most important questions for the present research concerns the role of culture in domestic circles. The role of culture in shaping childrearing practices is so fundamental that it permeates several aspects of parenting norms. It has nothing to do with cultural relativistic view which tends to be

amplified by some to provide cultural justification for unabated physical child abuse. Neither culture nor any other factor is considered in this work as a rational reason whatsoever for any manner of physical child abuse. Research findings indicate that the phenomenon of physical child abuse could be everyone else's sickness. The important question is: how do we position ourselves in the face of such social problem. What kind of response could be appropriate? Physical punishment may not be about culture, but it has something to do with culture. This is part of the driving incentive behind the current ethnographic research endeavour – how does cultural influence on the use of physical punishment play out on the relationship between family structure and physical child abuse in Igboland? To put it more succinctly: What are the effects of family structure on the phenomenon of physical child abuse in Igboland? The problem posed by divergent cultural interpretations of issues surrounding children motivated the United Nations many years ago to seek a kind of common ground that will help safeguard and protect children across cultures. Child development programmes in Igboland are deeply rooted in cultural practices and convictions showcased by Igbo families, irrespective of structure and status.

In Igboland, physical child abuse would hardly be getting serious attention, as it is today, were it not to be supported, informed and encouraged by other entrenched cultural dynamics. One of such cultural dynamics, that is vital for this research work, is the practice of physical (corporal) punishment in rearing children. In some cultures, severe physical punishment has been considered as a necessary ingrient for maintaining discipline and inculcating other societal values and skills. This is the case in Igboland, where such a practice has been a long-aged component of childrearing habits and processes. Igbo culture, in particular, considers *severe* physical punishment as an *excellent* corrective measure which aims at *helping* children to learn approved societal values and customary codes needed for acquiring responsible membership within the society (Tzeng 1991: 3). This long-aged practice which lies at the heart of Igbo understanding of discipline vis-à-vis childrearing will be considered severally in course of the current research work. It is not as though physical punishment is the only factor aggravating physical child abuse in Igboland. There are other causes such as economic hardships, child labour (hawking activities), the definition of a child, the conception of a person/hood, family structure, inappropriate expectations on both sides (parents and children), etc. in Igbo culture. However,

maltreatment in the form of physical punishment accounts for more than half of the reported cases. It is a major factor and it translates more often than not into one kind of physical child abuse or the other. Other contributing factors do not necessarily translate immediately into PCA – a lot depends on the nature and intensity of the posited action. Parents who employ physical punishment depend most often on the use of force for "effective punishing exercise".

Some reported cases of physical punishment will convince the reader of the overriding tendency in this connection. At Enugu, a mistress was so enraged that she poured boiling water on her househelp after physically insulting the latter. Just for stealing bread from the fridge, another househelp was burnt with a pressing iron on the back. Another mistress chained her househelp to the railing for many days without food. In the same city, one master beat up his apprentice with iron rod for stealing petty things (Odigie 2000: 242). These examples could be summed up through the observation of Newell in his introductory remarks on human rights and physical punishment. He writes:

> *Corporal punishment is a direct assault on the human dignity of the child and a direct invasion of the child's physical integrity (2011: 9).*

The nature of the above reported cases suggests that physical punishment is accompanied frequently by the use of force. It is widespread among several social and ethnic groups. And the measure of force used is sometimes out of proportion resulting very often in serious injuries. Many parents and guardians who endulge in the use of corporal punishment aim at disciplining the children, at least theoretically. But one can easily see that the nature of the cases presented above depicts rather punishment borne out of profound anger. In this regard, one can hardly equate discipline with punishment. Disciplining somebody does not mean punishing him. As Macauley (1979) argues, discipline is not synonymous with punishment. Discipline is the control one gains by enforcing obedience, on the one hand, and on the other, punishment is a penalty inflicted on the other which must not involve pain (cited in Mudiare 2000: p. 144). Mudiare also agrees that in Nigerian culture pain is always involved in physical punishment. I will go a step further than Macauley in arguing that discipline should not be gained through *enforced obedience*. Discipline ought to be gained rather by persuasion and rational appeal to the conscience of children. This will not only legitimize parental demand for discipline, but also it will transform the ac-

