



THE HURRIED CHILD SYNDROME IN NIGERIA

A Perception Survey

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3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The hurried child syndrome is a growing phenomenon in Nigeria. Children are subjected to a fast-paced, overscheduled lifestyle that leaves them with little time for relaxation, play, and socialization. This report examines the prevalence and effects of the hurried child syndrome in Nigeria, with a focus on how parenting practices may contribute to this phenomenon. A mixed-method approach was employed using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The study results show that the hurried child syndrome is prevalent in Nigeria, and it is caused by various factors, including parental pressure, societal expectations, and the desire for children to excel in all areas of life. The negative effects of the hurried child syndrome on children's physical and mental health include academic burnout, anxiety, depression, and poor social skills. The report suggests that parenting practices in Nigeria need to change to ensure that children have adequate time for relaxation, play, and socialization.

4. INTRODUCTION

The hurried child syndrome is a phenomenon in which children are subjected to a fast-paced, overscheduled lifestyle that leaves little time for relaxation, play, and socialization¹. Children who experience this syndrome may feel overwhelmed, stressed, and pressured to succeed in all aspects of their lives, including academics, extracurricular activities, and social interactions. The hurried child syndrome can have negative impacts on children's physical and mental health, as well as their overall development.

While there is limited research on the prevalence of the hurried child syndrome in Nigeria, it is believed to be a growing concern among parents and educators. In recent years, there has been a trend towards a more competitive educational system, which places significant pressure on children to excel academically. This pressure, combined with the influence of technology and social media, has contributed to increased overscheduling and decreased unstructured playtime for children in Nigeria.

This report examines the prevalence and effects of the hurried child syndrome in Nigeria, focusing on how parenting practices may contribute to this phenomenon. The report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the hurried child syndrome and its impact

¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/parenting/the-hurried-child-syndrome/articleshow/20393458.cms>

on children's physical and mental health and overall development. The scope of the report includes a review of relevant literature on the topic and an analysis of data collected from Nigerian parents and educators to identify trends and patterns related to the hurried child syndrome.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The hurried child syndrome is a term often used to describe a condition where children are overburdened with numerous activities, leading to excessive stress and anxiety. This syndrome is characterized by a fast-paced lifestyle where children are constantly pushed to achieve academic, social, and athletic goals. According to Kagan and Kagan (2020), the hurried child syndrome refers to a state of psychological and emotional distress caused by excessive pressure on children to excel in various areas of life, including academics, sports, and social activities.

The hurried child syndrome is caused by various factors, including parental pressure, societal expectations, and the desire for children to excel in all areas of life. According to Umar and Yakasai (2021), the pressure to succeed academically and socially is one of the primary causes of the hurried child syndrome in Nigeria. Other factors include parental over-involvement in their children's lives, peer pressure, and the desire to keep up with societal expectations.

The hurried child syndrome has several adverse effects on children, including academic burnout, anxiety, depression, and poor social skills. According to Adebayo and Ogunleye (2021), children with the hurried child syndrome are more likely to suffer from mental health issues due to the excessive pressure placed on them to succeed. They are also more likely to experience academic burnout, leading to poor academic performance.

The parenting practices of Nigerian parents have been identified as a significant contributor to the hurried child syndrome. According to Oyeyemi and Olajide (2021), many Nigerian parents have high expectations for their children and are willing to go to great lengths to ensure that their children succeed. However, this often leads to the hurried child syndrome, as children are constantly pushed to excel in various areas of life.

The hurried child syndrome is prevalent in Nigeria, and recent studies suggest it is rising. According to Umar and Yakasai (2021), many Nigerian parents have high expectations for their children and are willing to go to great lengths to ensure that their children succeed. This has led to an increase in the number of children suffering from the hurried child syndrome. Additionally, the competitive nature of the Nigerian educational system has also contributed to the prevalence of the hurried child syndrome in Nigeria.

6. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was employed for this study, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The study aimed to investigate the prevalence of the hurried child syndrome among Nigerian parents.

Quantitative data was collected using a cross-sectional survey that was accessible to Nigerian parents online. A total of 436 parents completed the survey, which consisted of 25 items designed to measure the prevalence of the hurried child syndrome. The survey was available for a period of two months and was completed across 21 states in Nigeria, including those in diaspora. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the survey, and the value obtained was $\alpha = 0.820$, indicating high reliability.

