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Gender Relationship Between Psychosocial Supports And Psychological Adjustment Of Bereaved Students In Wukari Education Zone Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Gender relationship between psychosocial supports and psychological adjustment bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone Taraba State, Nigeria, was examined in this study. In accordance with the research question and hypothesis, one (1) objective was set. Correlation design was used. There were 4,727 secondary school students, made up of two thousand six hundred and seventy-six (2676) males and two thousand one fifty-one (2051) females in the zone. The Zone comprised of 28 public secondary schools. The sample for this study is 354 secondary school students drawn from the population using Krejcie and Morgan method of determining sample size, purposively, a total of 225 was drawn from the sample using the Bereavement Checklist (BEC) was administered to students in 14 public secondary schools to determine the sample for the study. A total of 225 students who were bereaved were selected as respondents for the study. The sample was made up of 127 males and 98 females. Out of the 225 respondents, 85 students were selected from six secondary schools in Ibbi Local Government Area while 140 respondents were selected from eight secondary schools in Wukari Local Government Area, because the number of secondary schools in Wukari LGA are more than the secondary Schools in Ibi LGA. Two adapted and adopted questionnaires were used for data collection; 'Psychosocial Supports Questionnaire (PSS-Q) the PSS-Q, which has a reliability value of 0.87, is the tool used to gather data. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, whereas paired samples inferential statistics were employed to answer the research question and test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. According to the study's findings, there are differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in favor of male students. The study recommended that female students may benefit from support groups focused on gender-specific issues, while male students may benefit from programmes that promote healthy masculinity and positive male role models if services like counselling, mentorship programmes, and peer support groups are provided and tailored to meet the unique needs of male and female students in the zone.
Keywords: Bereaved Students, Psychological Adjustment, Psychosocial Supports

INTRODUCTION

During bereavement, the bereaved persons need adequate support of those that can reassure them of the normality of grief, explain its symptoms or reassure them that they are not going to die, or that the

frightening symptoms of anxiety and tension are not signs of death. Therefore, in order to help the bereaved, cope successfully and recover quickly from bereavement they need to be given adequate psychosocial support, these could be cognitive, emotional and social supports

Psychosocial support improves resilience and social connectedness, which are important protective factors for mental health. A study on the mental health of Syrian refugees found that those who had stronger social support networks were less likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety, Alpak, Unal, Bulbul, Sagaltici, Bez, Altindag and Dalkilic (2015). There is an inverse benefit to feeling supported and connected, particularly when faced with stressful life challenges. Social support improves mental, physical, and emotional health outcomes and has been studied extensively within varying disciplines over the last 40 years with similar results, (Yang, Schorpp, & Harries, 2014) opined that, Strong social support safeguards against the negative psychological and physiological responses to stress; it is a buffer of protection that aids coping.

Poor adjustment to the bereavement process could have a negative impact on the emotional experience for the adolescent lacking the emotional support to provide resilience against depression and anxiety. It has been noted that the psychological experience of the adolescent experiencing loss of a parent, during the adolescence developmental phase, could have a long-lasting negative influence on the adolescent's psychological development, levels of depression, types of attachment, anxiety experienced and over all well-being (Bowlby, 1973). This can be seen in levels of depression, type of attachment, anxiety experienced and over all well-being. For example, studies conducted on the subject of adolescent bereavement in the United Kingdom and the United States of America show that there is a strong correlation between the loss of a parent and depression, clinical depression (Dillen, Fortaine, & Verhosfstadt-Deneve, 2009; Hung & Rabin, 2009; Merlo & Lakey, 2007; Schlozman, 2003; Shaw & Dallos, 2005) or extreme emotional distress resulting in clinical psychiatric treatment (Bowlby, 1980).

Students have different ways and abilities of dealing with school challenges. Some deal with adjustment problems constructively, while some feel overwhelmed and find school life difficult. Students are confronted with new personal and interpersonal challenges that include the need to establish new relationships, develop, study skills and so on, and still cope with already established relationship with parents, former peers and so on (Renshaw, 2013). When students find themselves in the school, it can reduce contact and social support from former friends and family members. Difficulties in dealing with the challenges may lead to poor academic performance and increased anxiety. Students who are adequately adjusted become more prepared socially, emotionally, and academically. But those that are not adequately adjusted are ill-equipped socially, emotionally and perhaps academically. Elijah (2018) revealed that family variables such as separation due to crises, divorce, polygamy has affected students' social, emotional adjustment as well as academic performances.

