International Journal of Innovative Psychology & Social Development 14 (3):160-165, July-Sept, 2026

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DOI:10.5281/zenodo.21790864

Effect Of Social-Support-Technique In Managing Separation-Anxiety Among Student-Victims Of Armed-Banditry In Gusau Metropolis, Zamfara State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated effect of social support technique in managing emotional component of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis. The study was guided by two objectives which were transformed in to hypotheses. The study employed pre-test post-test quasi experimental research design with the total population of 124 student-victims who were exhibited separation anxiety symptoms as identified using Spence Anxiety Scale, (1994). A sample of 30 student-victims with higher symptoms of separation anxiety was used. The instrument used for data collection was an adapted Severity Measure for Separation Anxiety Disorder. It has a total of 10 items measuring emotional component of separation anxiety. The instrument was measured on five Point-Likert scale with a reliability coefficient of .763. Data collected were on pre-test and post-test respectively. The findings revealed that, there is significant effect of social support technique in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety p = .000, and gender did not have a differential effect on the management of emotional symptoms of separation anxiety, with mean scores of 20.13 for male and 18.57 for female, P = .226. It was concluded that social support technique was significantly effective in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis. Since gender did not have a differential effect on the management of emotional symptoms of separation anxiety, interventions programs using social support technique should be designed to accommodate both male and female student-victims without gender bias.
Keywords: Social Support Technique, Emotional-Separation-Anxiety, Armed Banditry

1. INTRODUCTION

Armed banditry in the North-Western Nigeria has become one of the most pressing security and humanitarian challenges of the last decade. In Zamfara State, the crisis has escalated from sporadic cattle rusting to coordinated attacks on villages, schools, and highways. These attacks often result in loss of lives, displacement of families, destruction of property, and forced migration of survivors to relatively safer areas such as Gusau metropolis, the state capital. The influx of displaced persons into Gusau has significantly increased the population of public primary and secondary schools. Among these displaced populations are student-victims of armed banditry – student-victims who have either witnessed attacks, lost family members, or been forcibly separated from parents and caregivers. The sudden displacement and separation from significant attachment figures places these students at risk of psychological distress.

One of the most common emotional responses among such students is separation anxiety. Separation anxiety disorder is a psychological condition characterized by excessive anxiety about separation from home or significant people to whom an individual is strongly attached. It involves persistent fear, uncontrollable nervousness, and worry triggered by anticipation of future events, memories of past events, or ruminations about daily activities, often with disproportionate fear of catastrophic outcomes. While normal separation anxiety disorder reflects a maladaptive pattern that interferes with functioning (Redlich, 2015).

Separation anxiety problems are among the most common forms of psychopathology in young people, with global prevalence estimate ranging from 5% to 25%, yet only a small proportion receive treatment (Boyd, Kostanski & Gullone, 2000). It accounts for a significant number of referrals for anxiety disorders in children and adolescents (Cartwright-Hatton, McNicol, & Doubledday, 2006). In the DSM and ICD, it is classified as a disorder usually first diagnosed in infancy, childhood, or adolescence. When untreated, it has been described as a "gateway" anxiety disorder that can lead to poor mental and physical health outcomes later in life (Battagalia, 2015). For student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis, separation from parents due to death, abduction or displacement, coupled with adjustment to an unfamiliar school environment, creates conditions that heighten vulnerability to these symptoms.

Addressing these emotional symptoms requires school-based interventions that are practical and context-relevant. One such approach is social support technique. Social support technique is a counselling and psychological approach that helps individuals generate solutions to problems and break out of rigid patterns of thinking. It fosters communication, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving in a relaxed and non-judgmental atmosphere (Moran, Talbot & Benson, 1990). In practice, it involves emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance provided through relationships with peers, teachers, counselor, and the wider community. Social support can be perceived or received, and it includes both psychological/emotional support and tangible instrumental support. Beyond individual ties, it also extends to community networks and social capital that promote mutual cooperation and resilience (Angel, Natalla, Susan & Santiago, 2016).

The theoretical foundation for this study draws from two perspectives. Firstly, Bandura Social Learning Theory emphasizes that much human behaviour is learned through observation and modeling. Bandura noted that people form ideas about new behaviours by watching others, and later use that information as a guide for action. The key processes in modeling are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Carbonel, 2014). In a school setting, teachers and peers who model coping, emotional regulation, and supportive behaviour provide student-victims with observable alternatives to anxiety and withdrawal. Thus, social support techniques align with social learning principles by creating environments where adaptive behaviours can be observed and practiced.

