



## The Plight of the Child in Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist* and John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Achakasara*

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the ordeal of the Victorian English and Postcolonial Cameroonian children through the lenses of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Achakasara*. Child abuse cuts across universality, timelessness, racial and gender constructs. The child in these two societal backgrounds undergoes untold suffering perpetrated by adults and their fellow children. They are exploited for commercial purposes, at the expense of their education and wellbeing. They experience physical assault through undeserved beating under the guise of domestic correction with pending eventualities being psychological trauma. A continuity of intentional abuse consciously impacts the child to view his place of birth and development as a problem. That child sees the streets as a better option. Very high probability abounds that these streets are not suitable for the developmental processes of the child but at that point, his/her actions are shaped by convictions. Dickens and Nkengasong take interest what happens to a child, in their respective societies. They pen with certainty that conventional Victorian England and contemporary Postcolonial Cameroonian societies are fraught with different shades of injustices, jeopardising the future of the younger generations. This paper is vehiculated by the Psychoanalytic theory, with focus on Anna Freud's dimension of Psychoanalysis. Anna Freud is a child psychoanalyst concerned with the upbringing of children. The purpose of this paper is to portray the various abuses experienced by the child as demonstrated in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Nkengasong's *Achakasara*.

**Keywords:** Child, Plight, Victorian England, Postcolonial Cameroon, Psychoanalysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

Children are the most tender, feeble, fragile and beautiful beings. The prosperity and future of a country depends on the wellbeing of its children. This means every human being and society at large have the right to protect her child. When that society comes short of her duties to offer educational, mental, and social protection to the child, then that society has failed. Failure leaves the child disadvantaged and it is a plight. John Tobin intimates that, "The Definition of a Child" defines the child as "every

human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (22)". The *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* defines plight as "a difficult and sad situation". This paper expatiates plight to the suffering, pain and ordeals that the child suffers, in a geographical location or place, which mars his educational, impairs his mental and physical growth and socialisation; their basic rights. A greater part of the Victorian English and Postcolonial Cameroonian societies maltreat their child with intentionality and

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non-intentionality. The Dickensian society was an industrialised one, which directly and indirectly affected the wellbeing of the child expunged in *Oliver Twist*. Nkengasong's Postcolonial Cameroonian society, especially the political capital of the country, is fraught with different shades of injustices; whereby the young are seriously affected by the egoism of the elders, political manipulation of authorities in high places, moral bankruptcy and the vicious cycle of evil continue to jeopardise the younger generation's future. Nkengasong pens this in *Achakasara*.

Diana J. English asserts that child abuse takes various facets. It is manifested through physical torture like, kicking, shaking, stabbing, punching and slapping. Sexual abuse is evident via child rape, pornography and innocence deprivation when sexual images are displayed before him/her. Neglect of intrinsic needs like healthcare, clothing, food and shelter is another facet. That notwithstanding, other abuses like child labour and psycho-emotional abuse abounds.

The *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, edited by Gary R. VandenBos, defines Psychoanalysis is "an approach to the mind, personality, psychological disorders, and psychological treatment ... The hallmark of psychoanalysis is the assumption that much mental activity is unconscious and that, understanding that people require interpreting the unconscious meaning underlying their overt, or manifest, behaviors". This insinuates that originally this theory was a therapy for mental instability and improve on man's understanding of his fellow human. It discourages the judgement and castigation of people's attitude without a comprehensive understanding of the "influence of such unconscious forces as repressed impulses, internal conflicts, and childhood traumas on the mental life and adjustment of the individual" (VandenBos, 2015).

Sigmund Freud, in his attempt at looking for solutions to treat his patients, he gradually developed this mental treatment, which has since been developed into an approach and a framework. Freud's major concern was about the unconscious and the conscious part of the human psyche. Anna Freud, Sigmund's daughter, aligns with Freud's tripartite definition of the mind but insist that other modes of therapy can be employed. James Strachey *et al.*, state that "the division of the psychic into what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premises of psycho-analysis" (13). This division is tripartite; the id, ego and superego.

