

Investigating Emotional Abuse: Causes and Impacts on Adolescents in Ekiti State Secondary Schools, Nigeria

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Abstract:-

➤ Background

Child abuse remains a significant social and public health concern. While physical and sexual abuse have received considerable attention, emotional abuse has often been overlooked. Emotional abuse can include behaviours like ignoring, belittling, and verbal assaults. This study aims to identify the causes and impacts of emotional abuse among adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

➤ Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted among adolescents in senior secondary schools in Ekiti State. A multistage sampling method was used to randomly select 450 adolescents. Data collection involved a self-administered questionnaire adapted for this purpose, filled out by the students under the guidance of trained research assistants. Data entry and analysis were performed using SPSS version 25.

➤ Results

Among the respondents, 187 (41.6%) were female and 263 (58.4%) were male. The sample included 190 early adolescents (42.2%), 220 mid-adolescents (48.9%), and 40 late adolescents (8.9%). Emotional abuse from actions such as discipline for noise making affected 84% of students, with 72.1% developing fear of their teachers, 48.9% experiencing low self-esteem, and 54.7% feeling anxious about their academic performance.

➤ Conclusion

Adolescents in Ekiti secondary schools experience emotional abuse through punitive measures and academic pressures, impacting self-esteem and academic outcomes. Schools should implement periodic awareness programs for teachers on constructive discipline methods that avoid emotional abuse. Additionally, government financial support would help students better meet academic needs.

Keywords:- Causes, Effects Emotional/Psychological Abuse, Adolescents, In-School, Ekiti.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is widely recognised as a critical developmental phase, typically spanning from the beginning of puberty to the achievement of social independence¹. During this period of transition, individuals undergo significant physical, psychological, cognitive, and emotional changes and may also encounter various forms of emotional abuse².

Emotional (psychological) abuse is often defined as the “use of verbal and non-verbal acts that symbolically harm or threaten to harm the other person.” Psychological maltreatment is considered present when acts of omission or commission harm a child's well-being, potentially leading to emotional distress or maladaptive behaviours in the child². Research has shown that emotional abuse impairs cognitive function and academic performance and is associated with aggression, irritability, hypervigilance, suicidal tendencies, and substance use among affected adolescents².

Emotional abuse can manifest in various forms, including ignoring, belittling, or intimidation. Such abuse hinders development, distorts a child's positive self-image, and may have lasting consequences, potentially resulting in risky or aggressive behaviour in adolescence or adulthood³.

The secondary school stage aligns with the adolescent phase of human development, a period often described as one of “storm and stress.” This term refers to the turbulent nature of adolescence, marked by conflicts and mood swings, highlighting the need for parents and teachers to approach this transition period with care. Teachers working with adolescents may sometimes fail to grasp the nature of this transition, the unique developmental needs of adolescents, the influence of peer groups, and the challenges linked to sexual maturation⁴.

A lack of understanding of these adolescent characteristics may create conflicts between teachers and students, potentially leading teachers to engage in emotionally abusive behaviours in the classroom⁵.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed for the study, covering aspects such as research design, research setting, target population, sampling technique, data collection instrument, validity and reliability of the instrument, data collection method, data analysis method, and ethical considerations.

B. Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey design to evaluate the prevalence of emotional abuse among in-school adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

C. Research Setting

The research took place in Ekiti State, located in the western part of Nigeria and one of the country's thirty-six states. Ekiti State borders Kwara and Kogi States to the north, Osun State to the west, and Ondo State to the east and south. It is divided into three senatorial districts: Ekiti Central, Ekiti South, and Ekiti North⁶. This study focused on secondary schools within Ekiti State, where students follow a six-year secondary education system—three years in junior secondary and three years in senior secondary, following six years in primary education. A cross-sectional research design was applied, involving senior secondary school students across the three senatorial districts in Ekiti State.