Secondly, Beck Cognitive Theory of Anxiety explains that anxiety is maintained not only by events, but by how individuals interpret those events. Anxious individuals tend to exaggerate threat and they engage in task-vigilant to danger (Ossai, 2013). For student-victims of armed banditry, interpretations such as "I am not safe anywhere" or "I will lose everyone again" can sustain separation anxiety symptoms. Beck theory is relevant because social support techniques can help students challenge these distorted appraisals and develop more realistic and rational ways of thinking about safety and relationships. Despite growing literature on banditry and displacement in Zamfara State, limited studies have examined the effect of social support techniques on managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among students-victims in Gusau metropolis. Given that schools are the primary setting where displaced students spend their time, understanding how social support can be applied to reduce separation anxiety is critical for promoting learning and psychosocial well-being. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of social support techniques in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

1. 2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the effect of social support technique in managing emotional component of separation anxiety among Student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis.

2. The differential effect social support technique in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among male and female student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis.

Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

1. There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of emotional component of separation anxiety among Student-victims of armed banditry exposed to social support technique in Gusau metropolis.
2. There is no significant differential effect social support technique in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety between male and female student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis.

2. METHODOLOGY

A pre-test post-test quasi-experimental research design was adopted for this study. This design was used to investigate the effect of social support technique in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis, Zamfara State. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the comparison of pre-test and post-test mean scores after exposure to treatment sessions in order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), quasi-experimental designs involve the assignment of participants to groups without randomization. This is because the researcher cannot artificially create groups for the purpose of the experiment. Instead, participants are assigned to groups based on existing or non-random criteria. Quasi-experimental designs are particularly useful in situations where true experimental designs cannot be conducted due to ethical or practical constrains.

The population of this study comprised all student-victims of armed banditry with separation anxiety symptoms identified in Government Girls Secondary School, Tudun-Wada, Gusau, and Government Day Secondary School, Samuru, Gusau. The total population was one hundred and twenty-four (124) student-victims. Out of this number, eighty-six (86) were identified at GGDSS Tudun-Wada, while thirty-eight (38) were identified at GDSS Samuru, Gusau. The target population for the study consisted of thirty (30) student-victims, with fifteen (15) participants selected from each school. Participants were selected based on high scores on separation anxiety symptoms as measured by the Separation Anxiety Checklist developed by Spence (1994).

A sample size of fifteen (15) participants per group is considered adequate for quasi-experimental research. De Winter (2013) noted that sample size in experimental studies depends on the nature, risk, cost, and prevalence of the research condition, and that a sample ranging from 3 to 40 participants can be appropriate, with smaller groups often yielding more manageable and reliable results. Two instruments were adapted and utilized for data collection in this study:

Separation Anxiety Checklist Instrument develop by Spence (1994), were used to identify student-victims with high separation anxiety symptoms. While Severity Measure for Separation Anxiety, Disorder adapted from Graske, Wittchen, Bogels, Stein and Lebeu (2013). This instrument assesses a wide range of physical, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive components of separation anxiety. It originally consists 40 items. However, for the purpose of this study 10 items that specifically measured emotional symptoms of separation anxiety were selected. This instrument was structured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Never, Occasionally, Half of the time, Most of the time, to All of the time. The overall reliability coefficient of the instrument was .763, while the reliability coefficient for the emotional component was .827. A pilot test was conducted, and the results indicated that the instrument was reliable for use in this study. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Paired sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis one while independent sample t-test was used to test hypothesis two, all hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

3. RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of emotional components of separation anxiety among Student-victims of armed banditry exposed to social support technique in Gusau metropolis.

Table 1: Paired Sample t-test of Pre and Post-Tests of Social support technique in Managing Emotional Component of Separation Anxiety

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Pretest	15	42.90	4.77	10.54	14	.000
Posttest	15	24.00	2.53			

Table 1 revealed significant effect of social support technique in managing emotional component of separation anxiety among Student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis as indicated by mean of 42.90 for pre-test and the mean of 24.00 for post-test; t= 10.54 and p= .000 which is lower than 0.05 alpha level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of emotional component of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry exposed to social support technique in Gusau metropolis is hereby rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant differential effect social support technique in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety between male and female student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis.

