
Child Abuse And Depressive Tendency Among Adolescents In Secondary School: A Bane To Creativity In Childhood Education

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Abstract

The study investigated child abuse as a correlate of depressive tendency among adolescents in secondary school in Abua- Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The aim of the study was to find out if child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) correlates with depressive tendency among adolescent students. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 4288 students from which cluster sampling technique was used to select 366 students made up of 177 males and 189 females drawn from Abua-Odual local government area of Rivers State. Three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Two self-designed instruments titled: Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) and Depressive Tendency Scale (DTS) were used to gather data. A reliability index of $r = 0.84$ was obtained for Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) while Depressive Tendency scale (DTS) had 0.87 respectively. The findings of the study revealed that physical, sexual and emotional abuse positively and significantly correlate with depressive tendency among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odua local government area. Accordingly, it was recommended that the government and educational stakeholders should enforce strict child protection laws and ensure effective monitoring mechanisms in schools and communities to prevent all forms of child abuse thereby safeguarding adolescent well-being.

Keywords: Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional abuse, and Depressive Tendency

Introduction

The well-being of adolescents in secondary school is a critical factor influencing their creativity, which in turn plays a significant role in the broader context of national

development. Child abuse and depressive tendencies can severely impact the creative potential of young individuals, hindering their educational achievements and their ability to contribute to society. Depressive tendency is the predisposition or inclination toward experiencing symptoms commonly associated with depression. Unlike clinical depression, which is a diagnosable mental health condition characterized by persistent and pervasive symptoms meeting specific diagnostic criteria, depressive tendency may manifest as recurring episodes or traits that suggest vulnerability to depressive states. Depressive tendencies are portrayed by behavioural changes towards despondency or being discouraged.

Maron, (2014) considers it to be a slant or inclining towards depression. Thus, understanding depression is necessary in order to comprehend depressive tendencies. In depressive tendencies, the appearance of signs and indications, for example, bitterness, low self-regard, rest aggravation, loss of craving, crying spells, loss of interest or delight in ordinary exercises, self-fault, feeling drained, self-hurt, poor school execution or continuous unlucky deficiencies from school and so on are being experienced.

Despite the fact that various causes of depressive tendencies have been identified, the consolidated impact of child abuse may assume huge part in precipitating depressive inclinations experienced by school adolescents in Abua-Odual Local Government Area. Belagali and Mangoli (2021) reported that each day more than five children die as a result of abuse. On average, child abuse report is made every 10 seconds for a total of approximately 3.3 million child abuse reports annually (National Institute of Mental Health, 2013). Child abuse is a deeply concerning issue that refers to any action, or failure to act, by a caregiver or other person in a position of authority that results in harm, potential harm, or the threat of harm to a child. This harm can manifest in various forms, broadly categorized into physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. Abuse. Each type of abuse impacts a child differently but invariably disrupts their development and overall well-being.

Physical abuse is against the child and it results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishment. Corporal punishment involves hitting (smacking, slapping and spanking) children, with the hand or with an implement whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices).

Sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation. Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed toward the physical gratification or the financial profit of the person committing the act. Forms of Child Sexual Abuse include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities, indecent exposure of the genitals to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual sexual contact with a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, or using a child to produce child pornography. Selling the sexual services of children may be viewed and treated as child abuse rather than simple incarceration.

Psychological abuse is harmful as sexual or physical abuse. Victims of emotional abuse may react by distancing themselves from the abuser, internalizing the abusive words, or fighting back by insulting the abuser. Emotional abuse can result in abnormal or disrupted attachment development, a tendency for victims to blame themselves (self-blame) for the abuse, learned helplessness, and overly passive behaviour. The production of psychological and social defects in the growth of a child as a result of behaviour such as loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism, and denigration of the child's personality. Other examples include name-calling, ridicule, degradation, destruction of personal belongings, torture or killing of a pet, excessive criticism, inappropriate or excessive demands, withholding communication, and routine labelling or humiliation.

