Interagency Collaboration between Forensic Social Workers and Police Officers and Child Protection Effectiveness in Oyo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Effective collaboration between professionals responsible for identifying, investigating and responding to cases involving children at risk is essential for child protection. The study investigated inter-agency collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers on effectiveness of child protection services in Oyo State, Nigeria. The research design used was descriptive survey. The sample was composed of 100 professionals: 50 forensic social workers and 50 police officers working in child protection services. The data were collected by means of structured questionnaire, using census sampling. The data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship between interagency collaboration and child protection effectiveness at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the level of interagency collaboration was moderate (weighted mean = 2.88), while the effectiveness of the child protection services was moderate (weighted mean = 2.72). Pearson correlation analysis indicated a positive and statistically significant correlation between interagency collaboration and the effectiveness of child protection services ($r = 0.438$, $p < 0.001$). The results suggest that increased collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers is related to more effective delivery of child protection services. The study concludes that improving joint case management, communication, information sharing, referral mechanisms and coordinated interventions is important to improving child protection outcomes in Oyo State.

Keywords: Child Protection, Effectiveness of Child Protection, Interagency Collaboration, Police Officers, Oyo State, Forensic Social Work

INTRODUCTION

Protection systems for children exposed to abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence and other forms of vulnerability need to respond to their needs in a timely and comprehensive manner. The protection of such children can often involve assessment, investigation, psychosocial support, legal intervention, family assistance, rehabilitation and continued monitoring which cannot always be adequately provided by one professional or institution. Child protection is then not only a matter of the availability of professionals, but also the extent to which the various involved professionals are able to work together. Forensic social workers and police officers play particularly important roles in this process, because while their roles are different, they can be complementary. Social workers' main priority is the well-being, psychosocial needs and safety of children. Police officers are concerned with investigation, public safety and the enforcement of relevant laws. When well coordinated these duties can result in more comprehensive and continuous protection of children at risk. However, in situations where professional responses are fragmented, gaps in communication, delays in intervention, duplication of responsibilities and weak follow-up may undermine the protection offered to children. Child protection in Nigeria remains a major concern as many children continue to suffer different forms of violence, abuse, neglect,

exploitation and other situations that threaten their safety and development. The Nigerian child protection system functions within a context marked by poverty, inequality, lack of access to essential services and institutional capacity weaknesses that can affect the ability of families and institutions to respond effectively to risks faced by children. Implementation gaps and access to appropriate services have also impacted the national child protection system, making coordinated intervention increasingly important (Elekwachi & Ebigbo, 2023). In Nigeria, child protection social workers face a shortage of personnel, high caseloads, lack of resources and inadequate institutional support, conditions that can limit the provision of effective services to vulnerable children (Isangha, Akintunde, Choi, & Tam, 2024).

In this context, child protection involves the participation of professionals of different expertise. Social workers identify the needs of children, assess the situation of families, provide counseling and psychosocial support, and make referrals and facilitate access to appropriate services. They play an important role, especially as child protection is not only about removing children from immediate danger but also about addressing social and family conditions that may make children vulnerable. Evidence from Nigeria shows that child protection social workers carry out remedial activities including counseling and therapeutic support, shelter, food and other forms of assistance for vulnerable children (Isangha et al., 2024). However, because child protection cases are complex, social workers may need to seek support from law enforcement agencies in situations involving suspected criminal activity, threats to safety, or a formal investigation.

Police officers are another key component of the child protection response. This can include receiving complaints, investigating allegations, protecting victims, identifying suspects and supporting the administration of justice. Cases of physical or sexual abuse, exploitation and other offenses against children may therefore require police intervention as well as social welfare services. The relationship between law enforcement and social work is especially important when protecting a child requires both immediate safety measures and longer-term psychosocial or family interventions. Research with police officers and social workers has demonstrated that professional collaboration can influence the effectiveness of child protection work . Collaborative attitudes, organizational arrangements and perceptions of other professionals were found to be related to collaboration effectiveness and job effectiveness (Shin, Jung, & Kim, 2017).

However, the involvement of various professional groups does not automatically result in effective child protection. Interagency collaboration is not just multiple institutions working on the same case at the same time. It requires communication, information sharing, shared understanding, appropriate referral, coordination of responsibilities and continued interaction among professionals. Where these are weak, differences in professional mandates and organizational cultures may lead to misunderstanding or fragmented intervention. Research into the experiences of police and social workers involved in interagency working has highlighted differences in professional perspectives and difficulties in the working relationships between the two groups, and the importance of communication and mutual understanding in collaborative child protection practice (King, Ireland, & Harvey, 2023).