quisition of it into something desirable and worthwhile for proper up-bringing of children. Effort should be focused on helping children to acquire rather than comply to laudable patterns of behaviour. Thinking along the same line, Feshback (1980: 57) insists that it is much better to urge parents not to use corporal punishment than to empower them to differentiate between socially acceptable and socially unacceptable in-fliction of pain. Presenting their research findings on physical punish-ment of children, Ellimana and Lynch underscore some striking ef-fects of phyiscal punishment on the overall development of the child. They write:

> The effects of physical punishment on behaviour and development, and links with aggression, mental health problems, child abuse, and so forth are so interrelated in such a complex manner with so many potential causes that the contribution of physical punishment may seem impossible to unpick. Furthermore, because corporal punish-ment of children is so common it is hard to identify control groups of non-smackers (2000: 2).

The answer to the question of whether the intended discipline of the child is achieved, remains a topic for debate. The answer is up in the air because children do not perform best under duress. Thus, while they may comply to the demands of parents in the face of (physical) punish-ment whichever shape that might take, they do not necessarily learn the desired good behaviour. Most often children comply to the desired good behaviour in the event of a continuous threat of the use of corpo-ral punishment. Frankly speaking, it is unimaginable that most parents would willingly bargain for such continuous appeal to the use of force which does not fundamentally characterize the loving-warming atmos-phere associated with families. That being said, there are grounds to suggest that the overall consequences of corporal punishment on child's development appear to deserve thoroughgoing scrutiny. Once again, El-limana and Lynch confirm what many have long known, that:

> The use of corporal punishment is associated with significant incre-ases in physical abuse, long term antisocial behaviour, and later as an adult the abuse of a partner or child, as well as significant decre-ases in beneficial outcomes including moral internalisation, consci-ence, and empathy (2).

When moral internalisation, conscience and empathy decrease, it reduces the effectiveness of desired behaviour originally imposed through physical punishment. This is what the above authors refer to as "an-in-built risk of escalation", maintaining that, physical punishment of children appears to be a universal phenomenon compelling researchers and others to view child abuse as something other people do (3). In other words, people consciously prefer not to recognise corporal punishment as explicit child abuse, for many reasons. Hence, the practice remains in vogue, being as aggressive as ever in some quarters in cultures across the world. What seems to emerge gradually on the social landscape is the undiminishing negative impact of physical punishment on the overall development of the child in general, and on physical child abuse, in particular. The cultural force behind the practice in Igboland is very strong. In some quarters, discussions on physical punishment and physical child abuse can easily turn poignant generating fertile ground for noisy arguments. For example, this is how one Nigerian born German academician reacted to the research findings, in an ad hominem manner.

### *Cultural sensitivity and Ad hominem approach*[1]
Cultural issues are sometimes powerful and sensitive that they command unreflected loyalty from members of the group. The use of physical punishment in Igboland appears to be one of such sensitive cultural issues. On reading the research findings concerning the culture of physical punishment, one Igbo scholar responded in the following manner:

> *Your reporting of the Nigerian situation is critically unballanced. Is the act of flogging a child peculiar to Igbo culture? Have not the Europeans and other people be doing it until recently, when law forbids it? The residue of historical anomaly cannot be accredited as a way of life to a people who is struggling to overcome the same like every other people is doing (Bremen, October 2011).*

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1    Ad hominem fallacy occurs when somebody in responding to a question or an opinion appeals to one's prejudices and special interests, rather than to facts and reason. That is, when somebody accuses the other person of doing the same thing. It smacks of uninformed approach to issues. It normally defies known logical rules of engagement.

