(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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Psychosocial influence of loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Loneliness is the absence of satisfying social relationships, accompanied by symptoms of psychological distress that are related to the actual or perceived absence. The study investigated the psychosocial influence of loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. The sample of 382 students was used for the study using simple random sampling technique via balloting. Two research questions were answered while two hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument for the study was a questionnaire tagged "Psychosocial Influence of loneliness Questionnaire (PILQ)". The data collected were analyzed with mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested with z-test. From the analysis, it was found out that poor family relation significantly influences loneliness among secondary school students in Andoni local government area. More so, the result of the study showed that self-esteem significantly influence loneliness among secondary school students in Andoni local government area. Based on the findings, it was recommended that there is need for personal social, group counselling and individual counselling in schools where students with challenged environment and personality are counselled. And students should develop positive self-esteem in life to assist them in their academic achievement

Keywords: Loneliness; Poor Family Relation; Self-Esteem; Secondary School Students.

1. Introduction

Change of social and cultural structure in today's world and fast lifestyle resulting from technological improvements has brought about some difficulties (Kent, 2016). Loneliness is encountered at increasing rate as one of the problems commonly experienced by mankind who tries to adapt these changes. Loneliness is used to describe the negative feelings when your needs for social connection are not met. Having psycho-social behaviour, mankind needs to establish close relationships with the others, to share the lives of the others, to prove himself within a social group during all age periods.

Loneliness has been defined as 'the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in either quality or quantity (Perlman and Peplau, 2018). Loneliness is a common problem for many students. Lin and Huang (2012) defined loneliness as an unpleasant experience that derives from important deficiencies in the lonely person's network of social relationship. Loneliness is also described as social pain—a psychological mechanism which motivates individuals to seek social connections. It is often associated with an unwanted lack of connection and intimacy. Many can connect emotionally to the people they live and work with.

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However, many cannot connect or share their happiness and worries with those around them. Social media and fast-paced life have accentuated loneliness among people (Van, 2014). Isolation and loneliness go hand in hand. Loneliness and isolation can affect general health and mental health. Loneliness must not be confused with "me time." It is normal to enjoy spending time alone on occasion. Spending time alone can help one reflect, focus, relax, and recharge. People have different needs for the "me time." Some may need more "me time" than others, and some may need more social interaction than others. When this need for social interaction is not being met over a period, it can lead to loneliness (Perman, 2013). Loneliness and feeling isolated can occur in children and adults. An adult or child can feel lonely and isolated despite being surrounded by people, such as family. This is because others may not be empathetic toward them or interacting enough with them, making them feel lonely. So, you might need something or someone else to feel your best. It is important to be able to recognize loneliness and address it to prevent complications. Research indicates that loneliness is associated with relatively poor physical health and depression among students (Young, 2017).

There are several characterisations that define loneliness; with one suggesting that loneliness is feeling absent from others while being surrounded by people (Holt-Lunstad, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015). Individuals that are lonely can be emotionally lonely or physically lonely, thus the feelings of loneliness can continue even when they are by themselves (Gierveld, Groenou & Smit, 2009). Long term loneliness can easily have adverse effects on students, such as low satisfaction in life and learning achievements, and a negative impact on their physical and mental health. Loneliness or perceived social isolation is a subjective experience relating to dissatisfaction with one's social relationships. Most research has focused on the experience of loneliness in old age, but levels of loneliness are also known to be high among teenagers and young adults. While poor health may be associated with increased feelings of loneliness, there is now considerable evidence on the role of loneliness as a risk factor for poor mental and physical health (Shankar, 2017).

Human beings have a fundamental need for belongingness (Sunny, 2018). Sawir, (2015) stated that not every lonely person has the "same" loneliness. The perception of loneliness, and the way people cope with it, vary among individuals and between cultural groups: not only by personality but also because of differing practices in relationships. Between two persons in the same circumstances, the incidence and intensity of loneliness can vary. In fact, one may feel lonely and the other not. Loneliness is a subjective experience in that it does not necessarily simply isolation, but instead is the result of self-perceived deficiencies in social relationships. The factors which relate to the loneliness at the cognitive level can be listed as: one's own negative feeling about himself/herself, the increase of the irrational opinions, not being able to control the life and fatalism (McWhirter, 2014). Loneliness can result in the following signs and symptoms: Feeling sad and empty, Anhedonia (unable to be happy), lethargy (decreased energy), difficulty concentrating, difficulty falling asleep or interrupted sleep, too much sleep, decreased or loss of appetite, low self-esteem, suicide thought, lack of confidence etc

Family as one of the factors that may influence loneliness offers an important source of social support where individuals acquire social abilities that are necessary to create positive human relationships. Family conditions are central for children's opportunities to lead a healthy life. One important aspect is the family social environment. According to attachment theory, a close relationship between the child and at least one caregiver is crucial for a positive emotional and social development (Morgan, 2017). A safe and supportive family environment during upbringing is likely to provide the child with emotional security and a sense of social integration which are conducive elements for a healthy development.

