

Childhood Behavioural Inhibition and Perceived Social Support as Predictors of Social Anxiety Among Secondary School Students in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Objectives: Social anxiety remains an issue among adolescents. This study was conducted to identify some predictors of social anxiety among adolescents. Two hypotheses were stated based on literature review.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted on 123 males and 172 females between the ages of 13 and 17 years. Participants were systematically recruited from 6 secondary schools in Oyo state, Nigeria. Data was collected using standardized questionnaires and subjected to SPSS (v.23).

Results: Childhood behavioural inhibition and perceived social support were significant predictors of social anxiety respectively.

Conclusion: Mental health practitioners should be cautious of the significant predictors in this study when designing intervention programs against social anxiety for adolescent population.

Keywords: Predictors, Social anxiety, Adolescents.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phase of adolescence remains a turbulent time as posited by many psychologists. Several studies have been conducted to inform the development of programs that mitigate the turbulence associated with adolescence (e.g. Agberotimi, et al. 2015; Constantine-Simms, et al. 2020). However, many of these studies still have failed to address crucial aspects of adolescent development which is social anxiety. Social anxiety is defined as the debilitating and chronic illness characterized by a marked and persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations involving exposure to unfamiliar people or scrutiny by others (Furmark, 2002). Social anxiety is a crucial problem as related studies such as Ayenibiowo, et al. (2012) have found a prevalence of social anxiety in adolescents to be around 27.47% with female participants exhibiting a higher level of social anxiety than their male counterparts on average.

This study, therefore, is interested in examining the predictors of social anxiety among secondary school students in Oyo state, Nigeria. The selected predictors were childhood behavioural inhibition and perceived social support. West and

Newman (2016) found significant associations between childhood behavioural inhibition and social anxiety, however, the findings were inconclusive because of cultural difference that may occur if the study was replicated in African societies. In a review study, Clauss et al. (2012) found significant predictions of childhood behavioural inhibition on social anxiety. Hirshfeld-Becker, et al. (2007) submitted that childhood behavioural inhibition was a subsequent antecedent of social anxiety in mid childhood.

In the same vein, related studies have found significant interactions between perceived social support and social anxiety. For instance, Singh, et al. (2020) found that more social support from close friends was significantly related to lower social anxiety level. Moghtader and Shambo (2019) supported this by submitting a significant negative correlation between perceived social support and social anxiety in a cross-sectional survey. In Nigeria, Ogueji and Olley (2019) found that social support enhanced adaptive functioning in vulnerable adult groups, however, results could vary if study was conducted among Nigerian adolescents.

All above literature is in consensus with the Lang (1985) bio-informational theory of anxiety which postulates that anxiety often has critical biological, psychological and sociocultural causal factors. The current study therefore utilizes the bio-informational theory as the theoretical framework. It is expected that findings from this study will be significant for guiding the development of psychosocial support programs the adolescent population. To achieve the aim of this study which is to identify predictors of social anxiety among adolescents, the following questions were asked:

1. What is the predictive impact of childhood behavioural inhibition on social anxiety among adolescents?
2. What is the predictive impact of perceived on social anxiety among adolescents?

II. METHODS

Research Design

The research design used for this study was a cross-sectional survey design. In this type of research design, data is collected from different participants to establish the existing characteristics in a population at a specific point in time. The design involves studying a group of individuals without a follow-up study. The independent variables in this study were childhood behavioural inhibition and perceived social support. The dependent variable was social anxiety.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study consisted of 300 participants from six secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. However, only two hundred and ninety-five (295) participants (one hundred and twenty-three (123) males and one hundred and seventy-two (172) females) completed their questionnaires. Participants' age ranged from 13-17 years (15.32 ± 1.78 years); they cut across private and public secondary schools and across the various upper basic education classes or grades (SSS 1- SSS 3). Out of the total participants who completed the questionnaires, one hundred and sixty (160, 54.2%) were from public schools while one hundred and thirty-five (135, 45.8%) were from private schools.