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test of Analysis of Gender Differences in the Effect of Social Support Technique in managing Emotional Symptoms of separation Anxiety

Groups	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Male	15	20.13	3.89	3.89	28	.226
Female	15	18.57	3.42			

Table 2 shows that male student-victims had a mean score of 20.13, SD =3.89, while female student-victims had a mean score of 18.57, SD = 3.42. An independent samples t-test revealed that the difference was not statistically significant, t(28), P= 0.226. This implies that gender did not have a differential effect on the management of emotional symptoms of separation anxiety through social support technique. Thus, the null hypothesis which states that There is no significant differential effect social support technique in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety between male and female student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis.is hereby accepted.

DISCUSSION

The result of the hypothesis one shows significant effect of social support technique in managing emotional component of separation anxiety among Student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis, which is in line with research of Maulik, Eaton, and Bradshaw (2011), who examines the moderate effect of social support on the relationship between stress and depression of university students. A total of 632 undergraduate students completed the measures of perceived stress, perceived social support, and depression. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that social support moderated the association between stress and depression was much smaller in the high social group compared with that in the low social support group. The results of these analyses are presented stress (B= 0.44, P< 0.01) significantly presented depression in the second step. The social support factor added a significant increment to the model in step three, where social support (B= -0.30, P< 0.01) was significantly related to depression after controlling other variables. Moreover, a significant interaction between stress and social support (B=- 0.10, P< 0.01) was present, as predicted. The findings suggested that social support moderated the impact of stress on depression. Significantly positive relationship exists between stress and depression at low levels of social support (B= 0.47, p< 0.01, R^2 =0.22). The relationship between stress and depression was significant at high levels of social support (B= 0. 22, p < 0.01, R^2 =0.04). The regression coefficient, however, was significantly less than that in the low social support group. Hence, the results also suggest that social support moderated the impact of stress on depression. The finding is also backed up by study of Bello (2021) who investigated the effect of social support techniques on

depression among HIV/AIDS-infected women in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Three objectives and three corresponding hypotheses guided the study. Hypotheses formulated for the study were statistically analyzed using a paired-sample t-test. Results of the data analyzed for the study showed that social support technique are effective in reducing depression among HIV/AIDS-infected women (p = 124).

The finding of hypothesis two implies that gender did not have a differential effect on the management of emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis. This is in agreement with the research of Muhammad and Yusuf (2021) who determined the effect of Social Skill Training on Social Anxiety among senior secondary School Students in Suleja Education Zone, Niger State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that social skills training counseling technique has significant effect on the cognitive component of social anxiety among students t=3.238 and p=.005. Social skills training counseling technique has a significant effect on the physiological component of social anxiety among students t=7.087 and p= .000. The finding is also in line with research of Segrin, McNelis and Swiatkowski (2016) who studied Social Skills, Social support technique and Psychological Distress: A Test of the Social Skills Deficit Vulnerability model. The social skills deficit vulnerability model predicts that poor social skills minimize opportunities to acquire social support techniques, in turn, leading to the proliferation of psychological distress. The results indicated that, after controlling for psychological distress at T2, through higher social support techniques. Thus, people with poor social skills may be vulnerable to the development of psychological distress because they have less access to the proactive effects of social support techniques.it was also disagree with research of Rabiu and Jelani (2025) who determined the effect of acceptance and commitment therapy in reducing stress among postgraduate students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Significant difference was found between academic and psychological stress among the students, with means scores of 48.32 for academic stress and 26.98 for psychological stress (p= .001).

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that social support technique was significantly effective in managing emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau metropolis. Furthermore, gender did not have a differential effect on the management of emotional symptoms of separation anxiety among student-victims of armed banditry in Gusau Metriopoplis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings, the researcher recommends that:

1. School counselors and psychologists in Gusau metropolis should integrate social support technique into their counseling programs to help student-victims of armed banditry manage emotional symptoms of separation anxiety. This will provide them with the necessary emotional and psychological support needed for recovery.
2. Since gender did not have a differential effect on the management of emotional symptoms of separation anxiety, interventions programs using social support technique should be designed to accommodate both male and female student-victims without gender bias.

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