
EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF ORPHANS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Orphans are vulnerable children whose social adjustment capacity can be adversely affected by poor life skills. This study sought to determine the influence of emotional skills, namely self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills, on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in government-owned orphanages in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study used 210 orphans randomly selected from a population of 440 orphans housed in the five government-owned orphanages in the state. A researcher-developed instrument, the Emotional Skills and Social Adjustment of Orphans Questionnaire (ESSAOQ), was used to obtain data for the study. Section A of the instrument sought information on self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills, while Section B sought information on social adjustment. The reliability indices using the Cronbach alpha statistic were .80 for self-awareness, .84 for self-regulation, .81 for social skills and .85 for social adjustment. The scores on each of the independent variables were categorised into two groups of 'high' and 'low' based on their average mean score. Using the four-point scale, the average mean score below 2.50 was considered to indicate "low" featuring of the variable, while 2.50 and above was considered to indicate "high" featuring. The corresponding mean and standard deviation scores on social adjustment based on the two categories were then compared to determine a significant difference using independent t-test analysis. The results were tested at a .05 level of confidence. The findings showed a significant influence of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills on the social adjustment of the participants. It was therefore recommended that the development of life skills in orphans should be intensified in orphanages to enhance their balanced psychological development.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Skills, Social Adjustment, Orphans, Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria

Introduction

Parents have the primary responsibility of providing their children psychological, physical, social, and educational care until they are able to stand on their own. The influence of parenting is very crucial in the development of a child. Parenting therefore promotes and supports the social and emotional growth and development of the child from birth to adulthood. Parents provide essential support that helps the child be aware of who he is and what he should become so as to fit well into society. When therefore parents are absent in a child's life, a social vacuum that may be difficult to fill by foster parents or care givers is created. In such a situation, the child loses the benefits of parental care and may encounter emotional deficits that can adversely affect the rest of his life. Depending on the quality of foster care he receives thereafter, his capacity for healthy social adjustment may become stressed.

Orphans refer to those children who have lost their parents, usually lack basic parental care and support, and as a result, may be unpleasantly affected in their social development and adjustment.

Many children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, have lost their parents to various forms of social challenges such as accidents, sickness, kidnapping, assassination, natural disasters, communal clashes, domestic violence, herdsmen and farmer clashes, and even war. In many instances, orphaned children usually receive parental care from caregivers who may be blood or non-blood relatives. The lack of parents places a burden on orphans to develop a socially balanced lifestyle. Petric (2019) describes as "pseudo-orphan syndrome" those challenges commonly encountered by orphans. According to her, orphans usually feel alienated from the environment, deprived of social life, and pathologically guilty with experiences of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, low self-respect, destructive self-criticism, a neurotic need for affection and approval, eating and sleep disorders, and addiction disorders.

Many orphans usually roam the streets of cities seeking succor through begging or engaging in demeaning activities for survival. Others resort to harmful activities that may be inimical to their healthy development. Ntuli, Mokgathe, and Madiba (2020) found that orphans lived in a socially depressed environment, were subjected to extreme poverty characterized by frequent hunger, did not enjoy family support, experienced ill-treatment and unsympathetic attention when living with extended families, suffered prolonged bereavement due to the death of their parents, resorted to silence as a coping strategy, and were usually forced to leave school early for various reasons. In an attempt to provide for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, education, and affection to make them comfortable and useful members of society, government and non-governmental organizations usually establish orphanages to cater for them. Many orphanages in Akwa Ibom State are owned by the government, while a few are owned by private organizations or individuals.

In traditional African societies, being an orphan can pose serious psychological trauma to the individual. An orphan, like every other child, needs care and acceptance from the people around him, especially during their growing years. It is this care and acceptance that would motivate them to learn to socialize meaningfully with peers, teachers, and other members of society, to give them a sense of being. Ntuli et al. (2020) concluded that grieving over their dead parents negatively affected their capacity to develop sufficient coping skills, which resulted in their experiencing isolation, sadness, hopelessness, a lack of peace, and fear of an uncertain future. The ability of the orphan to adjust to social life and the quality and speed of the adjustment may depend on a number of emotional skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills. Existing literature appears to have paid insufficient attention to emotional skills in the study of social adjustment of orphans, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, thus the researchers' interest in conducting this study. In particular, this study was undertaken to determine the influence of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills on the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

