

INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE ON THE SELF-CONCEPT OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CROSS RIVER STATE NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Survey data collected from 2,000 senior secondary two (SSII) students in Cross River state Nigeria were analyzed to determine the influence of emotional abuse on the self-concept of the students. One aspect of child abuse (emotional abuse) and five dimensions of self-concept (social self-concept, physical self-concept, moral self-concept, financial self-concept and family self-concept) were considered in the study. One Way Analysis of Variance was used in testing the hypothesis at 0.05 Alpha levels. The results obtained showed a significant negative influence of emotional abuse on the students self-concept in terms of social-self, physical-self, moral-self, family-self and financial self-concept respectively.

KEY WORDS: Emotional Abuse, Self-Concept

INTRODUCTION

Emotional abuse according to Romeo (2011) consists of "internal" injuries and is more difficult to identify. Emotionally abused children are not likely to be reported and do not receive the psychological services necessary for emotional healing and growth. Emotional abuse can be more dangerous to the child's welfare than other forms of abuse, as it negatively affects the child's self-esteem and self-images, causing devastating, life-long consequences. This paper provides educators with information regarding behavioral indicators of emotional abuse, its influence on the self-concept, self-image, and the life-long consequences of emotional abuse.

Sheslow; Taylor & Lukens (2005) indicated that a healthy self-concept is a child's armour against the challenges of the world.

Children who feel good about themselves seem to have easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. Such children are realistic and generally optimistic. However, observations show that some of the children in our secondary schools, especially in Cross River state have low self-concept, which forstalls their ability to combat challenges which invariably could constitute a major source of anxiety and frustration. Children plagued with self-critical negative self-perception have difficulty in problem-solving thoughts such as "I'm not good" or "I can't do anything right". This could make them recline into passivity, depression or withdrawal.

Self-concept is the collection of beliefs or feeling that we have about our "self perception" or ourselves. It is the sum total of the

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characteristics an individual exhibits, the totality of the perception that one has about one's self, and his attitude towards himself (Sheslow et al 2005; Woruka, 1993: 60).

Craig (1976) presented self-concept as consisting of the real self (the self we believe we are) and the ideal self (the self we ought to be). The perception of these two selves as similar tends to produce a strong healthy self-concept than were one sees the real self as being greater than the ideal self.

Thus a good parental care usually serves to guaranty the development of healthy self-concept. This is why in all cultures, parents and care givers should give adequate attention, love, and care to their offspring or wards. (Ajake, Bisong and Jamabo 2009; Isangedighi et al; 2009). This was supported by the United Nations Universal declaration on human right (UNICEF 2001 and 2003) that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. According to them, for the child to have full and harmonious development of his or her personality, that child should grow up in family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. The paradox of this is that in the 21st century world, some parents or caregivers still see relationship with their children as a paradigm of the old concept of "spare the rod and spoil the child". Reports also abound on heart breaking stories of children who has been emotionally abused to the point of death by family members, teachers or caregivers (Femi 2004).

On daily basis across our nation, reports and alarms are raised on incidences of abuse of children by parents and particularly by teachers in schools. However, attention to these abuses are devoted more to behavioral indicators of physical, sexual and child neglect rather than emotional abuse. One explanation for this is that the behavioral indicators of physical/sexual abuse and neglect are external and easily visible injuries. The behavioral indicators of emotional abuse, particularly the symptoms of children who respond to the abuse in passive ways on the contrast are more difficult to identify. Only four percent (4%) according to Wood (1999) of all substantiated cases of child abuse are reported as emotional abuse. Since a reported case of child abuse is bereft of information on emotional abuse, one may wrongly conclude that emotional abuse is not as serious an offence against children as other forms of abuse. However, emotional abuse can even be more dangerous to children's welfare as it affects the child's self-concept, thus having devastating and life-long

consequences. Isangadighi; Ajake and Bisong 2009 indicated that one's emotional state moves along the emotionality-stability scale. There are at one extreme such manifestations as moodiness, restlessness, worrying, anxiety and a general tendency toward the open display of emotion. The emotional environment of the family is therefore critical to the child's development of self-esteem and self-image. In the emotionally healthy family, the child feels loved and wanted as the parents' approval and acceptance encourages the child to bond and form a secure attachment with each parent. As a result, parental love and positive interactions with the child, convey their belief to the child that he/she is a "good" and "valued" member of the family. Consequently, the child develops positive self-esteem as one who has "worth", and a positive self-image, as one who is "good".