Some of the negative impacts of these issues on creativity in childhood education and national development may include, but not limited to:

1. **Inhibited Cognitive Development and Creative Thinking:** Exposure to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, as well as neglect, can lead to developmental delays and cognitive impairments. These negative experiences often result in difficulties with problem-solving, critical thinking, and creative expression. More so, adolescents experiencing depression may struggle with concentration, memory, and decision-making. This can hinder their ability to engage in creative thinking and innovation.
2. **Reduced Academic Performance:** These traumatic experiences can lead to lower academic achievement due to increased absenteeism, lack of engagement in school activities, and difficulties in learning. Poor academic performance limits opportunities for higher education and future career prospects, thus affecting the individual's ability to contribute creatively to the workforce. More so, depression can cause a lack of motivation and interest in schoolwork, leading to declining grades and diminished academic success. This reduction in academic performance can stifle the development of creative skills and knowledge.
3. **Limited Social Skills and Collaboration:** Adolescents who have suffered abuse or neglect may have difficulty forming trusting relationships with peers and teachers. This social isolation can hinder collaborative learning experiences that are vital for fostering creativity. More so, depression can lead to withdrawal from social interactions, making it challenging for adolescents to participate in group activities that promote creative thinking and teamwork.
4. **Decreased Self-Esteem and Confidence:** These experiences can severely damage an adolescent's self-esteem and confidence. Low self-esteem can make it difficult for students to express their ideas and take creative risks, which are essential components of the creative process. More so, depression often comes with feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, which can further diminish an individual's confidence in their creative abilities.
5. **Increased Risk of Mental Health Issues:** Prolonged exposure to abuse and neglect can result in long-term mental health issues such as anxiety, PTSD, and depression, which can impede creative thinking and problem-solving skills. More so, adolescents with untreated depression are at risk of developing chronic mental health conditions that can persist into adulthood, limiting their potential for creative contributions throughout their lives.

Kinane (2018) explained that the term depression is derived from the Latin term “deprimere”, which means to press down; explaining why victims are easily weighed down psychologically, physically or sometimes physiologically. It is the commonest reaction to frustration, and also the common cold of psychopathology because it’s high prevalence. Kinane (2018) identified depression is the second leading cause of disability, thereby describing depression as the persistent sadness and lack of interest or pleasure in previously rewarding or enjoyable activities. Depression is an aberrant, maladaptive behavior that impairs a person's mood to the point where they are unable to function as normally as they did before.

A person with depressive tendencies may not be creative as depression has the tendency to decrease ability and increase disability, creative endeavours can only be carried out by a sound mind. Adolescents in Abua/Odual Local Government Area may likely be grappling with depressive tendency with attendant absenteeism, deviancy, inattentiveness, among others whilst child abuse has been implicated to precipitate depressive tendencies. It is to this end that the present study intends to investigate child abuse and depressive tendency among adolescents from selected secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Depression is incapacitating thus can fizzle-out creativity particularly in adolescents if not well handled. Adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area are grappling with depressive tendencies. The researchers observed that adolescents often manifest sadness, easily get frustrated, disinterest in activities they used to enjoy, blame themselves excessively, have difficulty concentrating, feel drained and avoid social activities. These indicators call for deep concern by relevant stakeholders, and if left unchecked can precipitate debilitating consequences on both the educational, vocational and personal-social wellbeing of the adolescent.

Scholars have established that depression is triggered by plethora of factors including child abuse. Child abuse is any action by another person – adult or child – that causes significant harm to a child. Child abuse can result from physical, emotional, or sexual harm. Child abuse can have severe, long-term consequences, such as physical effect (e.g., injuries, developmental delays, and chronic health issues), emotional and psychological effects (e.g., anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and difficulties forming healthy relationships), behavioural effects (e.g., aggression, substance abuse, and criminal behavior), and educational impact (e.g., poor academic performance, lack of focus, or dropping out of school).

It is against the foregoing that the present study is out to investigate child abuse and depressive tendency among secondary school adolescents in selected secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The present study investigated child abuse and depressive tendency among adolescents of selected secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Area of Rivers State. In specific terms, the study examined:

1. The extent to which physical abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
2. The extent to which sexual abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
3. The extent to which emotional abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent does physical abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
2. To what extent does sexual abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
3. To what extent does emotional abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H₀₁:** Physical abuse does not significantly relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- H₀₂:** Sexual abuse does not significantly relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- H₀₃:** Emotional abuse does not significantly relate to depressive tendencies among adolescent in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised of the 4288 public secondary school students in Abua, as at the period of this study. The sample of the study was 366 students and it was adopted using cluster sampling technique. Two instruments were utilized to gather information for this study. Two self-developed instruments: Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) and Depressive Tendency Scale (DTS) were developed to collect data. The content and face validity of the instruments were determined by experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-re-test reliability method where copies of the instruments were administered to 20 students who did not participate in the final study. The responses of

the students were subjected to statistical analysis to determine their reliability coefficient. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to correlate the scores. Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) yielded a reliability of 0.84, while Depressive Tendency Scale (DTS) yielded a reliability of 0.87. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the corresponding hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: 1. To what extent does physical abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Hypothesis One: Physical abuse does not significantly relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Physical Abuse and Depressive Tendencies among Adolescents.