The loss of a parent is a painful and tragic experience and coming to terms might not be easy. However, putting in place mechanisms such as psychosocial supports that can drive the student to grieve in a healthy manner so that they may reach the acceptance stage faster may help the student to resume normal activities (Muchai, Ngari, and Mumiukha, 2014). Grief Counsellors should aim at assisting bereaved students to come to an acceptance with the new lifestyles so that they can start planning for life without their parents (Owaa, Aloka & Raburu 2015). When the individual learns that life moves on despite the loss of their loved ones, they can build healthy relationships both spiritually and emotionally (Kamau, Kuria, Mathai, Atwoli, &Kangethe, 2012). Therefore, this study intends to ascertain the impact of supports these students get to be able to adjust psychologically, and how these supports influence their acceptance to continue with building healthy relationships, having resilience in life and achieving their set goals in life irrespective of gender.

Ashford and Dent (2006) examined gender differences in coping strategies and their impact on self-esteem and academic attainment. They found significant differences between coping strategies used by males and females, where males exhibited greater tendency to detach themselves from the emotions of a situation and be emotionally inhibited while females achieved at significantly higher level than males. Examining gender differences in perceived stress and coping styles, Day and Livingstone (2003) found that women perceived three out of five scenarios presented to them as more stressful than men. In

addition, women reported more frequent use of social and emotional support to cope (Day & Livingstone, 2003 (Lee, Keough, & Sexton, (2002). Li, DiGiuseppe, and Froh (2006) discovered ound that, among adolescents, girls used emotion-focused and ruminative coping styles, which were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, whereas boys used problem-focused and distractive coping styles that were associated with masculinity and lower levels of depressive symptoms. According to Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2008), instead of seeking social support like adolescent girls tend to, adolescent boys prefer direct problem solving, distraction, avoidance or disengaging. There are conflicting literature and empirical studies on how male and female tends to cope with the death of a loved one, therefore this study investigated the gender differences between psychosocial supports and psychological adjustment bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone.

Statement of the Problem

Incidences of death in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, which takes the life of students' parents/guardians, friends, loved ones or any close relatives, put the students in a state of bereavement or mourning and with little or no psychosocial supports have affected their psychological adjustment. However, students are supposed to study uninterruptedly without any psychological distress to be able to perform well in their education and attaining the height of their goals and aspirations in life, but this seems to be unrealizable due to poor psychological adjustment as a result of hard experiences such as death of their loved ones. The death of a loved one can have a profound impact on a student's psychological and emotional well-being, particularly for adolescents who are still developing their identity and sense of self. In Nigeria, the lack of psychosocial support services for bereaved secondary school students in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, may aggravate the negative effects of grief and result in poor psychological adjustment thus, there is a need for this study to explore the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment among bereaved secondary school male and female students in this zone.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the psychosocial support as a correlate of psychological adjustment of bereaved secondary school students in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated:

1. The differences on the relationship between psychosocial supports and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone

Research Question

This study was guided by:

1. Are there differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone?

Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

Ho_1. There is no significance difference on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because the researchers examined the relationship between psychosocial supports (independent variable) and psychological adjustment (dependent variable) of bereaved male and female students in Wukari Education Zone.

The population of the study is 4,727 which consists of all the public senior secondary school students in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba state, Nigeria. It is made up of two thousand six hundred and seventy-six (2676) males and two thousand one fifty-one (2051) females. The Zone comprised of 28 public secondary schools. Taraba State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (TSMBSE, 2021), Annual school report. The sample for this study is 354 secondary school students drawn from the population using Krejcie and Morgan method of determining sample size, purposively, a total of 225 was drawn from the sample using the Bereavement Checklist (BEC) was administered to students in 14 public secondary

schools to determine the sample for the study. A total of 225 students who were bereaved were selected as respondents for the study. The sample was made up of 127 males and 98 females. Out of the 225 respondents, 85 students were selected from six secondary schools in Ibbi Local Government Area while 140 respondents were selected from eight secondary schools in Wukari Local Government Area, because the number of secondary schools in Wukari LGA are more than the secondary Schools in Ibi LGA.

Two questionnaires and a Checklist were used for data collection. Bereavement checklist (BEC) was used to identified bereaved students. The checklist is arranged in two sections; A and B, section A elicit information on the bio data of the students which comprises of gender and class of the respondents. Section B contained five items which elicits information that help the researchers to identified bereaved students. BEC was developed by the researchers.