In addition to the survey, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with a subsample of parents who completed the survey. The interviews were designed to provide more detailed insights into the experiences and perceptions of parents regarding the hurried child syndrome. The interviews were conducted with a total of 30 parents.

The data collected from the survey and the in-depth interviews were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

7. RESULTS

8.1 Respondents Demography

The assessment data analyzed represents a diverse group of mostly married, co-parenting individuals, with a higher proportion of female respondents in their late 20s to early 30s and mostly working in paid or self-employment. Respondents from various locations in Nigeria responded to the online survey, with Lagos having the highest count at 46%, followed by Abuja at 9%.

The majority of the respondents identified as female, accounting for 75% of the total count, while 24% identified as male, and 1% preferred not to say.

Most respondents were married, accounting for 79%, while 15% were single, 3% were separated, 2% were divorced, and 1% were widowed. Regarding parenting status, most respondents were co-parenting, accounting 89% of the total count, while 7% were single parents, and 3% were separate parenting. There were no respondents who did not have parenting responsibilities.

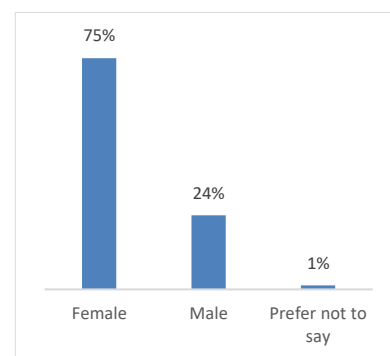


Figure 1 Gender status of respondents

for

Regarding employment type, 50% of the respondents were in paid employment, 46% were self-employed, and 5% were unemployed. There were no respondents who did not fall into any of these categories.

8.2 Contributing factors

One of the major factors contributing to the hurried child syndrome is the pressure for academic achievement. According to the data, nearly 24% of females, 7% of males, and 0.31% of respondents who preferred not to say agreed that academic pressure is a major factor

"Schools need to shift their focus from grades to holistic learning, incorporating extracurricular activities and real-life experiences into their curriculum." An Education

influencing the hurriedness of children in the present day.

Additionally, children who grow up too fast may experience emotional distress due to conflict caused by hurrying. The data shows that 26% of females, 8% of males, and 0% of respondents who preferred not to say agreed that this is the case. This further confirms an interview respondent's statement: *"Hurrying children to take on adult responsibilities can cause regression, anxiety, truancy, rebellion, substance abuse, and depression"*.

This closely correlates with the quantitative findings that suggest that it leaves them unprepared for the challenges of adolescence, with more female respondents (22%)

"Children should be allowed to grow normally and go through the learning process at their own pace." – A Professor in

"Parents should let children have their childhood and not skip any stage of the learning process." – A Preschool Teacher

agreeing than male respondents (15%).

The data also shows that children who bear parental responsibilities in single- and two-parent households may experience stress. For example, 27% of females, 12% of males, and 1% of respondents who preferred not to say agreed that in single-parent households, children are stressed because of their parental responsibilities. Meanwhile, 19% of females, 6% of males, and 1% of respondents who preferred not to say agree that children in both-parent households are stressed because of their parental responsibilities. These findings underscore the need for policymakers and practitioners to support parents in managing their responsibilities effectively and reducing the burden on their children.

The qualitative data from the interviews clearly shows that there is a need to increase awareness about the negative consequences of Hurried Child Syndrome among parents, educators, and society at large. Similarly, an educationist respondent believed that everyone knows the problem of the hurried child syndrome, but no one is doing anything to solve it. Therefore, it is crucial to educate parents and society about the potential harm of pushing children too hard too soon, both academically and emotionally and socially.

It is clear from the qualitative data that parental education is essential to prevent Hurried Child Syndrome. The interview findings showed that the major contributing factors to this syndrome are unfulfilled parental desires, unsecured parents who want to give everything to their child, and societal competition. Therefore, parents need to be educated about prioritizing their children's overall development, not just academics, and allowing children to grow at their own pace. A preschool teacher also advises parents to let children have their childhood and not skip any learning stage.

