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PARENT-CHILD ATTACHMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AS PREDICTORS OF DISTRESS DISCLOSURE AMONG BULLIED IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of parent-child attachment and demographic variables in predicting distress disclosure among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria. A cross sectional research design was adopted for this study and questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample size of 1, 122 (583 male and 539 female) respondents. The setting was Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State was selected using purposive sampling while the secondary schools and respondents were selected through simple random sampling. Two scales were adopted in the study. The scales are the Adolescent parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) and Distress Disclosure Index (DDI). Two hypotheses were developed and tested in the study. The results revealed that parent-child attachment had a significant influence on distress disclosure among in-school adolescents [$R = .413$; $R^2 = .171$; $F(1, 1120) = 230.789$; $p < .01$]. It was also shown that age and family type were significant joint predictors of distress disclosure [$F(2, 1120) = 24.934$, $p < .01$]. Collectively, age and family type accounted for about 4.3% variance in distress disclosure. However, only family type had independent influence on distress disclosure [$\beta = -0.207$, $t = -7.061$, $p < .01$]. The study concludes that parent-child attachment significantly predicted distress disclosure. It was also concluded that age and family type jointly predicted distress disclosure. It was therefore recommended that parents should give attention to their children (adolescents) so as to have a sense of belonging which will foster disclosure when the need arises. Parents should always ask their children of happenings in the school on daily basis, this will prompt them to disclose cases of bullying experienced in the school to their parents which will prompt the needed intervention.

Keywords: age, family type, attachment, distress disclosure, in-school, adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing need to enhance psychological wellbeing has made the issue of distress disclosure so germane and also for the fact that it is linked with enhanced mental health. The act of disclosing distressing information could pose certain significant health benefits because it tends to reduce psychological stress achieved through confronting stressor and also seeking to utilize various available support systems that could cushion the stressor (Ward et al., 2007; Gao et al., 2022). Distress disclosure implies the willingness of an individual to disclose distressing personal information to other individuals (Ward et al., 2007). Keum et al., (2021) noted that concealing distress could be linked with mental health impairments such as stress, anxiety, boredom and emotional instability. Therefore, disclose distress could enhance psychological health.

One of the critical factors that will either positively or negatively influence distress disclosure among bullied adolescents is parent-child attachment. Parental-child attachment refers to the bond that unites an adolescent and the parents (Yin et al., 2021). Adapting the attachment theory, propounded in the 1950s by Bowlby, the quality of the parent-child attachment is very important to child development, particularly the sensitivity and responsiveness to the child's cues. According to [Gilmore](#) (2020), there are four major attachment styles which include secure attachment, anxious-resistant attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized-disoriented attachment. Individuals with secure attachment would become distressed when they are separated from caregiver hence; they are comforted when they are with the caregiver.

Also, individuals with an anxious-resistant attachment could become more distressed. Individuals with an avoidant attachment do not experience distressed when separated from caregiver. Moreover, individuals with a disorganized-disoriented attachment don't show a predictable behavioral pattern either in the presence or absence of parent. With regards to this study, these attachment styles would be categorized into two: the secure and insecure attachment styles. A major assumption of this study is that the secure and insecure attachment styles could pose significant effect on distress disclosure among bullied in school adolescents. Insecure attached students usually hide their negative feelings and tend not to disclose their distress to their teachers in schools or to their parents at home (Jewett et al., 2018; Strand et al., 2018). The concealing of negative feelings and behaviours by in-school adolescents requires a high level of will power, which can result to severe mental health challenge, thereby affecting their well-being (De Cstello et al., 2018; Gupta & Gupta, 2019; Houazene et al., 2021). Studies revealed that insecure attached individuals are prone to negative life events resulting in reluctance to disclose their distress (Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2019; Sigel, 2017).

Research indicated that insecure attachment plays a significant role in distress disclosure (Barthel et al., 2018; Vanderlind et al., 2020). Absence of parental support at early-life serves as a risk factor hindering distress disclosure. Study shows that insecure attachment exposes and heightened adolescents' mental health problem (Strand et al., 2018), leading to feelings of embarrassment, guilt and shame (APA, 2013), low self-esteem and emotional breakdown (Brennan et al., 2017), lack of social support and poor psychological and mental health (Cison et al., 2018; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2019).

In a study conducted by Innamorati et al., (2018), it was found that a significant relationship exist between attachment and distress disclosure. A positive relationship that exist between parent and adolescents plays a great role in facilitating distress disclosure, where they can pour out their hearts by revealing the challenges they are facing in the school or within their communities. This will go a long way in enhancing their academic performance in schools, but when there is conflict between the adolescents and their parent, they tend to conceal their distress, which can lead to negative behaviours such as violent acts, drug abuse as well as joining cult groups in the schools. For instance, it was reported that conflict with parents resulted to non-disclosure of distress among bullied adolescent (Bi et al., 2018).