Walter (1998) tested the hypothesis that different gender-related personality attributes are associated with a past history of different types of childhood maltreatment. A survey instrument was administered to 1,060 male soldiers and 305 female soldiers in the U.S Army. The survey instrument included the Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ) which is a self-assessment instrument of personality characteristics. The survey instrument also included the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), which contains scales measuring sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect. The result showed that childhood abuse was associated with low self-concept in both males and females. It was also discovered that children who came from emotionally abusive family feels unloved and unwanted. In such family, the emotional environment is "cold", as the parents do not express nor show any affection, support or care towards the child. The child is deprived of the psychological nurturing necessary for a child's psychological growth and development.

Emotional abuse is not just a single event, but a systematic diminishment of the victim. It is a continuous behavior of the abuser that reduces a child's self-concept to the point where the child feels unworthy of respect, friendship, love and affection. Emotional abuse consist of unrealistic expectation of the child's behavior, repeated name calling (No good, rotten, ugly, stupid, crazy and deliberate humiliation in front of others example teachers, siblings, relatives, friends etc). All children inherently trust and love their parents and seldom complain directly about emotional abuse. They

lack the reasoning ability to challenge their parents' attacks upon their self-esteem. Unfortunately, the child accepts and regards the demeaning statements of the parents as "true" and "accurate" reflections of their own self-worth. As a result of this abuse, the child develops profoundly low self-esteem and a negative self-image as one who is "bad".

According to Becker (1996), a child who is emotionally abused will frequently feel depressed and unable to feel good about himself/herself. From her study, she observed that some parents and teachers publicly humiliate their children by the kind of words they use on them. Some children were frequently called "imbecile", "dummy" or "useless". These make most of the children feel afraid. Depression can occur because the child is afraid to take chances and risk making an error, which creates opportunity for further devastation by humiliation and ridicule. What is particularly insidious about this form of abuse is that the child and the adult survivor often have no ideas of "what hit them". There are no memories and no physical evidence of being beaten, molested or abused because the bruises and the scars are invisible. It is the soul that is injured. (Becker,1996). Thus, emotional abuse leaves hidden scars that manifest themselves in many different ways. This type of abuse is internal and affects the child's self-esteem and self-image. The child who is victimized by emotional abuse and does not receive any form of counseling for proper self-adjustment, enters adolescence burdened with extremely low self-esteem and negative self-image. If parents and teachers continue their emotionally abusive behaviors during the adolescence stage of the child development, it consolidates the adolescent's destructive self-belief, as one who is "bad" and "worthless". Many victims of emotional child abuse continue to be hunted by this during adulthood. They continuously enter into abusive relationship where they are used, and exploited by others. Their lack of self-worth confirms to them that they deserve abuse from others. Some victims of emotionally abused children develop into hostile and angry adults. They are consumed with rage and they perpetuate the violence that they received from their parents and teachers to others.

Emotional abuse may occur during a period in life where complex and hopefully, ordered changes are occurring in the child's physical, psychological and social wellbeing. Unfortunately, depression and low self-esteem are natural consequences of this process if

children are not properly guided and instructed. It generally produces poor ego control, reduces creativity and makes the child non-complaint. It produces withdrawal syndrome, disorder such as fearfulness, anxiety, low self-esteem and low self-worth (Egeland et al; 1983: Main and George, 1985; Ajake et al, 2009). Against this background, this study was to determine the influence of emotional abuse on the self-concept of senior secondary school students in Cross River state, Nigeria.