		Physical Abuse	Depressive Tendencies
Physical Abuse	Pearson Correlation	1	.827
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	366	366
Depressive Tendencies	Pearson Correlation	.827	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	366	366

* Significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)*

Table 1 shows Pearson Product Moment Correlation results of physical abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The results reveal r-value of .827 with its corresponding p-value of .000<0.05 level of significance. This shows a strong positive relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This result also indicates that to a very high extent physical abuse relates to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. It therefore indicates that there is significant relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendencies among students in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This also means that when there is increase in scores of Physical abuse, there tend to be a corresponding increase in depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Question Two: To what extent does sexual abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: Sexual abuse does not significantly relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of sexual abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents.

		Sexual abuse	Depressive tendencies
Sexual abuse	Pearson Correlation	1	.833
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	366	366
Depressive tendencies	Pearson Correlation	.833	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	366	366

* Significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)*

Table 2 shows Pearson Product Moment Correlation results of sexual abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The results reveal r-value of .833 with its corresponding p-value of .000<0.05 level of significance. This shows a strong positive relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This result also indicates that to a very high extent, sexual abuse relates to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This also means that when there is increase in scores of sexual abuse, there tend to be a corresponding increase in depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Question Three: To what extent does emotional abuse relate to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three: Emotional abuse does not significantly relate to depressive tendencies among adolescent in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents.

		Emotional Abuse	Depression tendencies
Emotional Abuse	Pearson Correlation	1	.687
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	366	366
Depression tendencies	Pearson Correlation	.687	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	366	366

* Significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)*

Table 3 shows Pearson Product Moment Correlation results of emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The results reveal r-value of .687 with its corresponding p-value of .000<0.05 level of significance. This shows a moderate positive relationship between emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This result also indicates that to a high extent, emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This also means that when there is increase in scores of emotional abuse, there tend to be a

corresponding increase in depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Physical Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Adolescents

The discoveries of the present study demonstrated that there was a noteworthy impact of physical abuse and depressive tendency. The results reveal r-value of .827 with its corresponding p-value of $.000 < 0.05$ level of significance. This shows a strong positive relationship between physical abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The discoveries of the present study mostly concur with the findings of Margaret, et. al. (2010) who discovered that all sorts of adolescent abuse freely foresee depressive inclination.

Sexual Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Adolescents

The discoveries of the present study uncovered that there is a strong positive relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The results reveal r-value of .833 with its corresponding p-value of $.000 < 0.05$ level of significance. This shows a strong positive relationship between sexual abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. This result also indicates that to a very high extent, sexual abuse relates to depressive tendencies among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. The discoveries of the present study is in concurrence with the discoveries of Kovacs et al (2014) who discovered that child abuse could impact real depressive issue. The distinction in the present study from different studies led is in nature of the examination.

Emotional Abuse and Depressive Tendency among Adolescents

The discoveries of the present study demonstrated that there is a critical relationship between emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in Abua/Odual. The results reveal r-value of .687 with its corresponding p-value of $.000 < 0.05$ level of significance. This shows a moderate positive relationship between emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in Abua/Odual. This result also indicates that to a high extent, emotional abuse and depressive tendencies among adolescents in Abua/Odual. The outcome is in consonance with the discoveries of Afifi et al (2019), in a study on the connections between adolescent abuse, parental separation and life time mental turmoil and suicidality in a broadly illustrative grown-up test in New York who said adolescent abuse alone was connected with psychiatric issues and self-destructive ideation and endeavours. The present study varies from that of Afifi et al (2019), in light of the fact that it was done in Nigeria, in Abua-Odual Local Government Area while that of Afifi was done in New York.

Conclusion

The wellbeing of adolescents secondary schools is a critical factor influencing their creativity which in turn plays a significant role in the broader context of national development. Child abuse and depression tendencies can severely impact the creative potentials of adolescents. In view of the discoveries of the study, it was concluded that

physical, sexual and emotional abuse are precipitates depressive inclination among adolescents in secondary schools in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Recommendations of the study.

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

1. Government and educational stakeholders should enforce strict child protection laws and ensure effective monitoring mechanisms in schools and communities to prevent adolescent abuse and safeguard adolescent well-being.
2. Schools should integrate professional counseling services to identify and support students dealing with abuse-related trauma and depressive tendencies, promoting mental wellness and academic success.
3. Educators and all those who deal with adolescents should regularly should receive training on recognizing signs of abuse and depression in students, as well as strategies for fostering a safe and supportive learning environment for them.

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