Information sharing is a core process through which collaboration can have an impact on the effectiveness of child protection Decisions about vulnerable children are often based on information from a range of sources including children, parents, social workers, police officers, schools, health professionals and community organizations. Professionals' judgment of cases and decision to take further action or investigate may be affected by the amount and quality of information available to them . The importance of information in the child protection process is illustrated by findings from a systematic review of child protection decision-making, which suggest that characteristics of referrals and the information contained within them can influence decisions about whether cases are investigated (Damman, Johnson-Motoyama, Wells, & Harrington, 2020). Effective collaboration between social work and police can thus create spaces for sharing and sense-making of relevant information from complementary professional perspectives. Referral and case coordination are just as important to the delivery of effective protection. An abused or otherwise at-risk child may require a range of services, including immediate protection, medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and family intervention and rehabilitation. Referral is a vital link between agencies and these services may be located in different

institutions. Interagency working can help to move cases between services and reduce the chance that children are left without support when responsibility moves from one institution to another. Research into interagency child protection approaches has demonstrated the value of structured collaboration between services, but also that the evidence about the actual outcomes of some collaborative models is limited (Hale et al., 2026).

Differences in professional responsibilities also influence the relationship between social workers and police officers. Social workers may focus more on welfare, psychosocial needs, family circumstances and rehabilitation. Police officers may focus more strongly on investigation, evidence and enforcement. These differences can provide complementary perspectives where professionals acknowledge and leverage each other's expertise. But they can also be a source of tension if responsibilities are not clearly defined, or if professionals have a limited understanding of each others roles. Research has shown that collaboration between social workers and police officers in child protection settings is associated with perceptions of other professionals and organization management for collaboration (Shin et al., 2017). This shows that the effect of collaboration is partly dependent on the management of professional differences through straightforward communication and coordinated practice.

The significance of interagency relationships becomes more apparent in cases involving multiple forms of vulnerability. For example, children exposed to domestic violence may require protection from immediate harm and interventions that address family and social circumstances. Cases can involve child protection services, police, domestic violence services, health professionals and family support agencies. A recent scoping review of interagency interventions identified the development of collaborative approaches to linking child protection with other services, but there is little evidence about their impact on children and families (Hale et al., 2026). Other research has also suggested that interagency work in the areas of child protection and domestic violence involves negotiating different perspectives and responsibilities, but still maintaining a focus on children's safety and wellbeing (O'Leary, Young, Wilde & Tsantefski, 2018).

The Nigerian setting presents additional considerations as professional child protection practice takes place within social, cultural and institutional conditions that may influence intervention. Children's rights may clash with family interests or cultural practices and raise ethical questions. In such circumstances, professionals are required to make decisions that protect children whilst respecting relevant legal and professional duties. Studies on child protection practice in Nigeria have revealed ethical challenges on children's rights, cultural practices and application of social work principles which point to the importance of professional standards and appropriate institutional support (Osaiyuwu, 2024). These considerations make collaboration particularly important as decisions about children may require professionals to combine social work, legal and protective perspectives rather than base their decisions on one professional perspective alone.

We can therefore understand the effectiveness of collaboration in terms of the contribution of coordinated professional action to child protection. Partnership is demonstrated by tangible activities including joint assessment, information sharing, referral, investigation, case management, follow-up and coordinated intervention rather than presence of contact between agencies . Research on social work and police collaboration (Shin et al., 2017) has shown that the effectiveness of collaboration is positively related to job effectiveness in child protection services. This provides an empirical basis for exploring whether increased collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers can be associated with more effective child protection services.

The issue is especially important in Nigeria where the capacity of child protection professionals to deliver services is shaped by wider institutional contexts. In a recent study of Nigerian child protection social workers, the shortages of social workers, high caseloads, limited resources and insufficient government support were identified as creating difficulties for effective service delivery (Isangha et al., 2024). In such situations, cooperation with other organizations can be an important way for professionals to share responsibilities and improve the continuity of services for vulnerable children. However, the mere presence of different agencies does not ensure that their activities are effectively coordinated, and collaboration itself must be empirically examined.