The researcher is not in anyway questioning the opinion nor its credibility. The opinion is only presented here to underscore the mindset of some Igbo elites with reference to the point at issue. This indicates how sensitive the matter is for the Igbo. Ofcourse, the researcher is in no way implying that flogging a child is peculiar to Igbo culture. Nor is there any attempt to exonerate the Europeans from the same practice in their recent past history. Only, the Europeans have concertedly succeeded at different levels in baning such practice through laws, at least theoretically. The so-called Swedish controversy was born in 1979 when the country banned all forms of physical punishment. The consequences of the ban have been the subject of much debate and misinformation (Ellimana and Lynch 2000: 2). Furthermore, there is no intention whatsoever to accredit the historical anomaly as a way of life to the Igbo. There is no accreditation, rather research findings indicate that many Igbo see it as such; a way of rearing children, a way of "doing it" with regard to bringing up children. There is data to substantiate this view and the Igbo appear not to be struggling to overcome it. That is why it still remains a dominant aggravating factor for physical child abuse, which is the main concern of this ethnographic research. The concern of the researcher is to present the research findings unadulterated to the reader. The way people think about certain held beliefs is important especially in the context of childrearing practices, given that most people act out of convictions even when they are not able to rationally explain their actions. Thus, the personal history, personality style, the ability to nurture and assist the child's developmental progress, the beliefs, convictions and the psychology of parents and caregivers have direct link to the welfare of the child in an interactive environment. Giardino et al. argue as follows:

> *A child's development builds upon interactions with people in his or her environment. Environments that do not provide positive, nurturing interactions may impair the child's accomplishments in a wide range of psychomotor, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional capacities (see Wissow 1990; Liebert & Wicks-Nelson 1981; Stroufe & Rutter 1984; cited in Giardino et al. 1997: 17–18).*

The use of corporal punishment in childrearing is practised by overwhelming number of Nigerian parents and caregivers. Presenting his situation analysis of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, Ebigbo argues, that many people are aware of child abuse in the country and that many

Nigerians prefer physical punishment to other forms of corrective measures. According to him:

> *26% believe that physical punishment is the best way to deal with a child who misbehaves while 48% believe that a child could get spoilt without physical punishment. 79% sometimes beat or slap their children if they misbehaved. 68% use cane, 18% use hand and 4% use belt while beating their children while 34% admit that shouting at a child is good for his training. Indeed up to 25% believe that physical punishment must hurt to be effective. 76% acknowledge that a parent is being abusive if he/she injures the child during beating (1986: 288).*

The author finally laments the use of physical punishment, pointing out that, it does not always bring about a change to the desired behaviour. Rather it generates hatred between parents and children destroying in effect the possibility of unconditional loving relationship. The above data dispels any doubt as to the massive use of physical punishment not just in Igboland, but in the country as a whole. Unusually striking is the percentage of people who believe that physical punishment "must hurt to be effective" as well as the number that beats and slaps children. The 76% that consider physical punishment as abusive only when injuries are involved is an index of the profound effort by people to situate abuse in another logical framework. At this juncture, the pertinent question is: must parents injure a child in order for their behaviour to qualify as abusive?

### Injury and abusive behaviour

It is not surprising that a high percentage of parents and caregivers seek to emasculate physical punishment, by introducing the dimension of injury as a necessary condition for the occurrence of physical child abuse. The perspective is scientifically flawed, given that all injuries do not flow from abusive practices. In effect, the view seems to confine and define child abuse from the viewpoint of residual outcome of antecedent actions. In other words, the actual action of punishing the child is no longer crucial in characterising and labelling the behaviour of parents, rather the "collateral effect" becomes the defining factor. A similar view is maintained by Sierra Leonian Families studied by Haji-Kella (2009) in United Kingdom. One of his informants responded in the following manner:

> *Physical abuse is when you go to extreme of punishing your child, such as causing harm, which includes burning of fingers and using hot pepper in the eyes when they steal from you (41).*

As we shall see shortly, abuse, as a concept, is one of the most difficult to define. Scholars are so divided as to what could be the best definition of abuse and child abuse. Though, there are many definitions out there, no one has argued convincingly that abusive actions derive their meaning from concomittant effects of antecedent actions. There are several abusive actions which do not necessarily result in physical injuries. An ample example is when parents/caregivers behave invectively toward children. Children do not necessarily need to be injured before they are said to have been abused. Neither do abusive actions derive their force and meaning solely from inflicted injuries.