D. Target Population

The study targeted adolescents enrolled in senior secondary schools within Ekiti State's three senatorial districts, focusing on adolescents aged 10–19 years. Those who were absent during the study were excluded. The sample size was calculated using Leslie Fischer's formula for populations over 10,000, resulting in a total of 380 participants, with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval, while accounting for a 10% non-response rate. This study builds upon previous research titled "Emotional Abuse Among In-School Adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria"⁷.

E. Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling method was used. In the first stage, one local government area was chosen from each senatorial district through simple random sampling by ballot. In the second stage, one secondary school per local government area was selected, also by random ballot. In the third stage, class arms were chosen, and the fourth stage used proportionate sampling to determine the required number of students from each school. Systematic random sampling was applied to select students from each arm to reach the target sample size.

F. Study Instrument

An adapted, self-administered questionnaire⁸ was used, divided into sections: Section A for sociodemographic data, Section B for students' perceptions of the causes of emotional abuse, and Section C for perceptions of its effects. Ten percent of the sample size was used for a pilot test of the questionnaire in a secondary school outside the study sample.

G. Method of Data Collection

Two medical students and one nursing student, trained as research assistants, supported the data collection process. Questionnaires were reviewed on-site to confirm they were correctly filled out.

H. Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 25. Univariate analysis, including percentages and means, was applied as relevant.

I. Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital, with further permissions from the Ministry of Education and school principals. Depending on age, assent or consent was obtained from participants. All information gathered was kept confidential, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage.

III. RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondent
Table 1 shows that equal number of students were recruited from each school, and about half (55.1%) of the students were senior secondary school students, a few (58.4%) of the students were male students, while almost half of the students were in their middle adolescent age. Majority of the respondents were Christians, and almost all (95.3%) of the respondents were day students.

Table 2: Students' perception on the causes of psychological abuse.

Table 2 shows that majority (92.4%) of the respondents do not perceive coming late to school as a reason to be psychologically abused. Similarly, 93.6% of the respondents do not perceive fighting in class as a reason to be psychologically abused. However, majority (84.0%) of the respondents perceived that making noise is in class as a cause of exposure to psychological abuse.

Table 3: Students' perception on the effect of psychological abuse.

Table 3 shows that about half of the respondents (51.1%) perceived that they had low self-esteem due to psychological abuse. Similarly, 54.7% of the respondents worry about their academic performance because of psychological abuse, many (73.1%) of the respondents are scared of their teachers due to psychological abuse exposure, 70% of the respondents also

feel moody and afraid of expressing themselves in class due to psychological abuse. Only few (24.7%) of the respondents

deliberately miss school due to psychological abuse.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondent

Variable	Frequency	
	N = 450	(%)
Schools		
All saint's Anglican college	150	33.3
Annunciation secondary school	150	33.3
Saint Augustine secondary school	150	33.3
Class		
Junior secondary school	202	44.9
Senior secondary school	248	55.1
Gender		
Male	263	58.4
Female	187	41.6
Age		
Early adolescents	190	42.2
Middle adolescent	220	48.9
Late adolescent	40	8.9
Religion		
Christianity	404	89.8
Islam	35	7.8
Traditional	11	2.4
Type of school		
Day	429	95.3
Boarding	21	4.7

Table 2: Student's Perception on the Causes of Psychological Abuse.

Variable	Frequency n = 450	Percentage (%)
Coming to school late.		
Yes	34	7.6
No	416	92.4
Fighting in the class.		
Yes	29	6.4
No	421	93.6
Poor academic performances in class		
Yes	23	5.1
No	427	94.9
Absconding from school.		
Yes	35	7.8
No	415	92.2
Being stubborn		
Yes	45	10.0
No	405	90.0
Owing school fees		
Yes	30	6.7
No	420	93.3

Not having textbook or notebook		
Yes	45	10.0
No	405	90.0
Making noise in class		
Yes	72	84.0
No	378	16.0

Table 3: Student's Perception on the Effect of Psychological Abuse.