Research on child protection collaboration exists, but there are some important gaps. International research has provided evidence on the relationships between social workers, police officers and other child protection professionals. However, institutional structures and professional arrangements differ between countries. Nigerian literature has also highlighted the shortcomings of the child protection system and the challenges faced by social workers, but there is comparatively less empirical evidence specifically investigating the relationship between forensic social workers and police officers and the effectiveness of child protection services in a state-level Nigerian context (Elekwachi & Ebigbo, 2023; Isangha et al., 2024). Exploring this relationship is important because the effectiveness of child protection depends not only on individual professional competence but also on the capacity of institutions to coordinate their responses to children at risk.

This issue is important to consider in the setting of Oyo State because children in need of protection may have contact with social welfare and law enforcement institutions. Cases involving abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence or other forms of vulnerability may require assessment, counseling, referral, investigation, protection and follow-up, creating several points at which forensic social workers and police officers need to interact. The quality of these interactions may affect the speed with which cases are dealt with, the sharing of information, the co-ordinating of responsibilities and the continuity of protection and support for children. However, the extent to which existing collaborative practices contribute to effective child protection in Oyo State needs to be empirically investigated rather than assumed.

It is against this background that this study looks at interagency collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers and child protection effectiveness in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study investigates the nature and the degree of collaboration between the two professional groups and whether collaboration is significantly related to the effectiveness of child protection services. The study intends to contribute to the understanding of how forensic social work and police intervention can be better coordinated to enhance the protection of children at risk in Oyo State. This will be achieved by providing evidence from professionals that are directly involved in child protection practice.

Statement of the Problem

Children at risk in Oyo State still require protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence and other circumstances that threaten their safety, wellbeing and development. Social assessment, psychosocial support, investigation, legal intervention, referral and follow-up may be part of child protection cases. In many cases, the participation of both forensic social workers and police officers is needed to respond appropriately to these situations. However, the effectiveness of protection may be impaired if the professionals responsible for the different aspects of intervention do not cooperate sufficiently. Weak communication, limited information sharing, poorly coordinated referrals, duplication of responsibilities and gaps in follow-up can lead to fragmented responses to cases involving children at risk. In such cases, the needs of vulnerable children may not be met in a timely and adequate manner, hence raising concerns about the efficiency of existing child protection services in Oyo State.

Protection of children through the activities of social welfare institutions, police units, child protection services and other organizations involved in child welfare has been the subject of various efforts. Forensic social workers continue to provide assessment, counseling, psychosocial support, referrals and other welfare-related interventions while police officers attend to cases that require investigation, protection and law enforcement. These interventions show that there are already mechanisms to deal with child protection problems but the problem is not yet fully resolved as children continue to be vulnerable. The fact that there are different professionals involved does not mean that their activities are effectively coordinated. In situations where collaboration is patchy or limited, information may not be appropriately shared, referrals may not be followed through, responsibilities may not be clearly defined or may be overlapping and cases may not be given consistent attention across agencies. Hence, the place of existing collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in effective child protection in Oyo State has not been adequately established. This study therefore seeks to investigate the interagency collaboration of forensic social workers and police officers and its relationship

with child protection effectiveness in Oyo State, Nigeria. In particular, the study will explore the nature and extent of collaboration between the two professional groups and whether the extent of collaboration is significantly associated with the effectiveness of child protection services. It aims to provide empirical evidence, through an analysis of the actual collaborative practices of professionals involved in child protection, so as to identify areas where coordination, communication, information sharing, referral and joint intervention can be improved. The findings are expected to improve collaborative practice and provide a basis for strengthening coordinated responses to children at risk in Oyo State.

Objective of the study

The study aims to:

1. to investigate the nature and extent of interagency collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in protecting children at risk in Oyo State.
2. to evaluate the effectiveness of current collaborative practices between forensic social workers and police officers in child protection services in Oyo State.
3. to identify the challenges that hinder effective collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in addressing cases involving children at risk

Research Question

1. What is the nature and extent of collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in the protection of children at risk in Oyo State?
2. What is the effectiveness of existing collaborative practices between forensic social workers and police officers in child protection services in Oyo State?
3. What challenges hinder effective collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in addressing cases involving children at risk?

Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between interagency collaboration of forensic social workers and police officers and effectiveness of child protection services in Oyo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children at Risk and Safeguarding Children

Child protection is the system of services and interventions that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and other conditions that threaten children's safety and development. Children at risk are normally subject to a number of interrelated vulnerabilities. To protect them is a task that goes beyond the family to social welfare institutions, law-enforcement agencies, health services, schools and community organizations. Effective protection, therefore, requires professionals to identify risks early, respond appropriately and to continue providing support through the different stages of a case.