Statt A. David says, "According to Freud, the id houses the deepest unconscious drives which are most in touch with the biological nature of the body and is one of the three aspects of the personality. The

id is dominated by the pleasure principle and causes problems for the ego when its drives are blocked". The id is the warehouse of all the instinctive drives of man. The id is the reservoir of unconscious instinct and forces of repression. It is beastly, animalistic motivated by pleasure principle. It is the sexual and aggressive tendencies that arise in man and always have the urge to be satisfied, enjoyed and pleased.

The Ego matches the hidden desires of the id with reality. It begins at birth with the first encounters with the universe. The ego learns modification behaviour; controlling those unacceptable id impulses. Its middle role is defined, among the unconscious impulses, the social and personal realities. Synonymously, the ego is the personality, character, self, self-image, self-worth, self-esteem and individuality. Contrary to the id, the ego questions the behaviour and character of man in relation to the social realities. The ego is characterised by it reflective and perceptive mechanisms. David further define that the ego is, "The conscious awareness of oneself ... the ego is that part of the personality closest to external reality which holds the ring between the conscious drives of the pleasure-seeking id, on the one hand, and internalized restrictions of the superego on the other".

The third level of the human mind is known as the superego. The superego dismisses the drives of the id in favour of the societal norms in which humans live. It is the conscience, integrity, sense of propriety, sense of judgement, sense of right and wrong and of morality. Furthermore, the superego, being the superior part of the human mind, judges the intentions and actions of the id in respect to the laws governing that immediate society and the universe at large. It comes in when the ego fails to fulfil its role.

Freud groomed and birthed other psychoanalysts. Anna Freud, Freud's daughter, is another psychoanalyst whose contributions fostered another dimension of Psychoanalysis. Her empirical science is concerned with the child as she is interested in the upbringing and care of the child. She is, thus, the mother of Child Psychoanalysis, influenced by her father's theoretical conceptions and penetrating personal observations, coupled with her interactions with children. She also emphasises on the importance of the pleasure principle and the need to avoid displeasure most often created by the child in a situation of pain and need. Rose Edgcumbe states that Anna Freud purports defence analysis, reiterating on describing the ego as "the seat of observation". She regards the ego as that "part of personality which scans the internal world: thoughts, wishes, feelings and impulses arising from the id, as well as the superego's reactions to these" (11).

Emphasis is laid on the harmony of the structure of the psyche. In her opinion, the id, ego and superego are united when there are no crises. When the superego approves of impulses and wishes, the ego grants them. But when there is conflict, the patient denies free association, ignoring and dismissing the approach. Therefore, it becomes imperative to explore the patient's defences; the ego and superego reactions, when exploring the impulses that trigger these reactions. She, also, demonstrates the concept of transference in children. She purports that, when the child is stuck with impulses, they either transfer these impulses to a safer place or when a safe reception is absent, they repress the emotions internally. Anna Freud had followed her father's footsteps but also imprinted her variations in the sands of time by specialising in child psychoanalysis. As a child psychoanalyst, she has brought about concepts that have evolved the dimensions of Psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis reiterates on the traumatising experiences of the child, giving the child's present behaviour an avenue to be understood as a demonstration of repressed impulses. The theory partitions the human minds into three; the unconscious (id), preconscious (ego) and the conscious (superego). Anna Freud in Child Psychoanalysis holds that children behave the way they do depending on the society's treatment. Societal actions towards these children remain engraved in their psyches and manifested at the appropriate time. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Achakasara* brings to the limelight the various ordeals the Victorian English and Postcolonial Cameroonian children experience.

### Child Labour

Ashhad Ahmad defines child labour as "any work within or outside the purview of the family that threatens the health and mental development of the child by denying him or her fundamental as well as non-fundamental rights" (19). Child labour is, thus, the act of employing children to work in factories or engaging them in other business activities that interfere with their education, endanger their health and security. Eric V. Edmonds summarises that "the phrase 'child labor' conjures images of children chained into factories, sold as slaves, or forced into prostitution (6). UNICEF declares that the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 138 (1973) and 182 (1999) states that child labourers are all "children younger than 12 working in any economic activities, children 12-14 years old engaged in more than light work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour – in which they are enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked, forced into illegal activities or exposed to hazards" (1). A child who does domestic

chores with respect to his/her age is not, therefore, considered as a laboured child. Rather, a child is considered laboured when he/she is economically exploited, either at home or in other institutions. This is in accordance with the facts presented by the International Labour Organisation that differentiates between child work and child labour. The former is ordinary work done by the child as part of the socialisation process, which child labour is considered the exploitation of the child's labour.

