



A Study of Psychosocial Challenges of Public Secondary School Students in a Semi- Urban Area of Southwest- Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study was done to identify the psychosocial challenges of public school students in Ore and the associated factors that may predispose the students to these challenges.

Methodology: The study is descriptive with cross - sectional design. A total of three hundred and fifty seven respondents who accurately completed the questionnaire were included in the study. Descriptive statistics was done and results were presented in percentages using tables.

Results: The findings revealed a good number of the respondents are able to identify with some of the psychosocial health problems such as bully (43.1%), anger (33.9%), hunger in school (40.1%) and thought of committing suicide (21.8%). The perceived factors related to the causes of these identified psychosocial health problems by the respondents were poverty (94.1%), peer pressure (96.4%), abuse and neglect (86.3%), emotional stressors (96%) among others.

Conclusion: The Public health Nurses and School health nurses should work with school administrators to enhance mental health of school children with a view to ensuring conducive learning environment that will promote academic performances.

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INTRODUCTION

One third of the day is spent within the school premises daily by the students, and most children spend more active hours in school than they do in the company of their parents. The time that children and parents actually spend together has reduced because both parents now take up jobs away from home.¹ However, the school alone cannot meet the basic psychosocial needs of children. Students face many situations in school that may result in psychosocial and health problems and rather than for the school to be a source of positive socialization, the school, for many children, is experienced as an uncaring and unsupportive environment, which can have detrimental consequences for their mental health.²

The school plays a significant role in the socio-emotional development of children, but some students fail to realize this and prefer to drop-out of school on the slightest excuse. Shocking reasons

for school drop-outs by students who have relatively good performance include boredom with school and inability to get along with teachers.³ When these children become drop out in school, both individual potentials and social capital are lost, leaving affected children vulnerable to psychological trauma and poverty. This could be physically damaging, psychologically stunting and demeaning to the dignity of children.

The pressure and adjustments that come with secondary school life can often be overwhelming for students as most of them are approaching the developmental stage of adolescence which has its peculiar hormonal disruption.⁴ The students at this stage need a very strong support network which should be coordinated by the teachers and accessible within the school environment for them to be able to navigate through this period with little to no negative health outcome.⁵

Physical, social and mental health are key components in a child's healthy development. Children need to be healthy in order to learn, grow, and lead productive lives. However, the nature of the school experiences, support and guidance will influence how well their developmental needs are met. To this end, this study examined the psychosocial and health challenges of students in public secondary schools with a view to making suggestions for decision makers.

The Research questions are;

1. What are the psychological and social challenges facing Students in Public secondary school?
2. What are the perceived factors related to these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional research design in which data were collected at a point in time to prevent biases and to control extraneous variables so as to effectively determine the psychosocial and health challenges of children in public secondary Schools in Ore, Ondo state.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in the selected public secondary schools in Ore Odigbo local government, Ondo state. Ore is a major city in this local government. It has an area of 1,818 km² and a population of 230,351 who are mostly agrarian as confirmed by the 2006 census.

The names of the schools were Ore community high school and Muslim community high school Ore. Ore community high school is situated along old Benin-Lagos way Ore and was founded in January 1978.

The total population of the students was 1500. The school comprises of administrative blocks, twenty classrooms, library, toilets, playground and laboratories. While, Muslim community high

school Ore is situated along Reserve garage near Beulah Baptist church Ore. It was founded in January 1987. The total population of the students was 1800. The school comprises of twenty two classrooms, toilets, administrative blocks, library, playground, and laboratories

Sampling Technique

Multi stage sampling technique was used. At first stage, Ore Odigbo local government was purposively selected for its characteristics of having teachers that attended schools regularly. Second stage was the simple random (balloting) selection of two public secondary schools from the local government.

The third stage was the selection of the students using a systematic sampling technique to prevent bias and to ensure that each student has equal chance of being selected. So, every 9th number of students on the register was included in the study for the filling of the questionnaire. The calculated sample size for the research study using Yemen's formula was 360. The study population were 357 students whose parents gave consent and who also gave assent to the researcher to participate in the study.

Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was developed following vast literature review. Content was subjected to review by experts in psychology. Test -retest Reliability result was cronbach alpha.⁸

The instrument has four Sections- section A consists of socio-demographic variables of the respondent, section B was on psychosocial and health challenges of public students in Ore, section C was on the causes of psychosocial and health problems of students while section D was on the relationship between psychosocial challenges and learning environment of the selected students.

Data generated for the study were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS version 17.

RESULTS

The socio- demographic characteristics of the respondents are as presented in table I, which revealed that majority of the students, were

Table I: Socio-demographics characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (N=357)	Percentages (%)
Age in years		
10 – 13	103	28.8
14-17	237	66.4
>18	17	4.8
Class		
JSS1-JSS3	102	28.6
SSS1-SSS3	255	71.4
Sex		
Male	208	58.3
Female	149	41.9
Religion		
Christianity	220	61.6
Islam	137	38.4
Ethnicity		
Yoruba	262	73.4
Hausa	56	15.7
Igbo	39	10.9

Table II: Reported Psychosocial Challenges of Respondents

Variables	Frequency n=357 (Percentage %)	
	YES	NO
Thought of committing suicide	78 (21.8)	279 (78.2)
Feeling sad and hopeless	16 (4.5)	341 (95.5)
Substance abuse(alcohol, nicotine)	37 (10.4%)	320 (89.6)
Sexual harassment in school	94 (26.3)	263 (73.7)
Self-medication	68 (19.0)	289 (81.0)
Bully	154 (43.1)	203 (56.9)
Fear of relating with others	52 (14.6)	305 (85.4)
Distraction in class	51 (14.3)	306 (85.7)
Easily get angry	121 (33.9)	236 (66.1)
Hunger in school	143 (40.1)	214 (59.9)

between the ages of 14- 17 years (66.4%) and were in senior secondary classes (71.4%). There were more males (58.3%) among the respondents.

Table II revealed that the students had multiple experiences of psychosocial challenges within the school hours among their colleagues, which range from thought of committing suicide, bully, and substance abuse to sexual harassment in school.

As regards the perceived causes of psychological/

Reported Causes of Psychosocial and Health Problems among Respondents

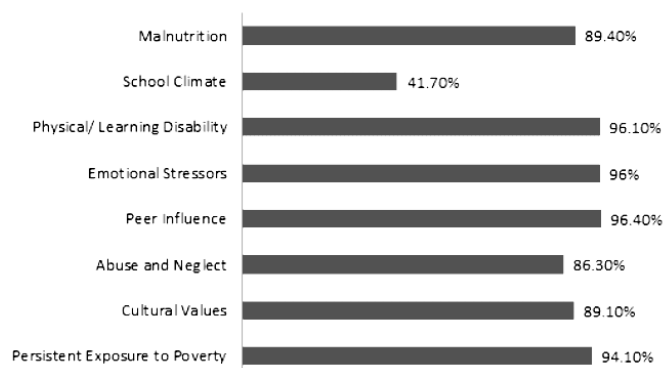


Figure 1: Perceived Factors for Psychosocial and Health Problems among Respondents

health problems among these students, 336 (94.1%) of the respondents agreed that persistent exposure to poverty had a negative effect on a child's health, 89.1% of them also agreed that gender and cultural values had an impact on who you are and what you do in life, 86.3% agree that abuse and neglect caused poor performance in school, 96.4% agreed that peer influence could affect a child's psychological and social behavior.