Child protection cases are complex and require coordinated professional intervention. A child's needs may simultaneously involve welfare, psychosocial, legal and security dimensions. Evidence from Nigeria shows that child protection social workers provide vital services including counseling, shelter and other remedial support. However, their ability to provide these services may be affected by heavy caseloads, lack of personnel and insufficient institutional support (Isangha, Akintunde, Choi, & Tam, 2024). Ethical and cultural issues may influence child protection practice in Nigeria, especially when professional responsibilities are at variance with cultural practices and the rights of the child (Osaiyuwu, 2024).

Police Intervention and Forensic Social Work for Child Protection

Forensic social work is an important part of the interface between social welfare and justice processes. Forensic social workers in child protection may assess children's circumstances, provide psychosocial intervention, make referrals and support children and families involved in legal or investigative processes, and document relevant information. Their role is complementary to that of police officers, particularly where there is suspected abuse, exploitation, violence or other conduct requiring investigation. Police officers perform functions related to investigation, protection, evidence gathering and law enforcement. Social workers provide knowledge of children's welfare, family circumstances and psychosocial needs. These roles are complementary and professional interaction is important in complex cases of child protection. A study of social workers and police officers found that perceptions of other professionals, organizational arrangements for collaboration and collaborative attitudes were related to effectiveness of interprofessional collaboration and child protection work (Shin, Jung, & Kim, 2017). More recent research on social worker-police collaborations also suggests that child welfare and child abuse are important areas where the two professions work together, with direct service teams, referrals, and joint task forces representing some of the ways collaboration can occur (Littman et al., 2023).

Collaboration with Child Protection Organization

Interagency collaboration is the sharing of information, coordination of responsibilities, referral, case communication, and joint response to identified needs by professionals and institutions. Collaboration is particularly important in child protection as no one agency usually has all the information, authority and expertise to deal with the different aspects of a child's vulnerability. Effective collaboration can facilitate continuity of intervention through linking investigation, welfare support, referral and follow-up.

But differences in professional responsibilities, organizational cultures and perceptions of other agencies can also undermine collaboration. Research on the experiences of police and social workers of interagency working found that professional relationships and perceptions of each other can influence collaborative practice, suggesting that formal structures alone may not secure effective cooperation (King, Ireland, & Harvey, 2023). Similarly, the systematic evidence on social worker-police collaborations suggests different models of collaboration, including direct service teams, joint task forces, referrals, and shared training, suggesting that collaboration can take on different forms depending on the problem and institutional context (Littman et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the effectiveness of collaboration depends on the quality of communication and coordination, rather than just the presence of agencies in a case.

Interagency Collaboration and Child Protection Services

The effectiveness of child protection services can be demonstrated by professionals' ability to identify children at risk, react to cases in a timely fashion, coordinate suitable interventions, protect children from further harm and provide continuity of support. These outcomes could be facilitated through interagency collaboration allowing professionals to combine their varied expertise and responsibilities. Empirical evidence has shown that inter-professional collaboration is positively associated with the job effectiveness of social workers and police officers working in child protection services (Shin et al., 2017).

At the same time, the Nigerian context has challenges that may affect the extent to which collaborative arrangements yield effective outcomes. Social workers working in child protection in Nigeria have cited shortages of personnel, high caseloads and limited resources, while wider systemic difficulties also affect service delivery (Isangha et al., 2024). Given these circumstances, it is important to reflect on collaboration within the specific setting in which child protection services are provided, rather than assuming that collaborative arrangements function in the same way across settings. Therefore, the study of the relationship between forensic social worker-police collaboration and child protection effectiveness in Oyo State can be a reference in establishing the extent to which the existing collaborative practices have contributed to the protection of at-risk children.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between interagency collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers and child protection effectiveness in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study population consisted of 100 professionals (50 forensic social workers and 50 police officers) working in child protection services in the state. The accessible population was small and manageable hence a census sampling approach was adopted and all the 100 respondents were involved in the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that sought information on interagency collaboration and effectiveness of child protection services. The instrument was validated by experts and pilot-tested on 20 respondents outside the study population to determine its reliability. The items in question were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire administered was fully retrieved, indicating a 100% response rate. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Ethical principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were observed throughout the study.

RESULT

What is the nature and extent of collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in the protection of children at risk in Oyo State?