Child labour is a timeless problem that affected even the Victorian era. According to Selina Schuster, the Victorian era was ambiguous in the great prosperity and terrible poverty. This ambiguity was portrayed in children. On one hand, children were regarded as little fragile angels that needed to be protected at all cost, but on the other hand, there were high child mortality rate and "child labour was a regular occurrence in the society" (10), as these laboured children provided an opportunity for additional income for poor families and a plus capital for capitalist employers.

Dickens was a victim. At the age of thirteen, he worked at a blackening firm for a little or no wage when his entire family was in prison. He pens these facts in *Oliver Twist*:

*[Oliver was] dispatched to a branch workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of seven pence-halfpenny per small head per week. (17-18)*

Oliver works in this workhouse and in a farm, alongside other children. With twenty or thirty other children in a workhouse, it is proof that child labour in the Victorian society was a common phenomenon. This number of children was in one workhouse and there were many of such work houses in London and in many other British cities. It portrays that uncountable number of children in Victorian England was labourers in various farms and industries.

According to the International Labour Office, 924,406 children in the Middle and North Africa go through child labour. However, West, Central, East and Southern Africa are not excluded. Child labour is rampant in Postcolonial Cameroon. United States Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs in "Cameroon: Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor", presents a statistic of 36.5 percent workable Cameroonian children. Most precisely,

1,749,094 children, between the ages of five to fourteen, work in Cameroon. The department, also, asserts that 34.1 percent of children, between seven and fourteen years, combine school and work. They work as cattle rearers and domestic servants. Some children in the Far North, especially in Maroua town, from the researcher's observation, beg and roam the streets at night. Besides, The International Labour Office further holds that some children in the economic and political capitals of Cameroon engage in drugs and some of them join criminal gangs. Child, sexual exploitation is quite evident in Kribi where tourists are always present. In the North West Region, children are exploited domestically in restaurants and in the agricultural sector. There is also child labour in the South-West Region as children are forced to work in coffee, cocoa, rubber and banana plantations with little or no wages (113-114).

Nkengasong asserts in his interview with Asong Guillian Leke (2018) that his novel was inspired by the ordeals that children undergo in Cameroon. In *Achakasara*, Acha does odd domestic chores like "washing dishes, cleaning the kitchen, sometimes cooking, following instructions or washing her inner wears" (48). Pippie Hugues holds that, "there are certain activities which are considered just and legal to carry out as children attending training programs with maximum supervision, assisting parents at home with manual work, and school-based activities such as manual labour" (14). These activities are fundamental in fostering the developmental processes of the child, enabling moral uprightness and servitude in life. The transformative mechanisms of child work to child labour dwell in the interference of these domestic or school activities in their "ability to attend regular school" (Hugues 14). Child work, also, metamorphoses to child labour based on the number of hours a child puts in and the kinds of domestic work. The young Acha does all these chores; yet, denied the possibility of going to school, even on exam days.

Also, Katika's gang practises child labour. The criminal world resident in the streets make use of these children's services; using them to pickpockets and enrich the gang leaders. Just like Fagin and Sikes in *Oliver Twist* exploit children like Oliver, Artful Dodger and Bates, Katika in *Achakasara* uses Acha, Obodo and four other boys, whose names are not mentioned to earn money and to afford their daily bread. Nkengasong states, "Sshhh!" the Katika hushed the boys. "Who are those to go for food today?" he asked. Four boys owned up. They hurried away ... the four boys returned with plastic bags containing bread, butter, and sardines. Katika shared the food and Acha ate with relish. He wondered