Related Literature

Several hypotheses provide theoretical perspectives on the concept of social adjustment. Among these are the social learning theories of identification (Sears, 1950), attachment (Bowlby, 1969), and risk and resilience (Garmezy, 1991). Sears holds that personality development in children is determined by the ways in which the child is raised and that socialization is a two-way process in which the behaviour of the individual depends on the behaviour of other people and in which the individual's behaviour acts to elicit specific behaviours from others. Bowlby in his view, posits that young children need to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for normal social and emotional development since infants become attached to adults who are sensitive and responsive in social interactions with them. The Resilience Theory notes that stressful life events can alter developmental trajectories by immediately changing individual capabilities and environmental conditions. A child traumatized by the loss of parents would need a certain level of resilience to be able to manage his emotions and relationships with other people effectively.

Emotional skills refer to the individual's capacity to recognize, identify, explicitly express, and regulate his emotions. These skills constitute the foundation of healthy mental capacities and self-awareness. Recognizing and understanding one's emotions helps the individual understand and appreciate the emotions of others, so interacting with them becomes easier. Emotional skills assist the individual to adjust to his social environment and facilitate his well-being and that of the community he lives in. How well an individual adjusts to his environment is a function of his emotional competencies. Emotional skills include the abilities to identify, use, understand, and regulate emotions. They cover self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, self-motivation, and emotional expression.

The nature of social adjustment exhibited by a child is influenced by his emotional skills and how he utilizes them. Such skills may include self-awareness, self-regulation, self-concept, and social and life skills (Segedin, 2016). Self-awareness refers to the capacity for self-introspection and the ability to recognize one's self as an individual separate from others in the environment. As observed by Segedin, positive self-awareness can facilitate positive social adjustment, while negative self-awareness may result in negative social adjustment. An orphan, unlike a child with parents, may develop feelings of low self-worth and desperation, which can affect his capacity for healthy social interaction. Naturally, individuals with a high level of self-awareness tend to be more capable of effective social adjustment than those with a low level of self-awareness. Self-awareness covers the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, values, strengths, and limitations. It helps to build self-confidence, optimism, and a growth mindset. The more an individual knows about himself, the better he is at adapting to life's changes (Weissman, Wickramaratne, Nomura, Warner, Pilowsky, and Verdelli, 2016).

Self-awareness is about understanding one's own needs, strengths, desires, failings, habits, and everything else that makes an individual unique. The more an individual knows about himself, the better he is at adapting to life's changes. When an individual has a better understanding of himself, he will be able to experience himself as a unique and separate individual. This empowers him to make changes, build on his areas of strength, and identify areas where he would like to make improvements (Weissman et al. 2016). It helps an individual create achievable goals because he will consider his strengths, weaknesses, and what drives him when he is setting goals.

Self-regulation refers to the capacity to respond to the demands of an ongoing emotion in a way that is socially acceptable. It covers the ability to delay or permit responses as may be required by circumstances. It also refers to the controlling of one's behaviour, thoughts, attention, emotions, impulses, and feelings so as to respond appropriately to an emotional experience (Zimmerman, 2000). Posner and Rothbart (2000) see self-regulation as the regulation of behaviour according to social, cognitive, and emotional situations. Liman and Tepeli (2019) found that self-regulation skills education programme promoted the development of self-regulation skills in children. Sengul and Karakurt (2018) note that self-regulation skills acquired during early childhood affect pro-social behaviours, school readiness, academic achievement, and high levels of empathy.

Social skills cover those personal attributes that indicate a high level of emotional intelligence. They constitute a cluster of productive personality traits that characterize one's relationships in a social milieu (Silber, 2009). These skills include social and communication abilities, language skills, personal habits, empathy, time management, teamwork, and leadership traits. Social skills cover three key functional elements: people skills, social skills, and personal career attributes (Silber, 2009). Konnikova (2015) identified social skills to include communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, a positive attitude, responsibility, and teamwork.