The intention of the acting agent, the nature of the posited action, its intensity, the place of execution and the timing – all contribute in varying degrees in determining whether an action is abusive or not (I will delve more into this later on). Therefore, defining physical child abuse from the point of view of *extreme injury* is fraught with problems. It leaves out unfairly thousands of children who suffer psychological, emotional and physical abuse without physical injuries. Making his case for the seriousness of emotional abuse, Hall writes:

> *Emotional abuse is probably the most difficult form of child abuse for any Professional to recognize because there are no obvious physical signs and the child does not usually say anything to any one which might draw attention to his difficulties. … It has long been recognized that emotional abuse is commonly found in conjunction with most forms of child abuse … (2006: 83).*

In addition to emotional abuse, sexual abuse is another perfect example of child abuse that could go without visible physical injury. Ellimana and Lynchb define physical punishment as:

> *physical force with the intention of causing the child to experience pain but not injury, for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behaviour (2000: cited in Debelle 2006: 39).*

Furthermore, the perspective of injury with enduring physical signs has also theoretical implication for childrearing practices. Scholars would

have to redefine their theoretical persuasion and find new instrument for identifying the incident of child abuse. Such an unfounded revolutionary approach to our studies will not only be misguided intervention, but also create linguistic problems of unimaginable proportions. Perhaps, a more modest approach to the view of *extreme injury* would seek to establish whether there is link between culture and the use of physical punishment – a prelude to physical child abuse.

### Physical child abuse and physical punishment: any cultural connection?

Physical child abuse is thought of as being present in most cultures, tribes and socioeconomic groups. There are culturally accepted childrearing practices in one culture which may be viewed differently in another. Though childrearing practices are culture-based, they may not *ipso facto* be immuned from qualified or profound abusive tendencies. In most cases, disciplinary methods employed in different African cultures aim *primarily* at maintaining role and social order (Graham 2002; Wilson-Oyelaran 1989 cited in Haji-Kella 2009: 24). Attempt to further our insight into the relationship between the concepts named above would require the knowledge of how a given culture defines or interprets both phenomena: physical child abuse and physical punishment. In a bid to offer some clarity in this regard, Korbin (1982, cited in Bannon et al. 2006) advanced the so-called three levels of cultural consideration. That is, three dimensional framework for formulating cultural relevant definitions of child abuse. The first consideration involves accepted modes of behaviour viewed as favourable in one culture but interpretted as abusive in another. Cultural conflict is highly probable here. The second consideration involves the criteria through which given culture pinsdown behaviours which are deemed as being unconventional or out of order (abusive). Though definitions of child abuse differ across cultures, each culture has certain mechanisms in place for identifying anormalies. This is the key to possible definitions within a given culture. The third consideration pertains to possible infra-structural conditions (e.g. socioeconomic hardships – social and material difficulties) which automatically generate abuse as a result of the unfavourable social reality. With regard to this, parents behaviour become irrelevant to the incident of child abuse. As compelling as these considerations may appear, the question of whether physical child abuse can be motivated through cultural practices remains controversial.

