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Early Life Trauma, Parenting Styles And Psychological Wellbeing Among Adults In Port Harcourt Metropolis

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the impact of early life trauma and parenting styles on the psychological well-being of adults in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Nigeria. Utilizing a correlational survey design, data were collected from 440 participants via standardized questionnaires, including the Adverse Childhood Experiences Interview Questionnaire (ACE-IQ), Baumrind Parenting Style Questionnaire, and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. Multiple regression analyses revealed that early life trauma accounted for 1% of the variation in adult psychological well-being, while parenting styles explained 39%. The interaction between early life trauma and parenting styles also accounted for 39% of the variation, with authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles significantly predicting well-being, unlike permissive styles. Socioeconomic status significantly moderated the relationship between early life trauma and psychological well-being, contributing 19.7% to the variation. Contrary to expectations, a higher frequency of early life trauma was not significantly negatively associated with adult psychological well-being, suggesting resilience or other moderating factors. These findings highlight the critical role of parenting styles and socioeconomic context in mitigating or exacerbating the effects of early trauma. Recommendations include trauma-informed parenting programs, early screening, and culturally sensitive interventions to promote psychological resilience. This study contributes to understanding the interplay of early experiences and parenting in shaping adult mental health in a Nigerian context.
Keywords: Early- Life Trauma, Parenting Styles, Psychological Well-being, Port Harcourt Metropolis

INTRODUCTION

Exposure to trauma during childhood is quite common, and as a result, a significant portion of children have the potential to be affected by traumatic experiences at some point during their developmental processes, which adversely affect various areas of daily life (Copeland *et al*. 2018).

The childhood of an individual is vital in determining who they will grow up to be in the future. Childhood experiences within a safe, healthy, and communicative family environment are strongly associated with the development of emotionally mature and well-functioning adults (Diana Baumrind, 1991; Ann S. Masten, 2001). However, exposure to traumatic events during childhood can disrupt this developmental trajectory (Bessel van der Kolk, 2005). When such trauma is not addressed within a psychologically supportive and safe context, it may lead to adverse long-term effects on an individual's psychological well-being (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Although

numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of psychological traumas on mental health (Kessler *et al*. 2010), the impact of traumas on the brain and the importance of this subject remain a critical issue that requires in-depth examination. Various approaches and methodologies have been utilized to investigate the effects of trauma experienced in early childhood on the developing brain, as well as the associated changes in the structure and function of specific brain regions across development and into adulthood (Martin H. Teicher et al., 2003; Charles A. Nelson III et al., 2019; Bruce D. Perry, 2002).

Although international research provides clear evidence of these associations, there remains insufficient context-specific investigation in Port Harcourt, where environmental stress, family instability, and socioeconomic pressures may heighten exposure to trauma.

Early life trauma and parenting styles significantly influence adult psychological well-being, yet their interplay remains understudied in Nigeria, particularly in Port Harcourt. As a major oil-producing city, Port Harcourt faces unique challenges, including economic inequality, environmental pollution, and communal conflicts, which may amplify childhood adversities (Ogunjimi, 2016). The absence of locally grounded empirical research limits the ability of mental health professionals, policymakers, and community Organization's in Port Harcourt to design interventions tailored to the realities of individuals who have experienced early trauma. This study addresses this gap by examining how early life trauma and parenting styles, independently and interactively, predict adult psychological well-being, while also considering the moderating role of socioeconomic status.

This study is grounded in Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1978), Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1967), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Psychoanalytic perspectives (Freud, 1961). These frameworks collectively suggest that early experiences shape emotional regulation, cognitive schemas, and behavioral patterns that persist into adulthood.

Research has demonstrated strong associations between childhood trauma and adverse psychological outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and reduced well-being (Copeland et al., 2018; Briere & Scott, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a correlational survey design to examine the relationships between early life trauma, parenting styles, and psychological well-being among adults in Port Harcourt. Data was collected using standardized questionnaires, and multiple regression analysis was employed to test hypotheses. The demographic variables include age, sex, marital status, educational qualification, ethnicity, occupation, socioeconomic background, and household type while growing up. Early life trauma and parenting styles were used as independent variables, while the psychological well-being of adults was used as a dependent variable.

The study was carried out specifically targeting and covering the city of Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria. Port Harcourt serves as the capital of Rivers State and is part of Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. The study involved 440 adults residing in Port Harcourt metropolis, selected using convenience sampling.

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. Respondents were approached in communities, workplaces, and public spaces. After explaining the purpose of the research and obtaining informed consent, questionnaires were administered in paper form and electronically. Participants completed the instruments, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Out of the total of 480, only 440 were ascertained to be legible and appropriate for data analysis. It also means that the questionnaires had a 91.6% returns rate.