Orphans constitute a vulnerable group that should not be ignored when they are socially maladjusted. These children, especially when brought up in orphanages, may find it difficult to interact with other people, given their experiences and disadvantaged backgrounds. If not sufficiently assisted,

they may become confused, uncertain, anxious, and socially maladjusted. Children growing up in orphanages may suffer as a result of the absence of their biological parents, a lack of long-term, stable relationships with caregivers, and discrimination related to their orphan status. These factors in turn can impair their ability to form healthy social relationships, learn, or work meaningfully with others. Chao (2011) affirmed that parents, through their parenting styles, build critical foundations for various aspects of their children's development and social adjustment. According to Spera (2005), the level to which a child adjusts in his immediate and external environment is a function of the parenting attention he received as a child, and this extends into adulthood.

In spite of the fact that hospitality agencies, churches, and governments provide support to help orphans, many of them still find it difficult to live a normal life and acquire education and life skills that would assist them to fully integrate into the larger society. A lot of emotional and behavioural problems, such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, insecure attachment styles, low social competence, low quality peer relationships, and poor communication skills, appear to characterize the behaviour of orphans and their overall social adjustment. These challenges could have negative effects on their social lives, academic aspirations, and achievements. Cluver and Gardner (2006) observed that orphaned adolescents experience low self-awareness and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. Studies have also shown that orphaned adolescents brought up in orphanages are exposed to various emotional and behavioural problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, and anti-social behaviour (Caligiuri, 2010; McLaughlin, Fox, Zeanah, and Nelson, 2012; Shaffer et al., 2016).

Social adjustment, according to Yengimolki, Kalantarkousheh, and Malekitabar (2015), is an adaptation to survive in the physical world. Human beings are able to adjust to the physical, social, and psychological demands that arise from interactions with other individuals. Adjustment according to Yengimolki et al. (2015), is an organizational behaviour in life situations at home, at school, at work, in growing up and in ageing. It is the course of behaviour that an individual follows in relation to the demands of their internal, external, and social environments. Mudasir and Ganaie (2013) view adjustment as a behavioural process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between those needs and the obstacles of their environments. A sequence of adjustments begins when a need is felt and ends when it is satisfied.

The adjustment process, Nadeem and Bhat (2014) observed, involves four parts, namely, a need or motive in the form of a strong, persistent stimulus; the thwarting or non-fulfillment of this need; varied activity or exploratory behaviour accompanied by problem solving; and some response that removes or at least reduces the initiating stimulus and completes the adjustment. When needs arise, especially in new or changed surroundings, the interpersonal activity meant to satisfy those needs is prompted. In this way, people increase familiarity and comfort with the environments, and come to expectation that such needs will be met in the future through the social networks.

Adjustment plays a pivotal role in the development of an individual. Azin and Mousavi (2010) define adjustment as the process of altering one's behaviour to reach a harmonious relationship with the environment. This is typically a response brought about by some type of change that has taken place. The stress of this change causes one to try to reach a new type of balance or homeostasis between the individual (both inwardly and outwardly) and the environment. The length and depth of the adjustment required are dependent upon the complexity of the change that catalyzes it and the underlying resilience of both the person and the environment. As defined by Owuh (2011), adjustment is the relationship between the individual and the environment. Igbo, Nwaka, Mbagwu, and Mezieobi (2016) argue that individuals strive to satisfy not only the needs of the body but also those urges and drives that are the dynamic forces influencing their thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and behaviour and the satisfaction of these urges determines the extent of the desirable adjustment of their personality.

Adjustment is the process of adapting to a setting and explains how efficiently an individual can realistically accommodate and adapt to the demands of the environment in which he finds himself. According to Ogini and Ofodile (2014), adjustment refers to the degree of capacity with which an individual tries to cope with the needs of his inner tensions, conflicts, and frustrations so as to bring about coordination between these inner demands and those of the outer world. Social adjustment therefore refers to the capacity to cope with one's inner tensions, conflicts, and frustrations in relation to the demands of the social environment. For an orphan, social adjustment entails his ability to effectively relate with other people both inside and outside of the school setting, such as by joining groups, participating in extracurricular activities, feeding and interacting with other students, and asking or answering questions in class, among other things.