Table 1: Nature and Extent of Interagency Collaboration between Forensic Social Workers and Police Officers

S/N	Item	A (%)	O (%)	S (%)	R (%)	N (%)	Mean	SD
1	I routinely exchange case information with police (or social services) using agreed referral channels	11 (11.0)	31 (31.0)	28 (28.0)	13 (13.0)	17 (17.0)	2.94	1.25
2	Joint home visits with police/social workers occur as part of our standard practice when risk is identified	7 (7.0)	36 (36.0)	25 (25.0)	18 (18.0)	14 (14.0)	2.96	1.18
3	Our agency refers suspected child abuse cases to police (or social services) promptly and without delay	14 (14.0)	27 (27.0)	34 (34.0)	10 (10.0)	15 (15.0)	2.85	1.23
4	I participate in multidisciplinary child protection strategy meetings when required	20 (20.0)	32 (32.0)	19 (19.0)	13 (13.0)	16 (16.0)	2.73	1.36
5	Training sessions are held jointly by police and social work for the purpose of building shared skills	13 (13.0)	25 (25.0)	31 (31.0)	29 (29.0)	12 (12.0)	3.02	1.25
6	We use shared forms or standardised referral templates during interagency case handover	16 (16.0)	27 (27.0)	26 (26.0)	21 (21.0)	10 (10.0)	2.82	1.23
7	My unit receives timely feedback from partner agencies after referrals are made	14 (14.0)	32 (32.0)	25 (25.0)	17 (17.0)	12 (12.0)	2.89	1.30
8	Our interagency collaboration includes joint planning for victim rehabilitation and reintegration	14 (14.0)	32 (32.0)	25 (25.0)	17 (17.0)	12 (12.0)	2.81	1.23
9	I have been seconded or worked temporarily in a partner agency	14 (14.0)	33 (33.0)	12 (12.0)	24 (24.0)	17 (17.0)	2.97	1.35
10	I routinely exchange case information with police (or social services) using agreed referral channels	15 (15.0)	37 (37.0)	15 (15.0)	21 (21.0)	12 (12.0)	2.78	1.28
Weighted Mean: 2.88								

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026

Key: A = Always, O = Often, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never.

Interagency collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers occurs across a number of child protection activities (Table 1). The highest mean score was for participation in multidisciplinary child protection strategy meetings (Mean = 3.02, SD = 1.25) followed by joint planning for victim rehabilitation and reintegration (Mean = 2.97, SD = 1.35) and routine exchange of case information through agreed referral channels (Mean = 2.96, SD = 1.18). The mean score for prompt referral of suspected child abuse cases was lowest (Mean=2.73, SD=1.36). The weighted mean obtained was 2.88 which implies that the overall level of interagency collaboration was moderate.

Research Question Two: What is the effectiveness of existing collaborative practices between forensic social workers and police officers in child protection services in Oyo State?

Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Current Collaborative Practices

S/N	Item	A (%)	O (%)	S (%)	R (%)	N (%)	Mean	SD
1	Collaboration between my agency and partner organizations leads to faster protective action for children at risk	24 (24.0)	30 (30.0)	15 (15.0)	11 (11.0)	20 (20.0)	2.73	1.46
2	Joint working improves the quality of evidence gathered in child protection cases	16 (16.0)	33 (33.0)	18 (18.0)	21 (21.0)	12 (12.0)	2.80	1.28
3	Interagency case plans are consistently implemented and followed up	18 (18.0)	24 (24.0)	28 (28.0)	12 (12.0)	18 (18.0)	2.88	1.34
4	Children and families report better experiences when agencies collaborate effectively	22 (22.0)	20 (20.0)	26 (26.0)	20 (20.0)	12 (12.0)	2.80	1.32
5	Shared training has improved mutual understanding of roles between police and social workers	24 (24.0)	30 (30.0)	20 (20.0)	14 (14.0)	12 (12.0)	2.60	1.32
6	Confidentiality and data sharing protocols are adequate to support safe collaboration	19 (19.0)	27 (27.0)	29 (29.0)	17 (17.0)	7 (7.0)	2.69	1.22
7	Our joint efforts reduce the number of repeated interviews experienced by victims	23 (23.0)	25 (25.0)	27 (27.0)	14 (14.0)	11 (11.0)	2.65	1.28
8	There is clear leadership and accountability for joint child protection outcomes in my locality	22 (22.0)	28 (28.0)	34 (34.0)	10 (10.0)	6 (6.0)	2.50	1.12
9	Collaborative practice has increased successful prosecutions where appropriate	21 (21.0)	29 (29.0)	21 (21.0)	17 (17.0)	12 (12.0)	2.66	1.33
10	Overall, the existing collaboration arrangements meet the protection needs of children in our area	24 (24.0)	24 (24.0)	29 (29.0)	8 (8.0)	15 (15.0)	2.86	1.46
Weighted Mean: 2.72								

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026

Key: A = Always, O = Often, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = Never.