Also, 96% agreed that emotional stressors influenced psychosocial problems, 96.1% agreed to presence of physical and learning disabilities affecting psychosocial development but a few of

Table III: Students' Perception of the Contributory Effect of School Environment on their Psychosocial Health

Students' Perception	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	(4) %	(3) %	(2) %	(1) %	(0)
I am encouraged to participate in class	39.8	29.1	2.0	29.1	0
My teacher is often stimulating	17.4	40.1	38.4	4.2	0
Students are ridiculed	30.3	47.3	6.7	15.7	0
I am always bored in class	24.6	5.0	24.6	45.7	0
My school is safe and secured	2.0	53.8	24.9	19.3	0
Students get punished always on slight things	9.0	60.8	7.8	22.4	0
The school environment is conducive for learning	18.8	40.6	18.2	22.4	0
I relate well with my classmate	7.3	56.9	9.0	26.9	0
School atmosphere is always relaxed	13.4	31.4	17.9	29.4	7.8
I usually feel home sick in school	51.0	14.0	11.5	17.9	5.6

the students (24.6%) agreed that malnutrition influences psychosocial problems. Fig I

Of the responses of the students about the contributory effect of the nature of the school environment to their psychosocial problems table III gives this summary.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to explore the psychosocial challenges of secondary school students and the factors that the students perceived were responsible for these challenges in Ore, Ondo state. The finding of this study showed that there are more males (58.3%) than females this disparity could be due to the belief that only male children retain the family name. Hence, most family believed that the training of female children for schooling is a waste of money.⁶

The students' responses revealed psychosocial challenges to be bullying/ mistreat (43.1%) Anger (33.9%); experience of hunger in school (40.1%) which is similar to other study⁷. Suicide is an alien practise to us in Africa, 21.8 % response of experience of suicidal ideation from the students in this study is significant and is higher than findings of suicidal ideation in Uganda (19.6%) and Tanzania (11.2%) schools. But it is as high as the prevalence of suicidal ideation in Botswana (23.1%) and lower than that in Kenya (27.9%), and Zambia (31.9%).⁸ This finding of suicidal ideation is also in consonance with similar study in Nigeria that reported 20% among the student respondents.⁹

Having feelings of sadness and hopelessness have been reported in similar studies carried out in schools among adolescents.^{10,11} The students under study also reported sexual harassment (26.3%) as one of the psychosocial challenges which supports the findings from previous study in Jos where 26.5% of the students also reported sexual abuse.¹²

Findings from this study showed that some of the student (40.1%) reported, hunger as a challenge which may be an underline factor for malnutrition. Malnutrition is a significant cause of psychosocial

health problem¹³ and may result from persistent exposure to hunger and poverty due to the socio-economic background of the families. Hunger and Poverty have ripple effects as young children in poverty demonstrate lower cognitive ability and are more likely to have behavioural or emotional problems than non-poor children.¹⁴

86.3% of the students agree that abuse and neglect causes poor performance in school, which agrees with the study that states that students who are abused and neglected perform at the lowest levels of academic achievements among other children. According to Adegoke,¹⁵ peers influence can have a positive and negative influence on adolescent development, peer rejection can negatively impact psychosocial developments, which correlates with findings in this study as 96.4% of the students confirmed that psychosocial health status is a function of peer influence. Disabilities both physical and learning was also reported by majority of the respondent (96.1%) to be a cause of psychosocial problems as it is associated with low self-esteem and, juvenile delinquency as a way of satisfying frustrated emotional needs.

Students' perceptions of the contributory effect of school environment on their psychosocial health revealed that most of the students valued their teachers' encouragement; and attributed safety in school to psychosocial health. Majority also placed emphasis on conducive learning environment which has been identified in similar studies to be a significant predictor of academic motivation.¹⁶ The findings of this study are important, and will contribute to an understanding of the psychosocial problems that public secondary school students experience. However, it is necessary to consider the limitation of this research in that the questionnaire was self administered and responses are only as accurate and reliable as the participants in the sample.

CONCLUSION

The senior secondary school phase studied consists of adolescence/ young adults that are at higher risk of committing suicide. The available

institutions majorly school and family should help adolescent in dealing with daily stress and turbulent thoughts.

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