where the loafers had money to buy such a great quantity of bread, sardines and butter" (107). Katika and other adult criminals stay back and send boys into the street at night to steal food in provision stores. They go into darkness, cunningly find their way into the store and carry away the booties. This is motivated by the economic crises that rocked Cameroon. Sarah G. Lynch intimate that, "in the late 1980s oil prices, as well as, world prices for some of Cameroon's agricultural exports declined. Despite policies that have sought to dampen the phenomenon of "Dutch disease," the windfall gains from oil production have distorted economic growth" (8). Economic crises imply poverty for the masses, enhancing high rates of unemployment and underemployment, high rates of rural-urban migration, prevalence of diseases such as malaria and typhoid, and crime as intimated by Oumar and Sama. The hegemonic gang leader sits in the background and commissions these children to steal food. Given that the boys are young, physically small and smartly multidimensional, Kakita exploits this strength to the detriment of the children. The children's "exclusive and privileged place in the society" (Hugues, 11) pertaining to their vulnerability and feebleness, is grossly exploited by the adults and some other children. He uses the boys because they are young and smart to obtain what the leader should have bought, but are naïve to know the repercussions.

#### **Child Sexual Assault and Other Physical Abuses**

Sexual abuse takes place when adults use children for sexual gratification or expose these children to sexual activities. It begins with kissing or caressing. Then, it develops to more intrusive sexual acts like oral sex, vaginal or anal intrusion. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network in "Child Sexual Abuse Factsheet" purports that child sexual abuse can either be direct or indirect. Direct abuse is when there is body contact while with indirect abuse the victimiser stares at the nakedness of the child or making the child to involve in pornographic acts. A sexually violated child (may) experiences nightmares or other sleeping difficulties, portrays a withdrawn attitude, expresses sudden outbursts of anger, anxiety, depression, refusal to be left alone with particular individuals. Dube *et al.*, statistically opine that 20% to 30% females, and 4% to 76% males experience child sexual abuse (1).

Nancy is a prostitute who deals with dangerous men. However, she is a prostitute not by intentionality but forged by deplorable circumstances. Even prostitutes are prone to violations, once consent is absent. Sikes, in his drunken state, desires intimacy with Nancy. With or without her consent, Nancy must comply and to achieve this, he resorts to threats. Sikes knows that according to the society in which they live, the man

has an upper hand and he can sexually abuse Nancy at his convenience, especially as she is a poor street girl. After consuming wine, his libido is high and his quest for sex is void of affection (353).

The Cameroonian society experiences child sexual violation. Online sources, retrieved on 7 July 2017 from Voice of America (VOA) news states that sexual abuse is manifested by teachers, parents and religious authorities. Ironically, they have as duty to transmit morals unto the younger generation, but they perpetrate such hideous acts. According to VOA, Officials in the Ministry of Social Affairs are not in possession of statistics but watchdog organisations have, which is proof that sexual abuse in Cameroon is a big challenge to government authorities in particular and citizens in general. Nkengasong via the lenses of *Achakasara* intimate that servants in domestic homes equally resist sexual abuse from their masters. Following Madam Senze's death, Monsieur Senze seeks to convert his housemaid to a sex partner. He forces his minor housemaid into a sexual relationship. As long as she refuses, every insistence from Monsieur Senze is sexually abusive. Although nothing happens between Monsieur Senze and the maid, the fact remains that his sexual advances is psychologically traumatising, instigating the maid's resignation from her job.

Moreover, Nkengasong reiterates on homosexuality. According to Bongnsai Mirabel Yensi in her article "Prohibition of Same Sex Marriage", gay relationships are strange phenomena because it is "alien to our [black] culture and violates all the values and morals that we recognise and cherish. The mention of the name gay ... is an expensive indulgence" (7). Nkengasong demonstrates child homosexual abuse in these words:

*He looked for a little corner and stretched out on the floor and fell asleep. Not long after, he felt someone pulling down his trousers almost close to the knees and a large hand caressed his buttocks, then a finger went deep into his anus. He screamed so loud that there was commotion in the cell. Dark images silhouetted in the darkness and he could not really make anyone out. 'Laisse l'enfant,' some one said. 'Qui est l'enfant ici?' retorted the other ... He stayed awake the whole night filled with fear. (139-140)*

Pulling down Acha's trouser, romancing the boy's buttocks and inserting a finger in his anus are proofs of homosexuality. It is sexual violation to touch someone in this manner, because there is direct contact between the body of the victimised and the victimiser, which is vividly described in the excerpt above. The rapist fails to recognise the immorality of his action; worst still on a boy. This confirms the assertion that the Postcolonial Cameroon child

encounters the challenge of sexual abuse, irrespective of his/her age and gender.