After the identification of bereaved students, two adapted and adopted questionnaires was used for data collection; 'Psychosocial Supports Questionnaire (PSS-Q) the PSS-Q is divided into two sections: A and B, section A contains information on the bio data of the respondents which include; class and gender. While section B contains three clusters: A, B and C which has seven items each. Cluster A sought information from the respondents on cognitive supports, cluster B sought information on emotional supports while cluster C sought information on social supports in Wukari Education Zone. Items in PSS-Q were adapted from Spuij, Prinzie and Boelen (2016) Kaplan, Block, Gillard and Putnam (2020) and sarason, Sarason, Shearin and Pierce (1987) respectively. The instrument is rated on a likert rating scale with four-point of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) with the scores of 4,3,2, and 1 respectively for items and 1,2,3, and 4 for negative items. The second adopted questionnaire is the Psychological Adjustment Scale (PAS) by Carol Ryff with reliability coefficient of 0. 87 which contains 15 items that seeks data on the level of adjustment of bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone.

A face and content validation of the instrument (PSS-Q) was done by three experts, two from the Department of Counselling, Educational Psychology and Human Development and one from the department of measurement and evaluation, Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo. A total of 20 respondents in Jalingo Education Zone were used to pilot test the instrument of PSS-PAQ. The respondents were selected by using random sampling technique (balloting). The purpose of the pilot test is to trial-test the PSS-PAQ before using in the main study, to ensure reliability and usability of the questionnaire. The trial-test also enabled the researchers to obtain data concerning the test item characteristics as well as obtain reliability indices of the PSS-PAQ. For an instrument to be reliable as stated by Ajai and Amuche (2015) for an achievement and aptitude test a reliability index of at least 0.80 is alright, while for attitude, interest, personality scales, it should be at least 0.70.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Research Question One: *Are there differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of the Gender differences on the Relationship between Psychosocial Support and Psychological Adjustment of Male and Female Bereaved Students

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	90	3.48	.14	.01
Female	135	3.22	.19	.02

Table 1 presents the Mean ratings of differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students. The table shows that male students have a mean of 3.48, while female students have a mean of 3.22. The result implies that there are differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in favor of male students.

Hypothesis One: There are no significance differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone

Table 2: Independent Samples t-test of Significance Differences on the Relationship between Psychosocial Support and Psychological Adjustment of Male and Female Bereaved Students

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
PsychAdj/Supports	Equal variances assumed	12.194	.001	10.882	223	.000	.25185	.02314	.20624	.29746
	Equal variances not assumed			11.558	220.897	.000	.25185	.02179	.20891	.29479

Result of independent-samples t-test in Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria ($t(220.897) = 11.558$, $p = 0.000$). Thus, the null hypothesis which states that there are no significant differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students in Wukari Education Zone is rejected. This implies that the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students differs significantly.

Finding revealed that there are significant differences on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students. The finding is in agreement with Judith, Pamela and Peter (2015) whose findings revealed that there was no statistically significant gender difference on adjustment to loss and grief base on gender. The finding also in line with Olaleye and Varga (2022) who found that there a statistically significant difference in the emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral grief effects experienced between female and male students with female students experiencing greater effects than male students. The finding justifies Adesina (2013) who found that both male and female suffer from the same psychological trauma and regardless of the victims each they all benefited from counselling intervention which have a great impact on their psychological adjustment. The finding is contrary to Samuel and Michae (2019) who revealed that there is no significant difference in the grief reactions to parental loss and coping strategies among in-school adolescents based on gender which contradict this study because findings revealed that there is significant difference on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of male and female bereaved students.

The reviewed studies provided some insights into the psychological adjustment of bereaved college students in the United States and China. The studies by Bonanno et al. (2004), Taylor et al. (2013), and Kerns et al. (2017) all suggest that bereaved students may experience lower levels of psychological adjustment compared to non-bereaved students. However, Bonanno et al. (2004) also found that most bereaved students showed resilience and returned to pre-loss levels of adjustment within two years. Kerns et al. (2017) also found that bereaved students who had lost a parent during childhood reported higher levels of negative self-concept. Wang et al. (2020) conducted a study in China and found that college students who had experienced the death of a parent had lower levels of psychological adjustment compared to those who had not. However, social support was found to be a protective factor for the bereaved students.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it was found that there is a significant difference on the relationship between psychosocial support and psychological adjustment of bereaved students' in Wukari Education Zone. It was also found

that there is an insignificant relationship between social support and psychological adjustment of bereaved male and female students.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

Schools should provide psychosocial support services to students to help them cope with academic and personal challenges. These services include counselling services, mentorship programmes, and peer support groups, and it should be tailored to meet the unique needs of male and female students. For example, female students may benefit from support groups focused on gender-specific issues, while male students may benefit from programmes that promote healthy masculinity and positive male role models. The researcherss also suggest that educators and school administrators should be trained in recognizing signs of psychological distress in students and referring them to appropriate support services.

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