



Child Abuse as Correlate of Depressive Tendency among Senior Secondary School Adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated child abuse as correlate of depressive tendency among senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted correlational research design. Population of the study was 11,364 (5056 male and 6308 female) students in all the public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Sample size was 386 (172 male and 214 female) SSS 2 students which was determined using Taro Yamene's sample size formula. Cluster sampling technique was used to select the sample size of the study. Two self-structured instruments titled: "Child Abuse among Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (CASSAQ)" and "Depressive Tendency among Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (DTSSA)" were used for data collection. The face and content validity of the instruments was determined by two experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation in the Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The Cronbach Alpha was used to obtain 0.72 and 0.70 for the two clusters of the CASSAQ, while test-retest method was used to obtain the reliability coefficient of 0.72 for DTSSA. Research questions were analyzed with Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (r), while hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-transformation formula. Results showed that physical abuse and sexual abuse have positive and significant relationships with depressive tendency among secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis. It was recommended among others that: parents and school teachers should avoid exposing adolescents students to corporal punishment, beating, torture, drunk, etc which are tantamount of causing bodily pain on them in the name of discipline to discourage depressive tendency among adolescents, and laws prohibiting child abuse should be fully enforced at all times irrespective of who is involved.

Keywords: Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Depressive Tendency, Adolescent

INTRODUCTION

In every society, education remains the bedrock for socio-economic, technological and human capital development. This is because education according to Adeyemi and Adu (2010) is one of the leading instruments for promoting economic development as it encompasses some processes individuals go through to help them develop and utilize their potentials. Education is in preparation of very much important for preparation of adolescents for adult life because through it, individuals acquire knowledge,

skills and attitude which would enable them develop and utilize their potentials for their personal well-being, as well as contribute their own quota to the overall growth and development of the society. However, irrespective of the importance of education in the society, some adolescent students tend to feel depressed when it comes to schooling and education generally.

Depression refers to feelings, mood or emotional disorder which can result to medical complications. Eremie (2007) defined depression as feeling of sadness, hopelessness, pessimism and general loss of interest in life, combined with a sense of reduced emotional well-being. Depression is characterized by emotion and behavioral changes towards depression or being depressed. Moran, Vuchinich and Hall (2014) viewed depressive tendency as inclination of leaning towards depression. This changes a person's feeling, mood or emotion which occasionally or irregularly leads to negative behaviours. This does not mean that the person who has been leaning towards depression is diagnosed as clinically depressed or even had what could be interpreted as true clinical depression (Moran, Vuchinich & Hall, 2014), rather the negative emotions and change in behaviour tend to be coming and going. This implies that depressive tendency is not the same thing as being depressed which implies a state of being a relentless condition.

Depressive tendencies or depression could be triggered by so many factors. Fritz (2011) who worked on the causes and correlation of depression affirmed that there are genetic factors to depression. Besides genetic predisposition to depression, social skills deficits may also contribute to depressive tendency. Other factors which could predict depressive tendency among adolescents as identified by Kail and Cavanugh (2017) include loss and internal belief system. Although a number of factors that causes depression abound, there is need to empirically ascertain the relationship between child abuse and depressive tendency among adolescent students.

Child abuse is physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or a care giver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child, and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with (McCoy & Keen, 2013). Child abuse takes place in the home environment, at school, in church, hospitals, orphanages and any other place. In fact, child abuse seems to be rampant nowadays, hence there may be no safe place for the adolescents if urgent measure is not taken to put a stop to it in the society. This is so because home caring of children is now left for housemaids who pay little or no attention to the well-being of the children. Child abuse consists of any acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or the threat of harm to a child (0-18 years of age) even if the harm is unintentional (Gilbert, Spatz, Widom, Braone, Fergusson, Webb & Janson, 2009).

Child physical abuse as defined by Messer (2011) is actual or likely physical injury to a child or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to child including deliberate poisoning and suffocation. Physical abuse is also the infliction of physical injury by slapping, punching, beating, kicking, biting and burning etc. it may include the use of weapon or any other object used to inflict harm. Physical abuse is characterized by physical injury, such as bruises and fractures that result from punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabling, choking, hitting with a hard stick, strap or other object and burning (Marshuk & Salu, 2013). According to Straus (2014), corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intension of causing bodily pain, but not injury for the purpose of correction or control. Straus noted further that most times some teachers fail to listen to students' apparent show of some misbehavior, instead they unleash corporal punishment on the students made which could make the students scared and unwilling to attend school. In their study, Eckenrode, Laird and Daris (2013) revealed that physically abused children displayed significant school problems.