Angelo P. Giardino, Michelle A. Lyn and Eileen R. Giardino assert that; "Physical abuse includes shaking, throwing, purposefully dropping a child, hitting, pushing, grabbing, dragging or pulling, punching or kicking and other physical abuse" (5). These other physical abuses are choking, burning, suffocating, poisoning or being held under water, inflicted on them by parents, guardians, passers-by and even other children. They further state that:

*NIS classifies children as physically abused under the harm standard if they suffered at least a moderate injury from physical abuse. Moderate injuries are defined as physical, mental or emotional injuries or conditions (or behaviour problems) resulting from physical abuse which are serious enough to persist in observable form for at least 48 hours. Examples include bruises, nightmares, depression and fearlessness. (5)*

Physical torture is evident on the child's body. Bruises, cuts, fractures, welts, internal injury, burns and in extreme cases, death are proofs. The above quotation is, further, enhanced in The National Child Traumatic Stress Network in "Child Physical Abuse Factsheet" that states that "physical abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver commits an act that results in physical injury to a child or adolescent, such as; red marks, cuts, welts, bruises, muscle sprains, or broken bones, even if the injury was unintentional. Physical abuse can occur when physical punishment goes too far or [when] a parent lashes out in anger" (1). The environment in which the child finds himself, the social considerations in which the child is present and how the child is treated physically, go a long way to determine the child's abuse.

Though Nancy has been a "liar, and among liars from a little child" (412), but it is the society that wrought her a such. According to Sigmund Freud, new-borns are a moral blank slate while Jean-Jacques Rousseau opines that no man is born inherently bad. Humans are a product of their societies; corrupt, villainous societies tint children. A villainous environment, wrought with class systems, fashions the behaviour of the child, as he/she grows up. Nancy has grown to care for herself irrespective of her age. During the process, she experiences physical abuse in the hands of her boyfriend, Sikes, who is older than she is. The latter inflicts pains on the girl physically. Dickens states:

*"Bill," said the girl, in the low voice of alarm, 'why do you look like that at me!' The robber sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged*

*her into the middle of the room, and looking once towards the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth. "Bill, Bill!" gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of mortal fear - 'I - I won't scream or cry - not once - hear me speak to me - tell me what I have done!" (422)*

From the quotation above, Sikes begins to torture the girl by his stern looks which make her feel uncomfortable. His dilated nostrils and heaving breast portray his rage, which he transfers unto Nancy. The head and the throat are delicate parts of the body. Murder intentionality is apparent. Holding her throat, he drags her into the middle of the room and attempts to strangle her. The girl chokes, wrestles for breath and fears for her life. Most often than not, human beings in the midst of fear, call for help. But Nancy does the contrary. She reassures him that she won't scream nor cry. In her loyalty, she requests for the chance to know her wrong to no avail. She stammers for words as evident in the repetition of the pronoun I. The abuser does not stop. He proceeds with his actions till the point of death. She pays a heavy price for helping Brownlow and Rose have full knowledge of Oliver's background. Her goodness metamorphoses into a sacrifice, dying in the hands of a ruthless beast. Dickens states:

*The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own. She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead ... It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down. (423)*

Despite the ego's efforts, portrayed as Sikes struggles to fight against anger, the id in him overshadows any voice of reason. He loses self-control. He has consciousness that his actions are wrong and undeserving to Nancy. Twice, he engages in a self-battle, but his anger is far beyond control. He grasps his pistol and fires straight into her forehead. Dickens employs the use of hyperbole to describe the horror scene of blood bathing Nancy's face. The sight is dreadful. In Dickens' vivid description, Nancy takes Roses' white handkerchief and prays to her maker. The imagery of white is a symbol of the girl's purity and innocence. The fact that she waves it like a flag symbolises her quest for forgiveness from her creator. Though Nancy is a prostitute, she is not evil. Murdering Nancy is not enough. Sikes demonstrates his anger, brutality and violence by re-murdering the girl. He derives more pleasure in giving the innocent

girl a second death. Stabbing the already dead girl is savage. Sikes is, therefore, regarded as one who neither has respect for the innocence nor the dead.

