



Psychosocial Adjustment And Family Communication Patterns Among Secondary School Adolescent In Imo State

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to determine the psychosocial adjustment scores of secondary school adolescents from conformity and conversation orientation. Gender was the moderator variable. This study was carried out in Owerri Education zone, Imo State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The descriptive survey design was used in the study. The population of the study comprised of 10,182 senior secondary school adolescents. Multi-stage procedure consisting of stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select the 480 participants from 16 out of 70 public secondary schools in the area were used. An adopted psychosocial adjustment questionnaire (PAQ) and family communication pattern questionnaire (FCPQ) were used to collect data. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha statistics and their internal consistency alpha obtained were 0.82 and 0.74. Data were analyzed using mean to answer the research questions, while the t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that secondary school adolescents from families of conversation orientation scored significantly high mean psychosocial adjustment irrespective of gender. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the guidance and counseling unit be established in every secondary school to help adolescents, parents and teachers deal with the psychosocial adjustment issues of adolescents.

Keywords: Psychosocial adjustment, Family Communication Patterns, Adolescents, Gender.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years based on juvenile delinquency and adolescent rebellion, many have regarded adolescence period as one that is full of problems. Being a period of active growth and a time for developing independence, many parents clash with their adolescents almost over everything. In this situation, the main issue is mostly always that of control. Adolescents want to be in control of their lives while parents are careful in granting such freedom for the sake of their safety. However, the way parents relate with their adolescent has some influence on the behavior of the adolescents. Many factors, including level of

psychosocial adjustment, family communication patterns and gender contribute to the development of behavior of adolescent.

Psychosocial adjustment is therefore a behavior pattern emanating from an individual ability to attune his or her mind and body to the social demands within a given environment.

According to Merrin-Webster (2005), psychosocial adjustment involves both psychological and special aspects of one's life. Psychosocial adjustment as a concept was first commonly used by Eric Erickson in his stages of psychosocial development theory (Unachukwu & Ebenebe, 2019). Erickson emphasized the importance of social factors in an individual's development and interaction between biological and social factors in the development of personality. According to Erickson, there are stages which are directly related to forces in the society which one must overcome in the course of social development and personality. Erickson proposed that human beings pass through eight psychosocial stages in their lifetime. At every stage, there are critical issues to be resolved. Some individuals resolve each critical issues satisfactorily and put it behind them to take a new challenge but some do not resolve these critical issues completely and they continue to deal with them later in life. He maintains that personality development is a life-long process. His theory places primary emphasis on the role of environment in causing crisis and determining how this crisis will be resolved.

In the first two stages of life, interactions are primarily with parents and other family members. As the adolescent develops, interactions extend. Where the adolescent is unable to accomplish life goals, the adolescent will be battling with failure and missed opportunities (Unachukwu & Ebenebe 2019). This failure and missed opportunities are recovered only, when such adolescent's psychosocial adjustment comes in.

According to Moby's Medical Dictionary (2009), psychosocial adjust has to do with life changes and adaptive psychological response of an individual to a significant life change. Such significant life changes may be developmental, as with adolescents or other occurrences in nature that may be as a result of accidents. Adjustment therefore, comes in to maintain equilibrium. Adjustment is also the mind's ability to consciously or unconsciously adapt to and relate the body to its social environment (CBS Interactive Inc. 2018). Psychosocial adjustment problems that perplex adolescents include establishing an identity, autonomy and intimacy, becoming comfortable with one's sexuality and making achievements. According to Eric Erickson's stage development theory, the adolescent comes under the fifth stage which is characterized by the age bracket of 12 - 18 years, the virtue being fidelity with psychosocial crisis as that of identity versus role confusion. The existential question for the adolescent according to this stage theory include questions about existence and purpose like who am I, and where am I going? (Weiten 2016). Proper psychosocial adjustment is the key to resolving this perplexity. In this stage theory, the adolescent's ego develops as he or she successfully resolves crisis that are distinctly social in nature. This involves a sense of identity in society. The opportunity to hear and be heard in a social setting as well as communicating in a small group like a family is very relevant here.