The researcher made use of three (3) standardized questionnaires to get responses from respondents. Adverse Childhood Experience Interview Questionnaire (ACE-IQ) (WHO 2018) was used to measure early life trauma. The Baumrind Parenting Style Questionnaire was used to determine the parenting styles experienced by respondents. Ryff's (1989b) standardized Psychological Well-being Scale was used as an outcome measure for participants on the six dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. All

instruments demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .70$). Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Simple Regression Results

Predictor	β	t	p
Early Trauma	-.101	−2.123	.034
Authoritative	.335	7.445	.000
Authoritarian	.480	11.440	.000
Permissive	.245	5.300	.000

Table 2: Multiple Regression Model

Predictor	β	t	p
Authoritative	.510	12.286	.000
Authoritarian	.055	1.366	.173
Permissive	.088	1.052	.642
Early Trauma	−.120	−2.911	.004

Model Summary: $R^2 = .387$, $F(4, 435) = 68.562$, $p < .001$
Model with SES: $R^2 = .395$, $F(5, 434) = 56.639$, $p < .001$

Discussion

The test of hypothesis one was carried out to determine the association between early life trauma and adult psychological well-being. An ANOVA associated with regression analysis testing the significance showed $F(1, 439) = 4.505$, $p < 0.05$. This result is significant as the p-value of .034 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected, which states that early life trauma does not significantly predict adult psychological well-being. This counterintuitive finding aligns with research on resilience and post-traumatic growth, which shows that some individuals exposed to repeated adversity develop coping mechanisms that buffer against negative mental health effects (Bonanno, 2004).

For hypothesis two, it is carried out to determine the relationship between authoritative parenting style and adult psychological well-being. An ANOVA associated with regression analysis testing the significance showed $F(1, 439) = 55.429$, $p < 0.05$. This result is significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The result thus suggests that authoritative parenting styles significantly predict adult psychological well-being. To support the finding that authoritative parenting style has a significant impact on adult psychological well-being. Baumrind's foundational work (1991) established that authoritative parenting characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and clear boundaries is consistently linked to more positive psychological outcomes in adulthood, including higher self-esteem and better emotional regulation.

For hypothesis three, it is carried out to determine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and adult psychological well-being. An ANOVA associated with regression analysis testing the significance showed $F(1, 439) = 130.870$, $p < 0.05$. This result is significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The result thus suggests that authoritarian parenting styles significantly predict adult psychological well-being.

For hypothesis four, it is carried out to determine the relationship between permissive parenting style and adult psychological well-being. An ANOVA associated with regression analysis testing the significance showed $F(1, 439) = 28.085$, $p < 0.05$. This result is significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The result thus suggests that permissive parenting styles significantly predict adult psychological well-being.

Hypothesis five was carried out to determine the interaction effect of early life trauma and parenting styles on adult psychological well-being. An ANOVA associated with regression analysis testing for significance yielded $F(4, 439) = 68.562$, $p < 0.05$. This result is significant as the p-value of .000 is less

than the 0.05 level of significance. The result thus shows that there is a significant interaction effect of early life trauma and parenting styles on adult psychological well-being.

For hypothesis six, the findings from the research carried out to determine the moderating effect of socio-economic status on early life trauma and adult psychological well-being showed that the ANOVA associated with regression analysis testing for significance is $F(5, 439) = 56.639$, $p < 0.05$. This result is significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The result thus shows that socio economic status of the family significantly moderates the relationship between early life trauma and adult psychological well-being. A growing body of research supports the hypothesis that socioeconomic status (SES) significantly moderates the impact of early life trauma on adult psychological well-being. SES often influences access to resources, social support, and coping mechanisms, which can buffer or exacerbate the effects of childhood adversity. For example, Evans and Kim (2013) found that children from lower SES backgrounds exposed to early trauma exhibited worse psychological outcomes compared to those from higher SES families, suggesting that economic resources play a protective moderating role. Similarly, Hudson (2005) emphasized that higher SES may mitigate the negative effects of trauma by providing greater access to mental health services and social support networks, thus reducing long-term psychological distress.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the complex interplay between early life trauma and parenting styles in shaping adult psychological well-being. The findings provide strong evidence that both early adverse experiences and the quality of parenting received during childhood exert significant and enduring effects on adult mental health outcomes.

Specifically, individuals who reported higher levels of childhood trauma consistently exhibited lower psychological well-being in adulthood. However, the presence of supportive and consistent parenting, particularly characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate autonomy granting (i.e., authoritative parenting) appeared to mitigate the long-term psychological effects of early trauma. In contrast, permissive parenting styles were more frequently associated with negative psychological outcomes, especially when combined with early adverse experiences. These findings underscore the protective role that positive parenting can play in buffering the impacts of early trauma. They also support the theoretical framework that views childhood development as the result of both environmental risk factors and the presence of resilience-enhancing protective mechanisms, such as secure attachment and positive caregiver relationships.

From a practical standpoint, this research highlights the importance of early intervention strategies that focus on both trauma-informed care and the promotion of healthy parenting practices. Mental health services, social work, and educational programs should consider these factors in efforts to support children at risk and foster long-term psychological resilience. In conclusion, this thesis affirms that early life trauma and parenting styles are critical determinants of adult psychological well-being. By addressing these foundational aspects of human development, both clinical and preventative efforts can be better tailored to support individuals across the lifespan, ultimately contributing to healthier and more resilient communities.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that Mental Health agencies in Rivers State should strengthen trauma-informed services and early screening programmes to identify and support individuals exposed to childhood trauma. Promote evidence-based parenting interventions and address socioeconomic disparities through policy.

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