Another kind of child abuse considered in this study is sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is defined as any sexual contact between an adult and sexually immature child for the purpose of the adults sexual gratification. It is also any sexual contact to a child made by the use of force, threat or deceit to secure the child's participation, or sexual contact to which the child is incapable of relationship with adults (Noll, Shenk & Putman 2009). Sexual abuse includes body contact such as kissing, oral, anal or vaginal sex. Child sexual abuse generally refers to sexual acts, sexually motivated behaviours involving children or

sexual exploitation of children (Jill, 2013). Pitzer (2010) opined that child sexual abuse (CSA) is any form of sexual activity with a child or adolescent in which consent is not or cannot be provided (e.g. significant disparity in age, development or size). The consequences of sexual activities involving adolescent students and their school teachers include unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhoea and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) which could lead to eventual withdrawal of the child from school. Exposure to sexual abuse is a substantial risk factor for a range of depressive disorders such as anxiety, substance abuse and personality disorders in children and/ or adolescents. Child abuse is one of the most challenging social issues which deserve much attention. However, it is unfortunate to note that scanty empirical studies seem to exist on child abuse and depressive tendency in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State; hence it is imperative to carry out this study.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, child abuse tends to have become one of the major social issues that could affect the future career and life of the victim if not properly checked. Hence, it is more likely that child abuse may be responsible for the depressive tendency experienced by secondary school adolescents over the years. Experience and observations by the researchers show that depressive tendency may create attention deficit and impair with academic performance and activities and health condition of adolescents. However, it is unfortunate that to my knowledge not much empirical studies exist on child abuse and depressive tendency among secondary school adolescents, especially in Rivers State in recent times, and this tend to have created a huge gap in literature which this present study sought to fill. This study, therefore, investigated child abuse as correlate of depressive tendency among senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between child Abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Specially, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
2. Find out if there is any relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted the correlational research design. Correlational research design is a research design provides clues for the proper understanding of patterns of relationships among variables of the study (Okwo & Walson, 2016). This research design was considered most appropriate for this study because the researcher was interested in investigating the relationship between the independent variable- child abuse (physical abuse and sexual abuse) and the dependent variable (depressive tendency among senior secondary school adolescents) in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State without manipulating the

variables. The population of the study consisted of all the 11,364 (5,056 male and 6,308 female) senior secondary school students in all the 35 public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State for the 2019/2020 academic session (Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board, Port Harcourt, 2019). The sample size of the study consisted of 386 respondents (172 male and 214 female) SSS 2 students in public Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, which was determined using the Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula. Cluster sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample size of the study. In cluster sampling, the population is divided into smaller intact groups called clusters with similar characteristics and simple random sampling carried out in the clusters (Obilor, 2018). In this study, the cluster sampling technique was used to group (cluster) the population into Local Government Areas (Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Council) and gender (male and female students). After clustering the population into Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Council, the simple random sampling technique was used to select the 386 respondents (253 students in Obio/Akpor LGA, and 133 students in Port Harcourt City Council). The difference in the sample sizes of respondents from Obio/Akpor LGA and Port Harcourt City Council was because the number of schools and students in both LGAs (Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Council) differs. Two self-structured instruments titled "Child Abuse among Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (CASSAQ)" with 12 items (6 items in each cluster) and "Depressive Tendency among Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (DTSSAQ)" with 10 items were used for data collection. Both instruments were prepared on a 4 point response scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points to Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The face and content validity of the instruments were ascertained by two expert judges in the field of Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation in Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The Cronbach Alpha was used to obtain the reliability coefficients of 0.72 and 0.70, for the clusters of the Child Abuse among Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (CASSAQ), while test-retest method was used to obtain the reliability coefficient 0.74 for the Depressive Tendency among Secondary School Adolescents Questionnaire (DTSSAQ). Research questions were analyzed with the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (r), while the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using the t-transformation method. The t-transformation method was used to compute the significance of the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (r) using the formula below:

$$t = r \sqrt{\frac{N - 2}{1 - r^2}}$$

where, t = t-transformation, r = correlation coefficient value, N = total number of cases (population) at df = N - 2.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *What is the relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?*

Table 4.1: Relationship between Physical Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Public Senior Secondary School Adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State (n = 382)

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	r	Remark
				$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$			
Physical Abuse	382	3.07	0.60	1171	3727	3726	0.119	Positive
Depressive Tendency	382	3.17	0.39	1212	3904			

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Table 4.1 presents the relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Results in Table 4.1 shows that the relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State is positive with $r = 0.119$. This result indicates that physical abuse serves as an additional factor for adolescents' depressive tendency.