Within the limited time that family members spend together, understanding and improving on communication patterns within the family is very important. This will help each family member to maximize the opportunities inherent in family interactions. These opportunities may not have real alternatives as every individual has only one social family at a time. If conflicts arise, understanding one's family communication pattern may go a long way to resolving the conflicts, because more profitable avenues of negotiation will be easily adopted. Each family therefore should understand their family communication pattern. Such understanding and exploiting it may go a long way to helping adolescents and their parents deal with many psychosocial adjustment issues perplexing the adolescents. Communication, which is the act of sharing information, is a cycle which is completed only when the receiver has understood the sender's message and intent.

According to Artin (2013), communication is the process of exchanging information in the form of messages, symbol, thoughts, signs and opinions. There are four main types of communication, verbal, non-verbal, written and visual. Of all these types of communication, verbal communication is very

important among family members. Verbal communication includes sounds, words, language and speech. Speaking helps family members to express his or her emotions, interact and converse with the rest of the family members.

Consequently, the four main communication patterns possible within families have been identified (Arlin, 2014) these include, consensual, pluralistic, protective and laissez-faire. In consensual family communication pattern, open conversation is the prevalent communication pattern. According to Arlin (2014), parents are the final decision makers about important matters in this pattern. Children are encouraged to express their feelings, thoughts and activities but must comply with parent's major decisions. Conflicts arise between parents and children out of the desire of the children to exercise control. These conflicts are however avoidable as the children learn to abide by the family's values and beliefs and assume their necessary roles.

In pluralistic family communication pattern, conversation is common but conflict is often absent. Parents believe that children learn through their own experiences outside the family. Family decisions come from equal inputs, irrespective of whether one is a child or a parent. In this pattern of communication, open conflicts are common and so present no threats since children are strong in decision making.

In protective family communication pattern, conformity is more prevalent than open conversation. Children are given little or no opportunity to express themselves. Children must obey their parent's decisions irrespective of their own views. Conflicts rarely exist among family members. Children here rarely display self-confidence. In laissez-faire family communication pattern, neither conformity nor conversation is easily discernable. Family members are often independent of each other emotionally. There are often no issues to discuss and no orders demanding obedience are issued. There are no specific expectations of parents from their children. Conflicts are almost absent because each one does what one likes. Due to lack of reference points, children grow up to become unsure of their abilities to make decisions.

However, these four family communication patterns can be merged into two main orientations; conversation orientation and conformity is generally characterized by a high degree of individuality. Conformity orientation stresses homogeneity of attitudes, values and beliefs; open conversation may be present to some degree but conformity to family values and beliefs are expected at all times in this orientation. According to Koerner and Fitz Patrick (2006) consensual and pluralistic family communication patterns belong to conversation orientation while protective and laissez-faire family communication patterns belong to conformity orientation. When an individual begins to function normally where there used to be complexity or confusion, the person's level of psychosocial adjustment could be said to have been enhanced.

Psychosocial adjustment is also predicted to vary with gender (Bradley & Inqus 2012). Communication patterns exhibited by different families have also been linked to variations in gender styles of expression and relation to others. McNaughton (2000) discussed many finding of connections exhibited in childhood between gender and styles of expression and relating to others. Females, being more concerned with relationships, freely express happiness and sadness, thus they socialize to strive for warm and supportive interaction with males and socialized into hierarchic, status-oriented and competitive relationships. McNaughten (2000), therefore observed that the communication with parents often provides some sorts of reinforcement for certain behaviours among male and female adolescents.