Manas K. Akmatov holds that, "the median percentage of moderate physical abuse was also highest in African countries (64.3%) ... A similar situation was observed for severe physical abuse ... in Cameroon (60%)" (221). Akmatov's statistic coincides with *Achakasara's* publication date. The coincidence communicates, occurrence and reoccurrence of continual social hazards on innocence in Cameroon. Thus, Nkengasong tilts towards writing against this dehumanising social phenomenon to prick the conscience of state holders towards the verification of conventional rights of children are implemented. These rights are conceived in the corridors of power, birthed in offices but practicality is defiant. Child, physical abuse continuous to linger in homes, especially as the society stigmatises children who conceive ideas of reporting to authorities. So, they adopt silence as a presupposed remedy to stigma. Nkengasong's Acha is maltreated by his step-mother, Shuri. She does this by pulling his ear and threatening to beat him up with sharp objects.

*Auntie Shuri ... held Acha's ear and pulled it so hard that he felt pain in the whole of his head. Acha was quiet and confused. 'Have you heard me?' Auntie Shuri shouted and pulled his ear again so hard and then pushed him away. Acha held his head grimaced and whimpered ... 'Get out of my sight you wizard,' she said making a move to strike him with a saucepan ... 'Let me see how you will escape now,' she said. She was already very close to him holding an axe in the air, the axe she probably used in breaking the door open. There was very little room for him to escape and he could see the axe falling straight on his head. (54-61)*

The anatomy of the ear and head shows, from physical observation, are interconnected to one another. Any shock on the ear sustained from injuries, blows and hard pulling, definitely affects the head. This explains Acha's silence and confusion. His silence is motivated by the fact that quietness stable is an instrument for regaining stability in his ear and subsequently diminish his headache. However, he is confused because the offence committed is trial yet severely punishable. Shouting, hard pulling and hard pushing jeopardises the ear drums and subsequently the head. Acha is, even, punished because he calls Monsieur Senze "Daddy". She denies the boy sonship to Monsieur Senze. This denial, further highlights child neglect. He is called names, relate him to sorcery and shown an axe, which should break his head if he does not cooperate.

### Child Neglect and Psycho-Emotional Abuse

A child who is denied of proper attention and basic needs his/her proper development is neglected. Child Welfare Information Gateway purports that neglect takes different forms like physical (lack of food, shelter and supervision), emotional (inattention to a child's emotional needs, lack of psychological care and exposure to alcohol and other drugs), medical or educational (3-4). Neglect is the failure of a parent to provide for the development of the child – especially when the parent is in a position to do so. Neglect is, thus, distinguished from circumstances of poverty in that neglect can occur only in cases where reasonable resources are available to the family or caregiver.

During the Industrial Revolution in England, many poor people migrated to urban areas in search for greener pastures. Consequently, they abandoned their wives and children. Marianne James assert that “towards the end of the nineteenth century, during the Industrial Revolution, child neglect became recognised as a societal concern throughout most of the western world, with initial concerns for abandoned and physically neglected children resulting in the formation of the first child protection societies (1-2)”. A neglected child lacks proper education. Oliver's leanness justifies malnutrition and lack of internal peace. Dickensian children are neglected. In *Oliver Twist*, poor children lack formal education.

Dick in the novel suffers from medical neglect. When Dick and Oliver come into contact again, Dick is dying, yet he receives no medical attention. Dickens demonstrates through Dick that:

*With the first ray of light ... a child was weeding one of the little beds; as he stopped, he raised his pale face and disclosed the features of one of his former companions ... They had been beaten, and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time ... “I heard the doctor tell them I was dying,” replied the child with a faint smile. “I am very glad to see you, dear; but don't stop, don't stop!” “Yes, yes, I will, to say good-bye to you,” replied Oliver. “I shall see you again, Dick. I know I shall! You will be well and happy!” “I hope so,” replied the child. “After I am dead, but not before. I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake. (78-79)*