The qualitative data also suggests that education system reform is necessary to prevent Hurried Child Syndrome. A respondent believed that the hurried child syndrome is a result of a flawed education system that prioritizes grades over learning. He thinks that schools need to shift their focus from grades to holistic learning, incorporating extracurricular activities and real-life experiences into their curriculum. Another respondent recommends that schools prioritize children's natural growth and development, rather than pushing them to excel at the cost of their mental and emotional health. Another suggest that stakeholders in the education sector should reassess the age at which children are put into classes and that the government should enforce policies to prevent hurrying children academically. Therefore, education system reform that prioritizes holistic learning and child development is essential to prevent Hurried Child Syndrome.

8.3 Impact of the School System and Media on the Hurried Child Syndrome

The features of the school system were found to force children to deal with adult issues, causing stress and pressures to grow up fast. Bullying is also encouraged when a child is hurried to fit into an inappropriate age, grade category, or class level. At the same time, a boring school system increases the stress experienced by children.

The media was found to create stress for children by providing them with information too fast or information beyond their intellectual or emotional states. When children are glued to the media, they tend to engage in less physical activity that brings pleasure (play). Further findings from the quantitative survey on the media's impact on children showed that it provide information beyond their intellectual or emotional states (female: 16%, male: 11%). However, female respondents (15%) agreed more than male respondents (10%) that children engaging in less physical activity due to excessive media consumption can cause stress and mental health problems.

Regarding the lack of spaces for physical play and extracurricular activities in schools, the survey findings suggest that both private and public schools in Nigeria face this issue. More female respondents agreed that there are no spaces for physical play and extracurricular activities in both private and public schools than male respondents. In the case of hurrying a child, the survey results indicate that it can lead to school burnout, with more female respondents (20%) agreeing than male respondents (13%).

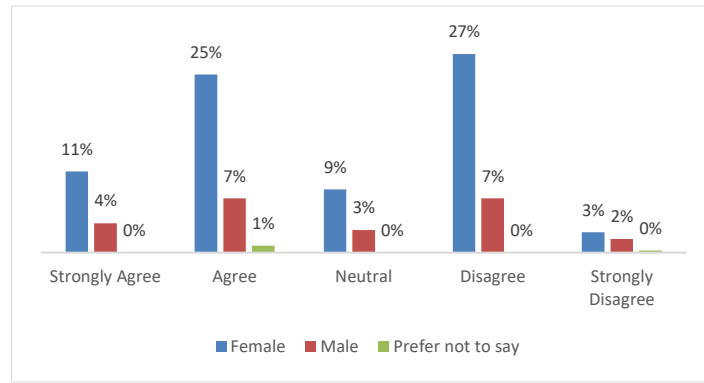


Figure 2 There are no spaces for physical play and extracurricular activities in private schools in Nigeria.

and

8.4 Importance of Parental Presence and Friendships in Childhood

Findings from the assessment showed that quarrelling among parents can cause stress and anxiety to children, as it was agreed upon by 21% of female respondents and 10% of male respondents. Similarly, 27% of female and 11% of male respondents agreed that too much separation from parents could be emotionally overwhelming for children.

Moreover, divorce can be stressful and confusing for children, forcing them to deal with separations that should have occurred later in life, according to 29% of female and 18% of male respondents.

The school system was also highlighted as a stress factor for children, as 29% of female and 16% of male respondents agreed it forces them to deal with adult issues, causing stress and pressure to grow up fast.

In addition, the dataset shows that friendships during childhood and adolescence are essential for building competencies needed in adulthood, according to 39% of female respondents and 28% of male respondents. Interview findings also showed that the hurried child syndrome harms children, leading to stress, anxiety, and poor mental health.