Table 2 shows the effectiveness of current collaborative practices between forensic social workers and police officers as moderate with a weighted mean of 2.72. The highest mean score was for the consistent implementation and follow-up of interagency case plans (Mean = 2.88, SD = 1.34) and the extent to which

existing collaboration arrangements meet the protection needs of children (Mean = 2.86, SD = 1.46). Working together to improve the quality of evidence 2.80 Improved experiences of children and families 2.80 Clear leadership and accountability for joint child protection outcomes had the lowest mean (M = 2.50, SD = 1.12). Overall, the results indicate that the collaborative mechanisms are in place and functioning, but their performance is still moderate.

Research Question Three: What challenges hinder effective collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers in addressing cases involving children at risk?

Table 3: Challenges Hindering Effective Collaboration between Forensic Social Workers and Police Officers

S/N	Item	A (%)	O (%)	S (%)	R (%)	N (%)	Mean	SD
1	Overall, the existing collaboration arrangements meet the protection needs of children in our area	24 (24.0)	24 (24.0)	29 (29.0)	8 (8.0)	15 (20.0)	2.66	1.34
2	Lack of clear referral protocols impedes effective collaboration	23 (23.0)	25 (25.0)	15 (15.0)	17 (17.0)	20 (20.0)	2.86	1.46
3	Inadequate training in child-sensitive and forensic skills undermines joint work	17 (17.0)	34 (34.0)	18 (18.0)	21 (21.0)	10 (10.0)	2.73	1.25
4	Insufficient staffing and high caseloads are major barriers to collaboration	29 (29.0)	31 (31.0)	14 (14.0)	12 (12.0)	10 (10.0)	2.51	1.39
5	Professional rivalry and mistrust between agencies hinder coordinated responses	26 (26.0)	33 (33.0)	12 (12.0)	11 (11.0)	18 (18.0)	2.64	1.44
6	Poor or insecure information systems restrict timely data sharing	24 (24.0)	33 (33.0)	16 (16.0)	16 (16.0)	11 (11.0)	2.57	1.31

Weighted Mean: 2.66

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

Table 3 shows that the challenges affecting collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers were at a moderate level, with a weighted mean of 2.66. The highest mean was recorded for the lack of clear referral protocols impeding effective collaboration (Mean = 2.86, SD = 1.46), followed by inadequate training in child-sensitive and forensic skills (Mean = 2.73, SD = 1.25). Professional rivalry and mistrust (Mean = 2.64, SD = 1.44) and poor or insecure information systems (Mean = 2.57, SD = 1.31) were also identified as challenges. Insufficient staffing and high caseloads recorded the lowest mean (Mean = 2.51, SD = 1.39). Overall, the results suggest that a number of institutional and professional factors constrain the effectiveness of collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers.

$H_0$1: There is no significant relationship between the level of collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers and the effectiveness of child protection services in Oyo State.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Interagency Collaboration and Effectiveness of Child Protection Services

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Level of Significance	Decision
Collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers	100	2.87	0.74	0.438	0.000	0.05	Significant
Effectiveness of child protection services	100	2.81	0.69				

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2026.

The mean score of collaboration was 2.87 (SD = 0.74) and the mean score of effectiveness of child protection services was 2.81 (SD = 0.69). The result produced a positive correlation coefficient of r = 0.438, p-value = 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance.

Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. The finding revealed a statistically positive relationship between inter-agency collaboration among forensic social workers and police officers and effectiveness of child protection services in Oyo State.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that interagency collaboration between forensic social workers and police officers is critical in the delivery of child protection services in Oyo State. The level of collaboration and level of effectiveness of child protection services was moderate. However, the significant positive relationship found between the two variables indicates that the more the collaboration the more effective the child protection outcomes. Thus improving communication, joint case management, information sharing and coordinated interventions is important in improving the protection and welfare of children at risk in Oyo State.

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