Accordingly, family relationships affect child development but also the offspring's mental and physical health across the life course (Taylor, 2015). One core aspect of family relationships is family cohesion, which is defined as "the degree of togetherness or closeness or emotional bonding that family members have toward one another" (Vandeleur, 2014). Features of high family cohesion include warmth, affection, consistency, involvement, and connectedness (Manzi, 2016). Higher levels of family cohesion have been shown to be associated with higher well-being and fewer mental health problems and loneliness indicating that positive and strong familial bonds promote healthy development. Conversely, lower levels of family cohesion are an indicator of poor family relationships and may hinder a healthy development and loneliness. Indeed, families characterized by unsupportive and neglectful relationships and conflict constitute risky environments that may lead to loneliness, worse mental and physical health across the life, operating through pathways such as stress, emotion processing, social competence, and risky health behaviours (Seeman, 2017).

Also, another factor that may influence loneliness on students is low self-esteem. According to Yöru (2018), self-esteem refers to a an individual's positive psychological state which, without considering oneself as inferior or superior, involves self-confidence, satisfaction with the self and finding oneself worth admiring. According to Coleman and Hendry (2013), individuals with high levels of self-esteem tend to have a higher possibility to become much happier, healthier, more productive and more successful, to be able to overcome difficulties, to sleep well at nights, to have less possibility to have ulcer disease, to be open in their social relationships and to resist their peers' pressure, while

individuals with lower levels of self-esteem tend to have anxious, pessimistic, lonely and negative views about their future and become unsuccessful (Odu, 2017). These negative thoughts that individuals have for future Adolescents with low academic achievement feel alone but adolescents with high academic achievement don't feel themselves alone. The low level of academic achievement triggers loneliness. Learning experiences of adolescents who feel alone are negatively affected because of poor social skills and decreased their academic achievement (Pancar, 2009). Low self-esteem leads to loneliness which increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Loneliness may be part of a normal developmental process for older adolescents in transition to young adulthood (Erikson, 2015), but for many adolescents the loneliness that results from school, families, and peer difficulties can lead to even more serious problems such as depression, suicide ideation, and violence. Hence, based on the background, the study is to investigate the psychosocial influence of loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni Local government area.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Loneliness is powerfully present at adolescence because of the development of new interpersonal needs for intimacy. Loneliness may be part of a normal developmental process for older adolescents in transition to young adulthood, but for many adolescents the loneliness that results from school, families, low self-esteem and peer difficulties can lead to even more serious problems such as depression, suicide ideation, and violence. This may also have a negative impact on students mental health, especially if these feelings have lasted a long time, this may result to an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems and increased stress.

Loneliness elicits a stress related inflammatory and neuroendocrine response and has been identified as a major risk factor for hypertension. In addition, loneliness is predictive of depression and reported as a contributor to functional decline and mortality. Experiencing loneliness is traumatic as lonely people experience significant social stigma is more likely to be inactive and engage in substance use. Some people experience deep and constant feelings of loneliness that come from within and do not disappear, regardless of their social situation or how many friends they have. There are many reasons people experience this kind of loneliness. You might feel unable to like yourself or to be liked by others, or you may lack self-confidence. Hence, the problem of the study is to investigate the psychosocial influence of loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni LGA.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out the psychosocial influence of loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni Local Government Area. Specifically, the study sought to;

- Find out how poor family relation can influence loneliness on secondary school students in Obio/Apkor
- Ascertain how self-esteem can influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent does poor family relation can influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area
- To what extent does self-esteem can influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area