Haji-kella is of the view that, there is "little evidence that suggests physical punishment is culturally accepted" in Sierra Leone (2009: 25). He identifies "pinning", smacking, slapping on the checks, etc. as the most common forms of physical punishment among the locals. Scholars like Fontes (2005); Levinson (1989); Owusu-Bempah (2005) cited in Haji-Kella), argue that similar forms of physical punishment are found in Chinese, African Americans and Carribean cultures. Levinson describes physical punishment as the most culturally condoned violence toward children not just in the United States of America, but also across many other cultures of the world. In his analysis, Robinson (2007) ( cited in Haji-Kella 2009: 26) differentiates between authoritative and permissive parents with regard to childrearing practices. He argues that authoritative parents not only value and demand obedience, they also command authority, independence and individuality, holding obstinately to severe corrective measures when rules are broken. On the other hand, permissive parents provide assistance and guidance without rigidly regulating every step of the entire process creating proper free social environment for child's development.

Scholars like, (Philip & Anderson 2003; Waterhouse et al. 1993; Grogan-Kaylor 2004 – cited in Haji-Kella) advance what I call the inconsistency arguments. Namely, they argue that inconsistency in childrearing styles by parents influence more the phenomenon of physical child abuse rather than culturally motivated practices. In other words, childrearing practices that are culture-specific do not necessarily lead to violence against children. Grogan-Kaylor even went further to deny that corporal punishment is in anyway culturally induced. He insists that neither race nor ethnicity constitutes a causal factor for physical punishment or antisocial behaviour. Causal factors, in his opinion, has to do more with poverty, psychological pressures and related issues. In view of the foregone arguments and insights, Haji-Kella came to the following conclusion:

> It is therefore important to argue that culture is by no means a tool to normalise behaviours such as child physical abuse through physical punishment, and that, it probably has little or no relevant bearing as a causational factor (Haji-Kella 2009: 27).

The outcome of the ethnographic studies among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, as we shall see later, does not support in part both Grogan-Kaylor and Haji-Kella's conclusion. The latter prepared the ground for his

conclusion in his view that, there is not much evidence to suggest that physical punishment is culturally accepted by Sierra Leonians. First and foremost, we need to distinguish between "what" is culturally accepted and "what" is culturally allowed (or tenable). Anthropology is about real issues concerning people in their everyday living. There are social behaviours which may be expressly culturally *allowed* and at the sametime (publicly) culturally *unacceptable* due to some other superimposed neo-social values and geopolitical interests or/and pressures. It may sound like a paradox, but, this is the nature of some sociocultural realities which, in themselves are larger than logic. Before furthering our analysis, let us consider the word "culture" – what is meant by it in our context? Writing on culture and ethnicity, Debelle borrows from the ideas of Hillier and Kelleher (1996) and describes culture as being:

> *Characterized by the behavior and attitudes of a social group. It can be defined minimally as a set of beliefs and ideas that **a group draws on to identify and manage the problems of their everyday lives** (2006: 35, emphasis is mine).*

Culture has to do with a collection of ethos, convictions, skills, habits and beliefs about life and ways of overcoming daily challenges. Culture, in this sense, does not always stand the test of time in terms of its logical consistency. In Igboland, the *Osu Caste system*[2] is (privately) cul-

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2    *Osu* caste is a system of cult slavery, in which a slave is dedicated to the service of the master's deity. The descendants of such a slave are called *Osu*. *Osu* could be dedicated by an individual, extended family or a lineage. They are despised and discriminated against by the entire community. Indeed, the *Osu* system is the greatest contradiction to Igbo egalitarian ideology which considers everyone equal before the Igbo laws and customs. Writing on the difficult situation *Osu* people find themselves, Uchendu notes: "*Osu* are a people with status dilemma: a people hated and despised yet indispensable in their ritual roles; a people whose achievements are spurned by a society which is aggressively achievement-oriented" (2004: 89). In line with its traditions and practices, *Osu* appears to essentially have a religious beginning, originating probably from the Owerri-Okigwi area. They are found in most parts of Igboland including northeastern Igbo. They are allowed to participate in several sociocultural activities, but intermarriages are strictly forbidden. There is superstitious belief that if *Osu* marries none *Osu*, it leads to a 'conterminated union' which in turn arouses the anger of the deity. This leads to some dire consequences in the form of barrenness and ultimate death of the couple. Ironically, *Osu* girls are very beautiful but getting spouses for conjugal living is sometimes an uphill task.