Hatami, Ghahremani, Kaveh, and Keshavarzi (2016) carried out a study on the effect of self-awareness training on self-efficacy and social adjustment among orphaned adolescents. The findings of the study showed that self-awareness training directly increased self-awareness skills and self-efficacy. Kessy (2017) studied the differences in social adjustment development between adopted children and children in orphanages in Dar es Salaam. The study revealed that orphans had higher levels of self-awareness than the adopted ones, and Muslim orphans had higher self-awareness than Christian and other orphans because of the type of services they received. Damirchi and Mohammadi (2015) carried out a study to compare the social adjustment, self-regulation, and religious beliefs of addicted and normal orphans in Urmia and found that the social adjustment, self-regulation, and religious beliefs of normal orphans were higher than those of addicted orphans.

Musisi, Kinyanda, and Nakigudde (2017) compared the behavioural and emotional disorders of primary school-going orphans and non-orphans in Uganda and found that more orphans than non-orphans had more common emotional and behavioural problems, while the orphans' social functioning in the family rated significantly worse compared to the non-orphans. Benthson (2015) conducted an analytical study on the influence of social environment on the social adjustment of adopted children in New Jersey and found that social environment of adopted children had influence on their social adjustment. Engelberg and Lennart (2014) conducted a study on internet use, social skills, and social adjustment and found that frequent users of the internet tended to be lonely, have deviant values, and, to some extent, lack emotional and social skills characteristic of high emotional intelligence.

Akpan-Idiok and Ackley (2018) studied the influence of family background on adolescent social adjustment in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, and found that family structure significantly influenced students' social adjustment. Rajalekshmi (2017) found that adolescent orphan boys had more social adjustment problems than girls. In a study to determine how psychological support and parents' social life influenced the self-esteem of orphans, Eranga and Ajka (2015) found that the probability of orphans suffering from low self-esteem was 0.59, while the factors that decreased the risk of low self-esteem for the orphans were psychological support, parents living together before death, a strong relationship between parents before death, a high average monthly income, voluntary support, and consideration from the society.

Purpose of the Study

This study was carried out to determine the influence of emotional skills on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State. The orphans in this study were limited to those found in orphanages run by the government in the state. The emotional skills were also limited to self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to provide direction for the study:

1. Self-awareness has no significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Self-regulation has no significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Social skill has no significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The study covered a population of 440 orphans accommodated in the five government-owned orphanages in the state. Using a simple random sampling technique, 210 (47.7%) of the inmates who could read and understand the instrument were selected to participate in the study. A researcher-developed instrument, the Emotional Skills and Social Adjustment of Orphans Questionnaire (ESSAOQ), was used to obtain data from the participants. The instrument has two sections, A and B. Section A sought information on the emotional skills, namely, self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills, while Section B sought information on social adjustment. The instrument was a self-reported, four-point Likert-type questionnaire using the scaling of strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point). The reliability indices using the Cronbach alpha statistic were .80 for self-awareness, .84 for self-regulation, .81 for social skills and .85 for social adjustment. While items on self-awareness and self-regulation were 7 each, those of social skills and social adjustment were 9 and 30 respectively. The scores on each of these variables for each participant were summed up based on the scale and thereafter used in the data analysis. The scores on each of the independent variables were categorized into two groups of "high" and "low" based on their average mean score. Using the four-point scale, an average mean score below 2.50 was considered to indicate "low" featuring of the variable, while 2.50 and above was considered to indicate "high" featuring. The corresponding mean and standard deviation scores on social adjustment based on the two categories were then compared to determine a significant difference using independent t-test analysis. The results were tested at a .05 level of confidence.

Results

Hypothesis One

Self-awareness has no significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

This hypothesis was raised to determine the significant influence of self-awareness on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Result of Independent t-test Analysis of Influence of Self-awareness on Social Adjustment.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	p-value	Decision P<.05
High Self-Awareness	169	99.74	7.08	200	20.05	.000	*
Low Self-Awareness	33	70.88	9.72				

*Significant at .05 alpha level

The result of the analysis indicates a significant difference in the social adjustment of adolescent orphans based on their level of self-awareness. Orphans with high self-awareness (n = 169) recorded a higher mean score in social adjustment (x = 99.74; SD = 7.08) while those with low self-awareness (n = 33) had a lower mean score in social adjustment (x = 70.88; SD = 9.72). The t-value of the analysis was 20.05 when compared at .05 confidence level with 200 degrees of freedom. This result suggests that self-awareness has a significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in the state.