1.3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses where tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Poor family relation does not significantly influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area
- Self-esteem does not significantly influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was adopted to collect data from adolescents in senior secondary school to investigate their psychological influence of loneliness. The study population comprised of all senior secondary school students in the 18 government secondary schools in Andoni local government area. The sample size for this study was systematically and statistically drawn using Taro Yamen"s formula for sample size, which is estimated at 383. Thus the researcher used a sample size of 383 respondents for the study. The researcher adopted a simple random sampling technique and a purposive sampling technique for the study. Simple random sampling through balloting was used to draw 10 schools from the 18 public secondary schools in Andoni, while purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. Data were collected through the use of self administered, structured questionnaire. The instrument that was used for this study is a researcher-developed instrument titled "Psychosocial Influence of loneliness Questionnaire (PILQ). The instrument is divided into two sections, A and B. Section A is on personal/demographic information. Section B is the main questionnaire developed on a four (4) point Likert rating scale with the following interpretations: Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (D) 2 points, Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. This section was used to assess and measure psychosocial influence of loneliness among secondary school students. The instrument was validated and has high face, content and constructs validity and is suitable for the study. The reliability coefficient of the entire instrument was determined and found to be 0.82 using Pearson product moment. Mean and standard deviation will be used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses will be tested with independent Z-test statistics.

3. Results

3.1. Research Question 1

To what extent does poor family relation can influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area

3.1.1. Hypothesis 1

Poor family relation does not significantly influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area

Table 1 Analysis of influence of poor family relation on loneliness among secondary school students

Variable	N	X SD		df	z-cal	z-crit	Result
Poor Family Relation	258	81.14	16.87	381	8.215	1.96	S
Loneliness 125		60.36	18.74				

The result of the data analyzed showed that poor family relation had mean score of 81.14 and SD of 16.87 while, loneliness had mean score of 60.36 and SD of 18.74. Since the z-calculated of 8.215 is higher than z-critical =1.96, it implies that the null hypothesis was rejected and alternate accepted. Hence poor family relations significantly influence loneliness among secondary school students in Andoni Local Government Area.

3.2. Research Question 2

To what extent does self-esteem can influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area.

3.2.1. Hypothesis 2

Table 2 Analysis of influence of self-esteem on loneliness among secondary school students

Variable	N	X SD		df	z-cal	z-crit	Result	Variable
Self-Esteem	238	84.97	14.13	381	13.67	1.96	S	
Loneliness 145		56.27	15.49					

Self-esteem does not significantly influence loneliness on secondary school students in Andoni local government area

The result of the data analyzed showed that self-esteem had mean score of 84.97 and SD of 14.13 while, loneliness had mean score of 56.27 and SD of 15.49. Since the z-calculated of 13.67 is higher than z-critical of 1.96, it means that the null hypothesis was rejected and alternate accepted. Therefore, the result implies that self-esteem significantly influence loneliness among secondary school students in Andoni Local Government Area.

4. Discussion

4.1. Poor Family Relation and Loneliness

The result of the finding shows that poor family relation significantly influences loneliness among secondary school students Andoni local government area. In agreement with the study, Wood (2014) noted that poor relationships between parents may contribute to more negative relationships between parents and children, according to University of Michigan research. This study, published in the "Journal of Marriage and Family" in 2010, found that negative relationships between parents as well as divorce were both associated with negativity in mother-child relationships. This study also found that these effects were more pronounced in families where the parents remained together, suggesting that the continuous conflict encourages more conflict in other relationships.

4.2. Self-Esteem and Loneliness

The result of the study showed that self-esteem significantly influence loneliness among secondary school students Andoni local government area. Low self-esteem is often associated with beliefs and behaviours that interfere with initiating or maintaining satisfying social relationships. In agreement to the study, Ickes & Layden, (2016) noted that students with low self-esteem may interpret social interactions in self-defeating ways, and these individuals may be more likely to attribute social failures to internal, self-blaming factors. Lonely people often feel worthless, incompetent, and unlovable. Indeed, the link between severe loneliness and low self-esteem is one of the most consistent findings of the loneliness research (Moore & Sermat, 2013).

5. Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that poor family relation significantly influences loneliness among secondary school students in Andoni local government area. The result of the study also showed that self-esteem significantly influence loneliness among secondary school students in Andoni local government area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended the following;

- Children need at least one consistently responsible adult (Parents) with whom the child can have a positive emotional connection. Having more than one of these figures contributes to a higher likelihood of positive child academic performance.
- There is need for personal social, group counselling and individual counselling in schools where students with challenged environment and personality are counselled. And students should develop positive self-concept in life to assist them in their academic achievement.
- Family factors such as divorce and parental conflicts should be resolved to provide children with conducive environment for growth and development of the positive norms.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

Author declare that they have no conflict of interest

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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