Methodology

Subjects

A total of two thousand students randomly selected from twenty secondary schools in Cross River state, Nigeria were used for the study. The subjects (1000 males and 1000 females) ranged in age from 15 to 17 years.

Instrumentation

An instrument constructed by the researchers captioned Students Opinion Questionnaire (SOQ) was used for data collection. Four relevant experts in Educational Psychology and Test and Measurement at the University of Calabar assessed the face validity of the research instrument. The reliability of the research instrument was obtained through a field study. The correlation coefficient ranged from 0.64 and 0.98 which were high enough to qualify the instrument for use. The research instrument had three sections A-C. Section "A" elicited from the respondents their demographics information such as age, sex, school type and class. Section "B" was a five item likert-type scale that measured the prevalence of emotional abuse. Section "C" was a 20 item likert-type scale that measured the respondent's self-concept such as social-self, physical-self, moral-self, family-self respectively. A total of 2000 copies of the questionnaire were administered, out of this number, 1,973, were properly filled and returned.

Data Analysis

The data generated were analyzed using One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT

The result of the analysis of variance showing influence of emotional abuse on each of the self-concept variables are presented in Table 1-3. The group means scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 1, while the

ANOVA summary is presented in Table 2. Table 3 shows the Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) Multiple Comparison Analysis. Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for the three groups of respondents based on their level of emotional abuse for each of the self-concept variables. The mean values generally reflected one trend; namely, the higher the level of emotional abuse, the lower the mean of the self-concept variables.

The comparison of the three mean values for the three groups for each of the self-concept variables produced F-values of 37.676 for social-self, 3.562 for physical self-concept, 46.934 for moral self-concept, 530.184 for financial self-concept, 405.943 for family self-concept and 1243.537 for overall self-concept.

Each of these F-values was greater than the critical F-value of 2.99 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 1970 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of emotional abuse on each of the five forms of self-concept and overall self-concept.

To really understand which group means difference had a significant influence, a post-hoc pair-wise multiple comparison analysis was carried out on the data using Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) analysis (Table 3)

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations of respondents in self concept across levels of emotional abuse.

S/N	Variables	Group (level of abuse)	N	Mean	SD
1.	Social self concept	Low level	667	9.36	2.20
		Moderate level	656	7.18	2.07
		High level	650	5.82	1.63
		Total	1973	7.47	2.46
2.	Physical self concept	Low level	667	11.45	2.81
		Moderate level	656	7.62	2.72
		High level	650	5.76	1.32
		Total	1973	8.30	3.37
3.	Moral self concept	Low level	667	9.98	2.31
		Moderate level	656	8.10	2.47
		High level	650	6.35	1.77
		Total	1973	8.16	2.66
4.	Financial self concept	low level	667	8.91	2.90
		Moderate level	656	6.21	2.24
		High level	650	5.00	1.20
		Total	1973	6.73	2.77

5. Family self concept	Low level	667	11.20	2.25
	Moderate level	656	9.41	2.31
	High level	650	.69	2.13
	Total	1973	9.45	2.65
6. Overall self concept	low level	667	50.91	8.50
	Moderate level	656	38.52	8.19
	High level	650	30.61	5.16
	Total	1973	40.10	11.20

TABLE 2: Result of Analysis of Variance of influence of emotional abuse of self-concept variables of senior secondary school students.

Variable	Source of variations	Sum of Square	df	Ms(mean square)	F
Social self-concept	Between Groups	4229.985	2	2114.992	37.676*
	Within Groups	7749.157	1970	3.934	
	Total	11979.141	1972	5565.689	3.562*
Physical self-concept	Between Groups	11131.378	2		
	Within Groups	11262.159	1970	5.715	
	Total	22393.537	1972		
Moral self-concept	Between Groups	4351.556	2	2175.778	46.934*
	Within groups	9590.421	1970	4.868	
	Total	13941.978	1972		
Financial self-concept	Between Groups	5292.330	2	2646.165	530.184*
	Within Groups	9832.327	1970	4.991	
	Total	15124.657	1972		
Family self-concept	Between Groups	4046.795	2	2023.398	405.943*
	Within Groups	9819.335	1970	4.984	
	Total	3866.131	1972		
Overall self-concept	Between Groups	138023.731	2	69011.865	1243.537*
	Within Groups	109327.969	1970	55.496	
	Total	247351.700	1972		