Hypothesis Two

Self-regulation has no significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

This hypothesis was formulated to determine the significant influence of self-regulation on social adjustment of adolescent orphans. Table 2 shows the result of the analysis.

Table 2: Result of Independent t-test analysis of Influence of Self-Awareness on Social Adjustment.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	p-value	Decision P<.05
High Self-Regulation	161	98.54	8.34	200	8.93	.000	*
Low Self-Regulation	41	81.21	18.38				

*Significant at < .05 alpha level

Orphans with high self-regulation (n = 161) had a mean score of 98.54 (SD = 8.34) in social adjustment, while those with lower self-regulation (n = 41) had a mean score of 81.21 (SD = 18.38). The analysis produced a t-test value of 8.93. This was found to be significant at less than .05 confidence level with 200 degrees of freedom. This finding indicates that self-regulation has a significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans. High self-regulation appears to facilitate high social adjustment.

Hypothesis Three

Social skills have no significant influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

This hypothesis was formulated to determine the significant influence of social skills on social adjustment of adolescent orphans. Table 3 shows the result of the analysis.

Table 3: Result of Independent t-test analysis of Influence of Social Skills on Social Adjustment.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	p-value	Decision P<.05
High Social Skills	181	96.68	11.18	200	5.65	.000	*
Low Social Skills	21	80.81	19.00				

*Significant at < .05 alpha level

The result of the analysis indicates that orphans with high social skills (n = 181) had a mean score of 96.68 (SD = 11.8) in social adjustment, while those with low social skills (n = 21) had a mean social adjustment score of 80.81 (SD = 19.00). The independent t-test analysis produced a t-value of 5.65. This was found to be significant at less than .05 confidence level with 200 degrees of freedom. This result indicates that social skills have a significant influence on the social adjustment of orphans in the state.

Findings

The findings of this study were that self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills have significant influence on the social adjustment of orphans. From the data collected, more orphans appeared to have higher levels of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills.

Discussion of Findings

More orphans had higher self-awareness with corresponding high social adjustment. Self-awareness indeed had influence on the social adjustment of adolescent orphans. Hatami et al. (2016)

found that self-awareness training increased self-awareness skills and self-efficacy. Keshi (2047) found that orphans had greater social awareness than adopted ones. The finding in the present study could result from the higher consciousness of the orphans as a result of their interactions in schools with non-orphaned children. Social adjustment was also found to be high among orphans with high self-regulation. This finding concurs with that of Musisi et al. (2017), who found that more orphans than non-orphans had more common emotional and behavioural problems. They also found that orphans' social functioning in the family rated significantly worse compared to the non-orphans. Benthson (2015) also found that the social environment of adopted children had an influence on their social environment. In the present study, the findings can be attributed to the social environments in which they found themselves, namely, the orphanages where they lived and the schools where they found themselves with other children. Although they may try to adjust socially with other children, the consciousness of their background may have some form of subtle influence on their psyche.

On social skills, it was found that most of the participants appeared to possess high social skills and showed correspondingly high social adjustment. Akpan-Idiok and Ackley (2018) found that family structure significantly influenced students' social adjustment. Eranga and Ajka (2015) found that the factors that decreased the risk of low self-esteem of the orphans were psychological support, parents living together before death, strong relationship between parents before death, high average monthly income, voluntary support and consideration from the society. Participants in this study probably obtained immense psychological support from their caretakers, hence their apparent high capacity for social adjustment.

Conclusion

Self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills are essential life skills that adolescents should possess as they grow into adulthood. These skills are even more relevant for orphans, given their disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. The present study has highlighted the relevance of these skills in the social adjustment of adolescent orphans, thereby suggesting the need to enhance the development of these skills in orphans so as to improve their healthy and balanced psychological growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is strongly suggested that:

1. Care givers in orphanages should be equipped with specialized skills on how the development of life skills should be facilitated among inmates in orphanages to ensure their balanced development.
2. Life skills training and development should form an integral part of orphanage service for the inmates throughout their sojourn in such facilities.
3. As a matter of necessity, guidance counselors should always be included in the key personnel composition of orphanages so that they can facilitate the provision of life skills and mentorship for the inmates of such facilities.
4. Apart from sending them to schools where they can interact with other children, inmates of orphanages should be exposed to other social activities and programmes that will help sharpen their social skills.

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