Variable	Frequency n = 450	Percentage (%)
Psychological abuse caused you to experience low self-esteem?		
Yes	220	48.9
No	230	51.1
Psychological abuse caused you to worry about your academic performances?		
Yes	246	54.7
No	204	45.3
Psychological abuse caused you to fear any of your teachers?		
Yes	329	73.1
No	121	26.9
Psychological abuse caused you to be moody and afraid to express yourself in the class?		
Yes	135	70.0
No	315	30.0
Psychological abuse caused you to deliberately miss school?		
Yes	111	24.7
No	339	75.3
Psychological abuse caused you to feel inferior to your classmates?		
Yes	92	20.4
No	358	79.6
Psychological abuse caused other students to look down on you or treat you badly?		
Yes	89	19.8
No	361	80.2
Psychological abuse caused you to see yourself as a dullard?		
Yes	64	14.2
No	386	85.8

IV. DISCUSSION

The prevalence of emotional abuse among in-school adolescents in Ekiti State has been earlier determined to be 66%⁷.

Our study revealed that noise making in class is the leading cause of psychological abuse in secondary schools. The noise phenomenon at school is one of the factors that may adversely distort school climate⁹. Research has shown that loud noise at school is not without consequences such as hypersensitivity in teachers, prolonged severe headache, difficulty in communicating, as well as teachers feeling tired and angry. It was understood that teachers acted in various ways to cope with the noise, such as verbally warning noisy students⁹. Because of the anger which is sometimes involved, this often leads to emotionally abusive behaviours.

Other causes of emotional abuse experienced by our study participants include fighting in class, poor academic performance, absconding from school, being stubborn, owing school fees, not having study materials.

Our study participants experienced many effects of psychological abuse with being scared of their teachers; being moody and afraid to express themselves in class; worrying about their academic performance; and experiencing low self esteem leading the race.

About half of our study participants reported feeling low self esteem from psychological abuse. This is consolidated by the result of a study done in Borno state where two-thirds of the adolescents reported the same.⁸ Emotional abuse adversely affects self concept, which is being developed in the adolescence phase, a sum total of the perception of their ability, behaviours and personality⁵. As a result, those who are psychologically abused don't become competent adults, capable of developing to their full potentials⁸.

A significant majority of our study participants reported feeling moody in class and being afraid to express themselves. This agrees with the report that emotional abuse destroys students' sense of self and personal safety manifested in their interpersonal thoughts, emotional health and social skills⁵.

The most perceived effect of psychological abuse on our study participants is that they become scared of their teachers. This is because children and adolescents expect caregivers and other adults in their lives to act in their best interest; consequently, when emotional abuse occurs, this fundamental belief is challenged¹⁰. Therefore, when teachers are the offenders, students may lose trust in them, and this may be expressed in form of fearing them, being hypervigilant or as a feeling of resentment⁸. Psychologically abusive behaviours themselves frighten students and by extension, they are scared of the people inflicting it on them¹⁰.

With emotional abuse stifling students' intelligence development, and destroying their sense of ability¹¹, over half of our study participants find themselves constantly worrying about their academic performance.

The students experienced, to a lesser degree, deliberate school absenteeism, being looked down on their peers and feeling weak in their body. As dislike for school, disgrace, demotivation and affectation of physical health have been mentioned as effects of psychological abuse⁹.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn: 84% of in-school adolescents in Ekiti-State experienced emotional abuse from making noise in class, they also experienced emotional abuse from other causes such as not having textbooks, being stubborn, coming to school late, absconding from school, owing school fees, fighting in class and poor academic performance. This means that emotionally abusive behaviours thrive in punitive and corrective measures to check students' excesses and also when they are unable to get their basic academic needs. As a consequence, about half of the times, they experience low self esteem and worry about their academic performance. They also develop fear for their teachers and deliberately miss school which are counterproductive to learning.

RECOMMENDATION

School authority should organize periodic enlightenment programs for the teachers on corrective measures void of emotionally abusive behaviours. The government should do more in providing financial aids to meet students' academic needs.

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