*significant at .05 level; Critical $F_{2, 1970} = 2.99$; $N = 1973$

TABLE 3: Fisher's Least Significance Difference (LSD) Multiple Comparison Analysis: Influence of emotional abuse on self-concept.

Variables	Groups (levels)	Low (n=667)	Moderate (n=656)	High (n=650)
Social self-concept	Low	9.36 ^a	2.18 ^b	3.54
	Moderate	19.98 ^{*c}	7.18	1.36
	High	32.45*	12.42*	5.82
	MSW =	3.93		
Physical self-concept	low	11.45	3.83	5.69
	Moderate	29.12*	7.62	1.86
	High	43.14*	14.06*	5.76
	MSW =	5.72		
Moral self-concept	Low	9.98	1.88	3.63
	Moderate	15.51*	18.10	1.75
	High	29.84*	14.34*	6.35
	MSW =	4.87		
Financial self-concept	Low	8.91	2.70	3.91
	Moderate	21.97*	6.21	1.21
	High	31.71*	9.78*	5.00
	MSW =	4.99		
Family self-concept	Low	11.20	1.79	3.51
	Moderate	14.57*	9.41	1.72
	High	28.56*	13.95*	7.69
	MSW =	4.98		
Overall self-concept	Low	50.91	12.39	20.30
	Moderate	30.26*	38.52	7.19
	High	49.42*	19.20*	30.61
	MSW =	55.50		

a - Group means are placed diagonal

b – Differences in group means are above diagonal

c – Fisher's t-value are below diagonal

*- Significance at .05 level (critical t=1.96)

DISCUSSION

This study shows that emotional abuse has a significant influence on the self-concept of the senior secondary school students. This means that students who were more emotionally abused had low self-concept in terms of their social-self, physical-self, moral-self, financial-self and family-self. This was supported by the previous studies (Romeo 2011; Sheslow et al, 2005; Isangedighi et al 2009; Femi 2004; Wood 1999; and Craig 1976; Woruka 1993 and Becker 1996). A child who is emotionally abused frequently feels depressed and unable to feel good about himself/ herself. What is particularly insidious about this form of abuse is that the child and the adult survivor often have no ideas "what hit them". They have no memories and no physical evidence of being beaten, molested, or abused because the bruise and the scars are invisible, it is the soul that is injured. Thus emotional abuse leaves hidden scars that manifest themselves in many different ways, one of which is low self-concept causing devastating life consequences. According to Becker (1996), part of the consequences of emotional abuse includes poor intimate relationship, withdrawal tendency, depression and apathetic behavior. Such children may consider themselves as innately unworthy to be loved. Even as an adult, victims of emotionally abused often find it difficult to trust their own judgment since an integral part of the abuse was reinforcing the fact that they did not know what was best for them. (Sarason and Sarason 1993).Leman 1993 and Toufexex 1998).

CONCLUSION

From the findings, students who experience high level of emotional abuse, tend to have less positive self-concept than those who had lower degree of emotional abuse. This result was true in respect of each dimensions of self-concept (physical-self, social-self, moral-self, financial-self and family-self) respectively. Thus, the government, nongovernmental organizations and corporate bodies should sponsor seminars, conferences and workshops for parents and teachers on the different dimensions of emotional abuse, causes, effect and ways of preventing it.

Such enlightenment will provide opportunities for parents to learn issues about the child development and appreciate behaviors of children and their personality characteristics. This will also provide parents and teachers with skills to create a more positive nurturing and stimulating environment for their children which will enhance the development of positive self-concept.

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