

Academic Performance among In-School Adolescents: Examining the Effects of Childhood Abuse and Self-Esteem

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Abstract

This study examines the predictability of childhood abuse and self-esteem on academic performance among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted while purposive sampling technique was used to select Local Government Area. Data were collected from 251 participants using three validated questionnaires while data collected were analyzed using zero-order correlation statistics and multiple regression analysis to test one hypothesis which was accepted at $p < .05$ of level of significance. The result revealed that childhood abuse and self-esteem jointly predicted academic performance among in-school adolescents ($R^2 = .25$, $F(2, 148) = 24.83$, $p = .001$). In addition, childhood abuse independently predicted academic abuse among study participants ($\beta = .514$, $t = 7.047$, $p = .001$). However, self-esteem did not independently predict academic performance among study participants ($\beta = -.10$, $t = -1.42$, $p > .05$). The novelty of the finding is that compared to other studies, this is the first time childhood abuse is being assessed among school adolescents in rural communities. The study concluded that childhood abuse more than self-esteem is a strong predictor of academic performance among study participants. It is recommended that parents/guardians, teachers and other stakeholders should reduce childhood abuse and put programmes in place to boost self-esteem of in-school adolescents in order to improve their academic performance.

Keywords: Academic abuse, childhood abuse, in-school adolescents, self-esteem.

Introduction

Academic performance refers to the extent a learner has attained their short-or long- term goals in terms of acquiring knowledge, skills and competencies to solve problems of life (Matalka & Dwakat, 2022). Academic achievement among in-school adolescents has been used as a standard to measure the effectiveness or otherwise of educational systems and as a major predictor of the future of youths in particular and the nation in general (Osagiede et al., 2024; Tadese et al., 2022). Several predictors have been used to investigate academic performance among in-school adolescents. Two predictors were examined in this study.

The first factor considered in this study as a likely predictor of academic performance is childhood abuse which is described as any act of commission or omission on the part of the parent, guardian or caretaker that results in physical, or mental or psychological harm to the child (WHO, 2016). In the context of learning activities, childhood abuse affects the cognitive and educational outcomes of the abused child (Debrah, 2018). For example, childhood abuse can influence a child's performance or competency such as engagement in academic tasks and paying attention in the classroom which are necessary for optimal learning and achievement in school (Ameh, 2022). Some abused children that managed to be in school do not fully devote their time to their studies. Samsa (2010) found negative associations between child abuse and academic performance.

The second factor considered in this study is self-esteem which has been described as the degree to which an individual is judged to be competent in life domains or deemed important for every aspect of everyday human activities (Okurame et al., 2024). The evaluation of an individual's self and how others perceived the individual constitute that individual's global self-esteem (Hepper, 2023). The overall feeling of self-worth that influences psychological functioning of individuals also constitutes an individual self-esteem construct. In-school adolescents with high self-esteem feel good about themselves, they are able to cope effectively with challenges and negative feedback, and they live in a social world in which they believe that people value and respect them (Elyamany et al., 2020). On the other hand, in-school adolescents with low self-esteem see the world through a negative filter, and their general dislikes for themselves affect their perceptions of everything around them (Hepper, 2023). Studies have found both positive and negative self-esteem to influence academic performance (Kärchner et al., 2021; Sadovnikova, 2016).

The poor academic performance where some in-school adolescents are repeating classes, some dropping out of schools, while others get into teenage pregnancy and early marriage has been a recurring problem that affects the parents, government and other stakeholders in the educational sector. Studies that have been conducted on the predictors of academic performance among in-school adolescents tended to produce varying results especially in the rural communities in Nigeria leaving gaps in knowledge to fill. Therefore, this study examines the predictability of childhood abuse and self-esteem on academic performance among in-adolescents in the rural communities in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study was guided by the research question: Would childhood abuse and self-esteem predict academic performance among in-school adolescents in rural communities in Ibadan? The finding of this study would provide a fresh understanding of the study variables on academic performance. Also, parents, teachers and other stakeholders would see the need in putting necessary programmes to help abused children develop positive self-esteem and improve their academic performance.

The hypothesis tested in this study was childhood abuse and self-esteem would jointly and independently predict academic performance among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Method

Research Design

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design where data were collected using validated questionnaires. The independent variables were exposure to violence, self-esteem and socio-demographic variables while the dependent variable was academic performance.

Research setting

The study was conducted within Ibadan Metropolis which comprised two local Government areas (LGA) where two public secondary schools were selected.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling technique was used to select two public secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis while convenience sampling method was used to distribute the questionnaires to the potential participants.

Instruments

The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) was used to assess childhood abusing tendencies among adolescents at a specific point in time (Derogatis & Spencer, 1982). Participants respond to 43-items using a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 0 = not at all, 1 = a little bit, 2 = moderately, 3 = quite a bit, to 4 = extremely. Sample items include: "My mom seems sad, worried, or upset" and "My father or my mom's partner yelled at mom during a fight". Authors obtained Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.68 (Somatization) to 0.91 (Phobic Anxiety) and in the present study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.61 (Somatization) 0.89 (Phobic Anxiety) were obtained.