turally allowed and practised (and everyone is aware of it), but publicly the same practice is repudiated, castigated and disowned. The same could be said of the "rape culture" in South Africa, India and Pakisthan – a practice that could not entirely be detached from the culture, as it were. Certainly, 'culture is by no means a tool to normalise behaviours such as physical child abuse through physical punishment', but, culture can and does provide the framework or repertoire of behaviour and attitudes from which a social group draws to identify and manage the problems of childrearing in everyday life. It is somewhat over-simplified approach to stripe culture of any relevant bearing to physical child abuse in view of physical punishment because it is no causational factor. Culture can hardly qualify as a causational factor. Even in a "murderous culture", culture does not necessarily cause people to act as alcohol would stupefy a driver on the highway. It does not cause people to employ physical punishment as childrearing method or abuse their children. Culture, however, provides the grounds for emotional, psychological and sociocultural justification for using such a strategy in solving childrearing anormalies. To the extent to which cultural appeal and drive help people to decide for certain methods in solving any socioeconomic problems, to that extent culture could be said to be playing relevant and empowering role. It is therefore relevant in providing the sense of appeal and justification which help a given group to act in particular ways.

Considered in this perspective, culture could be said to be an important factor in shaping the decisions and choices a cultural group makes concerning certain practices in several aspects of daily living, including childrearing habits. Developing his philosophy on the reduction of violence at different levels and aspects of physical child abuse, Gil insists on proper measures that will tackle what he calls the "culturally determined core of the phenomenon" (1973: 148).

Furthermore, the author drives his point home by underscoring the contribution of culture toward both the philosophy of childreaing and its practice in the United States. He writes:

> *A key element to understanding physical abuse of children in the United States seems to be that the context of child-rearing does not exclude the use of pyhsical force toward children by parents and others responsible for their socialization. Rather, American culture encourages in subtle, and at times not so subtle, ways the use of "a certain measure" of physical force in rearing children in order to*

*modify their inherently nonsocial inclinations. This cultural tendency can be noted in child-rearing practices of most segments of American society. It is supported in various ways by communications disseminated by the press, radio, and television, and by popular and professional publications (134).*

Gil goes on to advocate for systematic educational programmes, introduction of clear-cut cultural prohibitions and legal sanctions geard toward reducing the use of physical punishment in childrearing practices with the overall goal of checking physical child abuse (141). An indication that culture has got a vital role to play not just at the periphery of the phenomenon. It has gotten a link to the very heart of the social anormaly. Searching for explanations for child abuse some scholars (Belsky 1980; Garbarino 1977; Wilson-Oyelaran 1989, cited in Bannon and Carter 2003) worked hard to weave into a framework the findings of earlier perspectives maintaining unwaveringly that,

> *Child abuse can only be understood if it is analysed from a perspective that incorporates the previously disparate levels of analysis, namely the individual, the family, the social environment, and the cultural milieu, and also examines the dynamic interactions both between and within each level (35).*

Contrary to what Haji-Kella holds about the Sierra Leonians, Igboland accepts physical punishment culturally. Consequently, parents and caregivers consider the use of such childrearing practice as culturally justified. To establish the legitimacy of such a practice some appeal to religious roots of punishment presenting its application as though it is a response to divine obligation in training the child. Even Greven (1990) who explored the religious roots of punishment and the psychological impact of physical abuse admits that there exits considerable concern. He insists that

> *Both religious justifications and secular rationale for punishment must be reckoned with and understood before we can begin to grapple with some of the virtually infinite consequences of such physical punishments for ourselves and for all others who have experienced such forms of domestic and public violence. Given … such experiences … of suffering and hurt and harm, it should not be too surprising to discover that hardly any aspect of our psyches is free from the imprinting of coercion, violence, and pain (7).*