The present researchers are of the opinion that adolescents reared in homes with different family communication patterns, may not adjust socially to the same levels in the society. Consequently, the researchers are wondering if some of the difficulties secondary school adolescents encounter with school authorities and teachers and even with peers are linked to their different psychosocial adjustment levels, family communication patterns and gender. Empirical studies on family communication patterns and psychosocial adjustment abound in literature (McNaughten, 2000; Gorman, 2011; Arlin, 2014). However many of these studies were carried out in places like Iran, Canada, Dutch and so on, which have different cultures, norms and values, when compared to families in Nigeria. It was not revealed from studies

reviewed, which gender adjusted better in the different communication patterns. The present researchers therefore want to compare the psychosocial adjustment of secondary school adolescents from varying family communication patterns as may be influenced by gender in Nigeria, specifically in Owerri, Imo State in order to address these gaps highlighted in the review above

Purpose of the Study

To determine the following

- i. The mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents raised in conformity and conversation orientation families.
- ii. The mean psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescent raised in conformity orientation families
- iii. The mean psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescent raised in conversation orientation families.

Research Questions

The study was guided by these research questions

1. What are the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents raised in conformity and conversation orientation families?
2. What are the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescents raised in conformity orientation families?
3. What are the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescent raised in conversation orientation families?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents raised in conformity and conversation orientation families.
2. There is no significant difference in mean psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescents raised in conformity orientation families.
3. There is no significant difference in mean psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescents raised in conversation orientation families.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was carried out in Imo State, Nigeria. The population of this study consisted of adolescent population, that is, students within the age range of 14 to 19 years. There are seventy (70) state owned senior secondary schools with a population of ten thousand one hundred and eighty-two (10,182) senior secondary class two (SS2) students (Source: Education Management Board statistics 2017 for SS II). The sample size of this study was four hundred and eighty (480) SS II students (240 males and 240 female). Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to get this sample size. In this research, two validated instruments were used. The family communication pattern questionnaire (FCPQ) adopted from Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) Inventory and the Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire adopted from Nwikpo (2015). The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. After analysis, the FCPQ had a coefficient alpha of 0.74 while the psychosocial adjustment questionnaire had a coefficient of 0.82. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. If $p < 0.05$, the hypothesis was rejected, otherwise, it was accepted.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Adolescents Based on Family Communication Orientations

	FCP	N	Mean	SD
Psychosocial Adjustment	Conformity	241	85.65	0.664
	Conversation	239	98.44	0.532

The results in Table 1 show the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents based on family communication pattern. It reveals that conformity orientation had a mean psychosocial adjustment score of 85.65 and standard deviation of 0.664 while conversation orientation had a mean psychosocial adjustment score of 98.44 and standard deviation of 0.532. Conversation orientation has a higher mean psychosocial adjustment score than the conversation orientation.

Table 2: Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Male Adolescents Based on Family Communication Orientations

Male	FCP	N	Mean	SD
Psychosocial Adjustment	Conformity	121	84.85	10.135
	Conversation	119	97.38	9.063

From Table 2, it is obvious that secondary school male adolescents from families of conversation orientation have higher mean psychosocial adjustment score (97.38) against those from families of conformity orientation (84.85). Apparently, male adolescents from families of conversation orientation have a higher level of psychosocial adjustment than those from conformity orientations.

Table 3: Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Female Adolescents Based on Family Communication Orientations

Female	FCP	N	Mean	SD
Psychosocial Adjustment	Conformity	120	86.46	10.450
	Conversation	120	99.48	7.168

The results in Table 3 show the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of female adolescents based on family communication patterns. It reveals that secondary school female adolescents from families of conversation orientation have higher mean psychosocial adjustment score (99.48) against those from families of conformity orientation (86.46). Apparently, female adolescents from families of conversation orientation have high mean scores of psychosocial adjustment than those from conformity orientations.