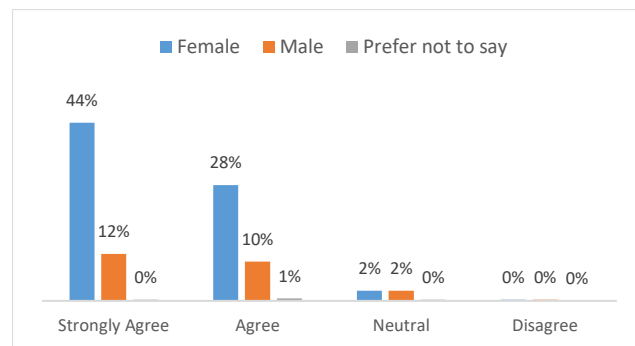


Figure 3 Count of Friendships during childhood and adolescence are essential for building competencies needed in adulthood (e.g., parenting, intimacy in marriage)

Further findings also suggest that it leaves them unprepared for the challenges of adolescence, with more female respondents (22%) agreeing than male respondents (15%). The survey also indicates that friendships during childhood and adolescence are essential for building competencies needed in adulthood (e.g., parenting, intimacy in marriage), with more female respondents (23%) agreeing than male respondents (18%).

The survey also suggests that the most expensive gift can never replace the presence of parents at their child's birthday party, with more female respondents (19%) agreeing than male respondents (13%). The visible symbol of caring and connectedness is more important than material support to a child, with more female respondents (21%) agreeing than male respondents (14%).

The qualitative interviews also showed similar findings. The visible symbol of caring and connectedness is far more important than material support to a child. The qualitative interviews showed that hurried children feel their parents are more committed to their own lives, careers, and friendships than they are to them. It further showed that young people pressured to grow up too fast tend to be more critical of their parents.

"The most expensive gift can never replace the presence of parents at their child's birthday party." **Interview respondent**

It is clear from the qualitative data that parental education is essential to prevent Hurried Child Syndrome. One of the qualitative interview respondents, a counseling psychology expert, defined Hurried Child Syndrome as pushing a child to complete their childhood

"Parents should prioritize their children's natural development and not use their children as a means to achieve unfulfilled desires" **Counseling Psychology Expert**

"Parents should allow their children to go through the natural developmental process to avoid missing out on social relationships and foundational academic knowledge." **25-year-old victim**

phase earlier than expected by using means of control. She believes that the major contributing factors to this syndrome are unfulfilled parental desires, unsecured parents who want to give everything to their children, and societal competition.

Therefore, parents need to be educated about prioritizing their children's overall development, not just academics, and allowing children to grow at their own pace. This was similar to a preschool teacher and consultant on early childhood education response who also advises parents to let children have their childhood and not to skip any stage of the learning process.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study exclusively examined Nigerian parents with the necessary education and access to complete the survey online, which restricts the applicability of the results to other groups, including rural parents.
- The sample size for the in-depth interviews was small and may not fully represent the diversity of experiences among Nigerian parents.
- The study did not assess the long-term effects of the hurried child syndrome on children's development.

9. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings suggest that Hurried Child Syndrome is a prevalent issue in Nigeria, and urgent action is needed to prevent its negative consequences. Policymakers, practitioners, educators, and parents must work together to ensure that children are not rushed into adulthood and are allowed to grow at their own pace. Prioritizing children's overall development and well-being should be the main goal of all stakeholders involved in child development.

10. RECOMMENDATION

- **Increase awareness:** There is a need for increased awareness about the hurried child syndrome among parents and educators in Nigeria. This can be achieved through public campaigns, workshops, and training sessions for parents and educators.
- **Promote unstructured play:** Parents and educators should encourage unstructured playtime for children. This will allow them to relax, recharge, and improve their physical and mental health.
- **Encourage balanced lifestyles:** Parents and educators should encourage children to have a balanced lifestyle, including academic, social, and physical activities. This will prevent them from being overscheduled and reduce the pressure to succeed in all areas of life.
- **Set realistic expectations:** Parents should set realistic expectations for their children and avoid putting undue pressure on them to succeed academically and socially. This will reduce the likelihood of hurried child syndrome.
- **Foster positive parenting practices:** Parents should adopt positive parenting practices that promote children's self-esteem and resilience. This includes listening to their children, showing empathy, and providing emotional support.
- **Address the competitive nature of the educational system:** There is a need to address the competitive nature of the educational system in Nigeria. This can be achieved through reforms that focus on the overall development of the child rather than just academic excellence.
- **Increase research:** There is a need for increased research on the hurried child syndrome in Nigeria. This will provide more insights into the causes and effects of the syndrome, as well as the most effective strategies for addressing it.

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