According to Yin et al., (2021), parent-child attachment has a direct influence on distress disclosure, including but not limited to disclosure of academic exploit in school, friends they keep in schools, as well as their relationship with their teachers and other support staff. The way their parents relate with them will determine how they can reveal information and issues that affect them either positively or negatively in the school environment or the community in general. Theory of attachment stressed that the quality of attachment has a significant influence on distress disclosure (Vertue, 2003). Secure attachment has a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction and low level of anxiety (Fraley, 2019; Sumer & Gungor, 1999). According Bowlby (1973), adolescent with secure attachment with their parent used such attachment as a safety net to explore or fall back on during distress. Constant and positive engagement with the parent enhances distress disclosure. Secure attached adolescents are sure of adequate attention and support from the parent. On the contrary, insecure adolescents are not sure of positive responses and support when disclosing distress. Uncertainty and fear of the responses they will get from the parent leads to non-disclosure of distress (Brumariu & Kems, 2008). A study revealed that secured attached adolescents freely disclose distress and relates well with friends and peers (Bosquet & Egeland, 2006). Adolescents with secure parent-child attachment excel academically and have good relationship with their friends (Parade et al., 2009).

Also, [Han](#) et al. (2015) noted that certain demographic characteristics could affect disclosure distress. Keum et al. (2021) revealed that demographic characteristics such as age could pose influence on individual distress disclosure. Also, Cox et al. (2020) noted that distress disclosure is a social phenomenon for certain individuals to be understood, socially accepted, and also able to connect to others within their social terrain hence, demographic characteristics play a significant role on distress disclosure. According to Sittichai and Smith

(2018); [Benatov](#) (2019), demographic characteristics such as age is a very germane factor that could influence the disclosure of distress, particularly among school adolescents, which is the major population of this study. For example, Sittichai and Smith (2018) revealed that younger adolescents find it easy to disclose distress as regards to bullying than the older adolescents. This could be in the form of disclosing such bullying acts to parents or teachers, or telling the police, fighting back, among others.

Family structure, including factors such as single-parent households, blended families, and extended families, also plays a role in shaping adolescents' distress disclosure. Adolescents from single-parent or blended families may experience complex family dynamics, which can either foster or inhibit open communication. Studies suggest that adolescents in single-parent households may develop closer bonds with the custodial parent, potentially increasing distress disclosure if the relationship is supportive (He & Huang, 2020). However, family instability or lack of cohesion in blended families may create emotional barriers to disclosure, as adolescents struggle with shifting family roles and alliances.

Research on family structure and distress disclosure indicates that adolescents in stable family environments, regardless of structure, are more likely to share emotional challenges. For instance, adolescents in single-parent households with supportive parental relationships tend to report higher levels of distress disclosure (Williams & Richards, 2021). In contrast, adolescents in unstable or conflicted blended families often report lower rates of disclosure due to perceived lack of trust or emotional safety (Carlson & Rogers, 2022). Family structure, therefore, is a key socio-demographic factor that influences the quality of parent-child relationships and adolescents' comfort in disclosing distress.

Studies such as Raji et al. (2019) revealed that the attitudes that parents and teachers have affected distress disclosure among school adolescents. Bullying affects students' academic activities and could even hamper career and academic performance in the long run (Igbaede-Edwards et al., 2023). Its elastic effect could also extend towards causing low academic self-perceptions, poor school engagement, mental related health issues, low self-esteem, negative behaviors, among others that could pose significant effects on the development of the students hence, on career and academic performance (Hellfeldt, Gill & Johansson, 2016; Ladd, Ettekal & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2017; Igbaede-Edwards et al., 2023). It is a global growing societal problem among school adolescents leading to high level of insecurity among school students, posing several adverse short-term and long-term effects on the school system and the society at large (Igbaede-Edwards et al., 2023). Furthermore, it could exercise several health related issues which could be mental health and aggravate other health issues that could affect individual social activities and performance in the society.

Different studies have been conducted on distress disclosure among secondary school adolescents utilizing diverse psychological variables as predictors but the dearth of literatures on the predictive influence of parent-child attachment and demographic variables on distress disclosure among secondary school adolescents in Ibadan. This is the lacuna the researchers aim to fill.

The following are the objectives of the study;

1. To investigate the influence of parent-child attachment on in-school adolescents' distress disclosure in Ibadan.
2. To explore the role of age and family type on distress disclosure among in-school adolescents in Ibadan.

The following hypotheses will be tested in the study

1. Parent-child attachment will significantly predict distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents in Ibadan.
2. Age and family type will significantly jointly and independently predict distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents in Ibadan.

METHOD

Research Design

Cross sectional research design was adopted in this study which measures the relationship between the independent variable, parent-child attachment and the dependent variable, distress disclosure.

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study is Ibadan North Local Government; Ibadan was selected using purposive sampling technique while eight (8) secondary schools and participants were selected through simple random sampling technique. Taroyamane (Yamane, 1973) sample size calculator was used to select 1,122(583 male and 539 female) as the respondents in the study.

Instruments

Two scales were adopted in this study and were further divided into three sections (A, B, and C). The scales are the Adolescent Parental Bonding Instrument and the Distress Disclosure Index.

Section A contains respondents' demographic information which includes age, gender, family type, religion, class and bullying experience. Sections B and C measure Parent-Child Attachment and the Distress Disclosure respectively.