Table 4: t-Test Analysis of Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Adolescents from Families of Conformity and Conversation Orientations

FCP	N	Mean	SD	df	<i>t</i>_{cal}	p-value	Decision
Conformity	241	85.65	0.664	478	-15.021	0.000	Reject H ₀
Conversation	239	98.44	0.532				

From the results of the t-Test as shown in Table 4, the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance while the observed difference in the mean values of conversation and conformity orientations is (12.79). Therefore statement of hypothesis 1 is rejected; implying that there is a significant difference in the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of secondary school adolescents in conformity and conversation

orientations. This means that psychosocial adjustment levels of adolescents from families of conversation orientations are higher than those of adolescents from families of conformity orientations.

Table 5: t-test Analysis of Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Male Adolescents from Families of Conformity and Conversation Orientations

FCP (Male)	N	Mean	SD	df	t_{cal}	p-value	Decision
Conformity	121	84.85	10.135	238	-10.088	0.000	Reject H_0
Conversation	119	97.38	9.063				

From the results of the t-Test as shown in Table 5, the statement of hypothesis 2 is rejected; implying that there is a significant difference in the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of secondary school male adolescents in conformity and conversation orientation. This is because the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Hypothesis 2 shows a significant difference in the direction of conversation orientation.

Table 6: t-test Analysis of Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Female Adolescents from Conformity and Conversation Orientation

FCP (Female)	N	Mean	SD	df	t_{cal}	p-value	Decision
Conformity	120	86.46	10.450	238	-11.259	0.000	Reject H_0
Conversation	120	99.48	7.168				

From the results of the t-Test as shown in Table 6, the statement of hypothesis 3 is rejected; implying that there is a significant difference in the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of secondary school female adolescents in families of conformity and conversation orientations. This is because the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

From the findings of this study, a significant difference was reported in the mean scores of adolescents from families of conversation and conformity orientations in favour of conversation orientation, suggesting higher level of psychosocial adjustment. This finding agrees with literature. Children from families of conversation orientation exercise have relatively higher freedom for self-expression (Arlin, 2014). This pattern of communication style (open conversation) is linked with reinforcement from parents for adolescents' social relationships, free expression of happiness and sadness and hence supports warm interactions with outsiders (McNaughton, 2000). Female adolescents from families of conversation orientation were also reported to have significantly higher mean score in psychosocial adjustment than their counterpart from conformity orientations. This is also an indication of higher psychosocial adjustment level. Literature has it that female adolescents tend to be better psychosocially adjusted than the males. Generally, females have less tendency for social group dominance but view the group as a social net-work for mutual benefits (McNaughton, 2000) and more emotional disclosure than male adolescents (Gorman, 2011). It is therefore understandable that female adolescents from families of open conversation orientation which support and reinforce self-expression and struggle less with conflict will tend to exhibit higher levels of psychosocial adjustment. The explanation given for the observation of possible high mean score of psychosocial adjustment among female adolescents from families of conversation orientations shall suffice for similar observation about males in conversation and conformity orientations. With male adolescents' tendencies to seek control of group leadership and exhibition of authority, openness may be lacking. It is therefore worse for such a male adolescent if he already has a background in a family where he is always in conflict with family members (conformity orientation).

CONCLUSION

In Imo State, and from the schools sampled, adolescents from families with conversation orientation seem to have higher levels of psychosocial adjustment when compared with those from families of conformity orientation. The higher levels of psychosocial adjustment shown by adolescents from families of conversation orientation above adolescents from families of conformity orientation seem to be consistent in gender. The strongest determinant of psychosocial adjustment levels of secondary school adolescents is family communication orientation when compared with the variable of gender. Irrespective of family communication pattern, female secondary school adolescents tend to exhibit higher levels of psychosocial adjustment than their male counterparts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Parents should re-direct the communication patterns within the family in order to give their children, especially the adolescents more opportunity to make their voices heard and their opinions count in family decisions, especially as it concerns them.
2. Teachers generally and form teachers in particular should regard the classroom as a unique family where students are giving the opportunity to freely express themselves and treat their opinions with regards.
3. Schools should establish guidance and counseling units with qualified guidance counselors to help adolescents deal with their psychosocial problems.

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