Research Question 2: *What is the relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State?*

Table 4.2: Relationship between Sexual Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Public Senior Secondary School Adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State (n = 382)

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	r	Remark
				$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$			
Sexual Abuse	382	3.09	0.55	1182	3774	3761	0.130	Positive
Depressive Tendency	382	3.17	0.39	1212	3904			

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Table 4.2 presents the relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Results in Table 4.2 reveals that there is a positive relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State ($r = 0.130$). This result is because sexual abuse is a substantial risk factor for a range of personality disorder.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Table 4.3: PPMC and T-test Analysis of Relationship between Physical Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Public Senior Secondary School Adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	r	t-trans	t-crit	α	Remark
Physical Abuse	382	3.07	0.60						
				380	0.119	2.336	1.960	0.05	S
Depressive Tendency	382	3.17	0.39						

S = Significant at 0.05 Significance Level

From the results in Table 4.3, it can be observed that at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom (df) of 380, $r = 0.119$, t-transformation (t-trans) = 2.336 and t-critical (t-crit) = 1.960. Since t-trans value of 2.336 > t-crit value of 1.960 at 0.05 significance level and degree of freedom (df) of 380, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State was therefore rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Table 4.4: PPMC and T-test Analysis of Relationship between Sexual Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Public Senior Secondary School Adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	r	t-trans	t-crit	α	Remark
Sexual Abuse	382	3.09	0.55						
				380	0.130	2.556	1.960	0.05	S
Depressive Tendency	382	3.17	0.39						

S = Significant at 0.05 Significance Level

Results in Table 4.4 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom (df) of 380, $r = 0.130$, t-transformation (t-trans) = 2.556 and t-critical (t-crit) = 1.960. Since t-trans value of 2.556 > t-crit value of 1.960 at 0.05 significance level and degree of freedom (df) of 380, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State was therefore rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the results of research question 1 as presented in Table 4.1, it was found that there is a positive relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Also, results in hypothesis 1 as shown in Table 4.3 revealed that the relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State is significant. This result indicates that physical abuse serves as an additional factor for adolescents' depressive tendency. This finding is in agreement with Famularo et al (2002) who examined whether physical abuse functions as an additional factor for adolescent depression in New York State Department of Social Services and found that physical abuse added significantly to other risks factors in accounting for lifetime diagnoses of major depression, dysthymia, conduct disorder, drug abuse and cigarette smoking. Similarly, Meek (2007) revealed that physically abused children have a 59 percent increased risk of lifetime major depression compared with similar children who were not abused. Thus, the use of more positive forms of behaviour modification is advocated such as persuasion, appeal to reason and good judgment and the reward for desirable forms of behaviour.

Results of research question 2 as shown in Table 4.2 showed that there is positive relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. However, results for hypothesis 2 as shown in Table 4.4 showed that the relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State is significant. This result is because sexual abuse is a substantial risk factor for a range of personality disorder. Similar to this finding, Margaret et al (2010) found that exposure to sexual abuse increased risks for the majority of outcomes including psychosis, affective, anxiety, substance abuse and personality disorders. Margaret, et al also observed that the rates of clinical disorders diagnosed in adulthood and childhood remained significantly higher among child sexual abuse cases. Thus, sexual abuse or any kind of abuse negatively and permanently affects the physical development of a child's brain (Melissa, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that child abuse contributes to the rate of depressive tendency among senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Thus; an attempt to reduce the level of child abuse could result to a decrease in depressive tendency among public senior secondary school adolescents in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Implications for Counselling

The following are some of the counselling implications of the study:

1. Secondary schools should have counselling units where adolescent students who have been exposed to any form of abuse could be helped to overcome the trauma, become well-adjusted and live better in their environments.
2. Counsellors should be available and accessible in secondary schools for adolescent students who might need help with their concerns as regards child abuse and its depressive tendencies.
3. Also, the government should empower the counselling associations in Nigeria to develop appropriate counselling measures and therapeutic approaches that could control the incidence of child abuse in the school and at home, as well as holistically address the social and psychological needs of the victims to reduce the depressive effect of child abuse among the secondary school adolescents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents and school teachers should avoid exposing adolescents students to corporal punishment, beating, torture, drunk, etc which are tantamount of causing bodily pain on them in the name of discipline to discourage depressive tendency among adolescents.
2. Laws prohibiting child abuse should be fully enforced at all times irrespective of who is involved.

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