Parent-Child Attachment Scale

The Adolescent parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) developed by Parker et al., (1983). It is a 25-item scale developed to assess attachment from the view of the child. It helps the child relate the extent of care and protection received from the parent. It is rated on a four-point likert pattern ranging from very like to very unlike. It has a high reliability coefficient of .89 and convergent validity of .71. High score indicates secure attachment while low score indicates insecure attachment.

Distress Disclosure Index

This is a 12-item scale developed by Khan et al., (2012). It is designed to explore individual desires to revealed distressing experiences. The authors revealed that the DDI reported a high level of content validity of .67 and a reliability of .81. It entails reverse scoring of items 2,4,5,8,9 and 10 respectively. The DDI is scored on a five-point Likert format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). High score indicates distress disclosure while low indicate distress concealment.

Statistical Analysis

Data collected for this study will be analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software 25.0 version. Both descriptive and inferential statistics will be used in the analysis of the data collected for this study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis will be used in testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be sought from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of the Social Sciences University of Ibadan.

RESULTS

Table 1: Linear regression analysis summary table showing results on the influence of Parent-Child Attachment on Distress Disclosure

Criterion	Predictor	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	P
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Distress Disclosure	Parent-Child Attachment	.413	15.192	.000	.413	.171	230.789	.000
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Table 1 above present results of the influence of parent-child attachment on distress disclosure among bullied school adolescents in Ibadan. It is shown that parent-child attachment has a significant influence on distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents in Ibadan. [$R = .413$; $R^2 = .171$; $F(1, 1120) = 230.789$; $p < .01$]. Further, parent-child attachment accounted for 17.1% variance on distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents. Direction of the beta value revealed that the higher the parent-child attachment of respondents ($\beta = .413$), the higher their distress disclosure.

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Demographic Variables on Distress Disclosure among Bullied In-School Adolescents in Ibadan

Independent Var(s)	Beta	T	Sig.	R	R ²	F	P
Age	.014	.483	.629				
Family Type	-.207	-7.061	.000	.207	.043	24.934	.000

Table 2 present results of the jointly influence of age and family type on distress disclosure among bullied school adolescents in Ibadan. It revealed that age and family type jointly influenced distress disclosure [$R = .207$; $R^2 = .043$; $F(2, 1120) = 24.934$, $p < .01$]. This implies that demographic variables accounted for 4.3% variance on distress disclosure among bullied school adolescents in Ibadan. Independently, results revealed that family type has a significant inverse influence on distress disclosure among bullied school adolescents in Ibadan [$\beta = -0.207$, $t = -7.061$, $p < .01$]. However, result shows that age [$\beta = 0.014$, $t = .483$, $p > .01$] did not independently influence distress disclosure among bullied school adolescents in Ibadan.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the influence of parent-child attachment and demographic variables as predictors of distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents in Ibadan. Hypothesis one stated that parent-child attachment will significantly predict distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents in Ibadan. The results revealed that parent-child attachment significantly predicted distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents. This finding is similar to the study of Innamorati et al., (2018), who found that a significant relationship exists between attachment and distress disclosure. Similarly, According to Yin et al., (2021), parent-child attachment has a direct influence on distress disclosure, including but not limited to disclosure of academic exploit in school, friends they keep in schools, as well as their relationship with their teachers and other support staff. The way their parents relate with them will determine how they can reveal information and issues that affect them either positively or negatively in the school environment or the community in general. Moreover, secure attachment has a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction and low level of anxiety prompting distress disclosure (Fraley, 2019; Sumer & Gungor, 1999).

Hypothesis two which stated that age and family type will significantly jointly and independently predict distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents in Ibadan was also significant. The result indicated that age and family type significant predicted distress disclosure among bullied in-school adolescents. Independently, it was found that family type has a significant inverse influence on distress disclosure among the respondents. However, age has no significant influence on distress disclosure among the respondents. A study by Keum et al. (2021) revealed that demographic characteristics such as age could pose influence on individual distress disclosure. According to Sittichai and Smith (2018); [Benatov](#) (2019), demographic characteristics such as age is a very germane factor that could influence the disclosure of distress, particularly among school adolescents, which is the major population of this study. For example, Sittichai and Smith (2018) revealed that younger adolescents find it easy to disclose distress as regards to bullying that the older adolescents.

Conclusion

This study concludes that parent-child attachment has significant influence on distress disclosure among in school adolescents in Ibadan. This has implications for parents to be friendly and accommodating to their adolescents thereby prompting disclosure of distress when the need arises. It was also concluded that age and family type jointly influence distress disclosure among bullied in school adolescents in Ibadan. It was further concluded that family type influences distress disclosure among bullied in school adolescent.

Recommendations

Based on the outcome of this study, it was recommended that parents should give attention to their children (adolescents) so as to have a sense of belonging which will foster disclosure when the need arises. Parents should always ask their children of happenings in the school on daily basis, this will prompt them to disclose cases of bullying experienced in the school to their parents which will prompt the needed intervention.

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