The Performance Based Self-Esteem (PBSE, Hallsten, 2005) scale was used to evaluate participants' self-esteem. It consisted of 8-items rated on a 5-point Likert's response format from 1 = fully disagree to 5 = fully agree. Sample items include: "I think that I sometimes try to prove my worth by being competent" and "My self-esteem is far too dependent on my work achievement". Hallsten, (2005) obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.68 and in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.62 was obtained.

Academic Performance Scale (Birchmeier et al., undated) was used to assess academic performance among participants. It is an 8-item scale presented on 5-point Likert's format ranges from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. Sample items include: "I enjoy homework and activities because they help me improve my skills in every subject" and "I start papers and projects as soon as they are assigned". Authors obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 while in the present study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 was obtained.

Procedure

The researchers were identified with a letter of introduction collected from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The Principals of the two public secondary schools were approached and the purpose of the study was explained to them for their approval to administer the research questionnaires. After vetting the research questionnaires, the researchers were handed over to the counselors to help assemble potential participants in a designated classroom. The researchers introduced themselves to the in-school adolescents, explained the purpose of the study to them and solicited for their consent. They were told that participation was voluntary and responses given would be treated confidentially. Those who agreed to participate were given the questionnaires which took about 19 minutes to fill. A total of 156 were administered (52 questionnaires to each school) and collected on the spot. However, during screening and coding, five questionnaires were found to be either half-filled or have irregular responses and were removed leaving 151 questionnaires used for the analysis.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS version 26 was used for data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted on the data. Zero-order correlation was carried out to establish the relationship among study variables. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis which was accepted at $p < .001$ level of significance.

Results

Participants

Descriptive statistics revealed that 66(44%) of the participants were males while 85(56%) were females. All the participants were unmarried. The age bracket indicated that 148(98%) were between 16 and 19 years while 3(2%) were 20 years and above. In terms of religious affiliations, 108(71.5%) professed Christian faith, while 43(27.8%) professed to be Muslims. Finally, as regards the classes of the participants, 47(31%) of the participants were in Junior Secondary School (JSS3), 57(38%) were in Senior Secondary (SSS) 1 while 47(31%) were in SSS2.

Zero-order correlation was first conducted to establish the relationship among study variables and this is presented [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Zero-order Correlation of Study Variables

S/N	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1	Childhood abuse	123.63	10.55	-		
2	Self-esteem	29.59	2.98	.21*	-	
3	Academic performance	22.02	4.42	.49*	.04	-

*.Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level

[Table 1](#) presents zero-order correlation statistics of study variables. The result revealed that childhood abuse has significant positive relationship with academic performance [$r(150) = .49, p = .001$], while self-esteem had no significant correlation with academic performance [$r(150) = .02, p > .05$].

Hypothesis: Childhood abuse and self-esteem would jointly and independently predict academic performance among in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Multiple regression of joint and independent predictors of academic performance among in-school adolescents

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R^2	F	p
Childhood abuse	.514	7.047	<.05				
Self-Esteem	-.10	-1.42	>.05	.50	.25	24.83	<.05

Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

[Table 2](#) presents multiple regression analysis of joint and independent predictors of academic performance among in-school adolescents. The results indicated that child exposure to violence and self-esteem jointly predicted academic performance among in-school adolescents ($R^2 = .25, F(2, 148) = 24.83, p < .05$). This means that children exposed to violence and self-esteem contributed 25% variance observed on academic performance. In addition, childhood abuse independently predicted academic performance among study participants ($\beta = .514, t =$

7.047, $p < .05$). However, self-esteem did not independently predict academic performance among study participants ($\beta = -.10$, $t = -1.42$, $p > .05$). Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported.

Discussion

The hypothesis that childhood abuse and self-esteem would jointly predict academic performance among in-school adolescents was supported. This means that the interactions of these two variables significantly predicted academic performance among study participants. The result corroborated with previous findings that the interaction of childhood abuse and self-esteem have effects on academic performance (Ratshivhanda & Guvuriro, 2018). In addition, other results (Hepper, 2023; Kärchner et al., 2021; Okurame et al., 2024) supported the present finding that childhood abuse and self-esteem are strong predictors of academic performance among a wide range of age groups into adolescence stage in life.

However, only childhood abuse independently predicted academic performance among study participants. This implies that the level of early childhood abuse by parents, primary caregivers or significant others have far reaching implications on academic performance of children who then turn into adolescents. This finding lent credence to previous results (Ameh, 2022; Akhtar, 2012; Reardon, 2011, Pamar, 2014) that childhood abuse was a significant predictor of low academic performance among their study participants.

Conclusion

The study investigated childhood abuse and self-esteem as predictors of academic performance. The hypothesis tested was that childhood abuse and self-esteem would jointly and independently predict academic performance among in-school adolescents in the study population. The hypothesis was empirically supported. Also, childhood abuse independently predicted academic performance among study participants.

Limitations of Study and Suggestions for Further Studies

The study has some limitations that need to be addressed in further study. For example, data were collected using self-reported questionnaires that would be free of social desirability. Further study would benefit from focus group discussion and key informant interview that would triangulate data generated from self-reported questionnaires. Next, the study was conducted among youths in the Ibadan Greater Municipality which cannot be generalized to other parts of the State. Further study should include the rural parts of the State to enhance generalization. Finally, the two independent variables investigated were not exhaustive; therefore, further study should incorporate social support, personality traits and socio-economic factors to examine their influence on academic performance among in-school adolescents.

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