The first ray of light indicates time that every child should be preparing to go to school or in some cases already on their way to school. In the excerpt, Dick is younger than Oliver and they both undergo same experiences in the workhouse. Their basic

needs are not provided. He lacks both formal and informal education. As friends, Dick and Oliver experience similar ordeals. They are physically abused, deprived of food and locked up in dungeons many times. At the time Oliver is escaping to London, he meets the boy again. Oliver, a child, observes Dick's paleness. Dick needs medical help but that is far-fetched. The child sees death as a source of relief for him. Ironically, his dying nature, is further exploited. Dick regards kindness as existent only in heaven. Dick is the second child in the novel whose life and predicament in the workhouse are portrayed in detail. Dickens, through Dick, highlights other forms of child abuse; the child's health and education. Upon Oliver's rich return, Dick had died (467).

Acha in *Achakasara* often goes hungry, especially after Madam Senze's demise. When he demands for food, Auntie Shuri chases him “Go and eat the English Language test and don't disturb me and my child (46)”. Acha, the fourteen-year-old boy, goes for days without food. Monsieur Senze does nothing to ensure that the child eats properly, spares no time for the boy and as time goes on, it is difficult for him to give the child attention. Due to his effeminate nature, he grants room for Acha to undergo chronic neglect. Child Welfare Information Gateway states that “chronic neglect occurs when: one or more needs basic to a child's healthy development are not met, the neglect is perpetrated by a parent or caregiver [and] the neglect happens on a recurring or enduring basis” (1). Acha suffers neglect when his school needs are not provided or provided late. He does not write public examinations because his registration fee is not provided in time. He does not go to school on time because he is overworking house chores. After Madam Senze's demise, Acha gradually drops out of school due to Monsieur Senze's negligence and Auntie Shuri's wickedness. Nkengasong states that:

Before the end of first term, Auntie Shuri delivered a male child and took his father's entire attention. Just the basic exercise books and a few writing materials were bought to satisfy some of his school needs. Acha complained to his father one evening: ‘Daddy, our class teacher has threatened sending us out of the class if we don't bring our English Language and Arithmetic text books on Monday’, he said. ‘What text books? asked Auntie Shuri ... ‘You think all the money will be spent on you alone? Go to the kitchen and wash the dishes’ ... Acha hardly went to school early again. He did all the work in the house before going to school. (49)

A worst form of neglect is experienced when a parent makes a differentiates between/among

his/her children. With Shuri's delivery, Acha's needs are neglected the more. Even the untimely provision of needs is considered as extravagance on the part of Shuri. Acha does not write his public exams because the money provided by his father is confiscated by Shuri and because his father fails to appropriate time to go to the boy's school and personally register him. Failure to do so implies neglect, which generates to Acha's subsequent school dropout. With knowledge of his wife's wickedness towards the boy warrants his full attention, but he prefers silence, unconsciously conspiring to Acha's neglect.

The impact of psycho-emotional abuse is, mostly, unnoticed because the effects are not immediately palpable. Emotional deprivation in the child occurs when the child is denied emotional warmth or when his immediate environment responds negatively to the child's emotional needs. Emotional deprivation, therefore, occurs when the child is continually abused through harsh criticisms, threats and mockeries; also, characteristics of verbal abuse. Emotional maltreatment can be inflicted through rejection, denial of attachment, refusal to appreciate the child and other ways of showing hatred. Child neglect engenders psychological trauma. A child who is emotionally abused lacks tender care from his parent or caretaker. That child lives uncomfortably because his flaws are corrected abusively or the child is abandoned with no correction. A child deprived of compassion and empathy, is affected psychologically.

The Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century caused the separation Victorian English family; husbands from wives and children from parents. According to Peter Ackroyd Dickens was separated from his parents at a very tender age. In *Oliver Twist*, Oliver is born an orphan in the workhouse. Her absence deprives him of his rights and privileges. It is noted that unforeseen circumstances also determine the course of child birth. In the work house, he is emotionally abused when he demands for his basic rights of more food; which paves the way for trauma. Dickens presents the psycho-emotional plight of Oliver in the following words:

It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eye ... It was not until he was left alone in the silence and stillness of the gloomy workshop of the undertaker that Oliver gave way to the feeling which the day's treatment may be supposed likely to have awakened in a mere child ... Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. (22-27)

The premature death of Oliver's mother imposes a painful separation between them. With her death, it is the responsibility of the parish authorities to cater for the boy, that is, according to the dictates of the society as evident in the novel. Rather than being catered for, he is treated with no affection and when he demands for more food, he is confined. He feels hurt because he knows it is his basic right. Tears well up in his eyes. In the midst of silence, he gives in to a single thought, his beloved mother. At that moment, he feels the absence of his mother. A mother who should have nourished and provided him with emotional warmth. He has never had any knowledge of his mother but, he is certain that his life would have been better with her physical presence. The warmth he feels of his mother brings to mind Oedipus Complex, a psychoanalytic feature of Sigmund Freud. To make matters worse, the parish authorities put up a notice of the sale of Oliver to anyone who needs an apprentice.

In the fictional society, Cameroon, the child also undergoes psycho-emotional abuse caused either by abandonment or neglect. In *Achakasara*, Aminata abandons Acha on a rubbish heap, reflecting outright rejection. Her choice of abandonment is more offensive. The image of a new born baby on a garbage talks of a child who is totally unwanted by a parent. This affects Acha in his later life, especially when Shuri forbids him from calling Mr. Senze father. Nkengasong states:

*More questions continued to come up in his mind: why had his father refused to answer when he wanted to know whether he was his father or not? If Madam Senze was his real mother would his father not tell Auntie Shuri the truth? Why did his father talk of taking him to another place called the Social Welfare? Where was Social Welfare? If he were his real child, why would he be taking him to Social Welfare? ... He remembered how his mother used to take care of him and he started crying. 'My mother why did you do this to me?' he said crying. (95)*

Acha interrogates his identity. Monsieur Senze's silence confirms that Acha is not his biological son. The suggestion that Acha should be taken to the social welfare further raises concerns in the child's psyche as he wonders his identity. The lack of affection makes him cry. The vacuum created by Madam Senze's death remains empty despite the presence of a step-mother. Shuri's painful words; "wizard, don't ever step foot in this house again" (82) and Monsieur Senze's consideration of contacting the social welfare provide Acha with evidence of his supposed origin. "Acha stood dumbfounded, looked at his father, then Auntie Shuri, then his father again, expecting him to make a statement ... Acha left the



scene not understanding why his father could not back him in the matter" (49). With these thoughts, the child is psychologically affected and which goes on to affect his emotions. In the end, this yields psycho-emotional abuse. Acha feels empty because he is not only rejected by Auntie Shuri in these words; "wizard, don't ever step foot in this house again" (82), but also by his father who considers leaving the child at the Social Welfare. Acha's ego propels the realisation that Monsieur Senze is not his biological father, if not he would not contemplate separating from him. The lack of affection causes him to shed tears, thereby reflecting psycho-emotional abuse. Also, Acha demands for affection from his father but his father does nothing to make him feel better. "Acha stood dumbfounded, looked at his father, then Auntie Shuri, then his father again, expecting him to make a statement ... Acha left the scene not understanding why his father could not back him in the matter" (49).

## CONCLUSION

The plight of the child is a common problem that cuts across the globe, irrespective of the race, gender, age and size. Children - in Victorian England and Postcolonial Cameroon suffer immensely in the hands of some adults and other children. They are exploited for commercial purposes, at the expense of their education and wellbeing. They are, also, physically abused through beatings and punching. The effects of physical abuse cause another form of abuse, which is psycho-emotional abuse. Child maltreatment, equally, takes the form of sexual exploitation and neglect. When children experience such physical, emotional, educational, medical, psychological, and sexual ill-treatment, they regard their home guardians as impediments to their wellbeing. This phenomenon was evident in the Victorian society, brought to the limelight by Dickens in his *Oliver Twist*. The plight of the child is, further, observed in Postcolonial Cameroon as portrayed by Nkengasong's *Achakasara*. Despite the sensitisation of the public, it still continues to be a problem in Cameroon and the world at large.

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