The sampling techniques employed in the sample selection included a two-stage process as mentioned below:

I. The secondary schools were selected using stratified sampling technique. First, the list of all the local governments in Oyo State, Nigeria were made into ballot options and three local governments were randomly selected. Furthermore, one private school and one public school were randomly selected from the list of all private and public secondary schools in each selected local government totalling the six secondary schools for the study.

II. The participants for the study (students in the secondary schools) were selected using systematic sampling. Fifty (50) participants were sampled from each of the six schools, making a total of three hundred (300) participants. In each school, the total number of students in the upper basic education were divided by fifty (50) to give the nth count on the list and each student that fell on the nth count was sampled.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study. They include:

The Retrospective Measure of Behavioural Inhibition (RMBI)

The Retrospective Measure of behavioural Inhibition (RMBI) is an 18-item instrument that serves as a retrospective self-report measure of recollected inhibited behaviours in childhood – between the ages of 5-13. This instrument is a dimensional measure which was designed to capture the primary behavioural indices and indicators of behavioural inhibition as defined by Kagan, et al. (1984). The validity of

the RMBI is supported by its high correlation with the Retrospective Self Report of Inhibition developed by Reznick et al. (1992) – 0.73. There is also evidence of its great construct validity in its ability to independently measure social anxiety and avoidance separately from childhood separation anxiety better than the existing retrospective self-report of inhibition (RSRI) (Reznick, et al. 1992).

All questions in this instrument are rated on a 3-point scale ranging from no/hardly ever (0), to some of the time (1) and yes/most of the time (2). As this is a retrospective measure, the instrument also provided room for the participant to select an option of failing to remember. The scores on this measure are positively correlated with levels of inhibition i.e. higher scores equal higher levels of inhibition.

Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL-12)

The ISEL-12 (Cohen, Mermelstein, Kamarck & Hoberman, 1985), is a shortened version of the 40-item ISEL (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983), both of which measure perceived accessibility and availability of social support. It is a 12-item instrument that assesses the items measuring perceived social support on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (definitely false) to 3 (definitely true). All items are summed to yield a total score (scores range 0 –36) that describes overall perceived social support, and three sub-scales representing perceived availability of appraisal support, belonging support, and tangible support.

Social anxiety scale for adolescents (SAS-A)

The SAS-A is an 18-item self-report measure of social anxiety developed specifically by La Greca and Lopez (1998) for adolescents. This instrument is based on the findings of Watson, Friend and Leary (1969) on the elements of social anxiety defined as: fear of negative evaluation by others (Fear Negative Evaluation, FNE), and social avoidance and distress experienced in the presence of others (Social Avoidance and Distress, SAD). These elements formed the sub-scales of La Greca's measure of social anxiety. In this instrument, the FNE sub-scale consists of 8 items with scores ranging from 1-40, the SAD-New consists of 6 items with scores ranging from 1-30, and the SAD-General sub-scale consists of 4 items with scores ranging from 1-20. The total score range amounts to 1-90 with higher scores reflecting more social anxiety for all sub-scales. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale according to how much the item is true for the respondent, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the time).

The SAS-A has been proven to have good construct validity, showing statistically significant relationships with other social phobia and trait anxiety measures. The entire measure possesses Cronbach's alpha and split-half test reliability of .88 and .85 respectively.

Procedure for Data Collection

A letter of introduction and permission was provided at each of the six schools, thereafter, the researcher administered the

questionnaires to all three hundred (300) participants across the schools. The response procedures and requirements were explained according to the standardized instructions on the instruments. The researcher also retrieved the questionnaires upon completion by participants. Two hundred and ninety-five (295) questionnaires were successfully retrieved out of three hundred (300) that were administered.

Ethical Consideration

The instruments used in this study did not contain any element that could cause pain to participants or bring hurt to them in any way. The personal information and identity of respondents were kept confidential as personal information such as names and addresses were not required of participants. Participants were not forced or pressured to partake in the research process but rather, their consent was requested to ensure their free will in participation and they were given an opportunity to withdraw from research if they wished to. Institutional consent was obtained for each of the schools represented in the sample and only information pertaining to the study was collected. Participants were verbally appreciated after the completion of the questionnaires. The study obtained ethical approval from the Department of psychology, Covenant University before being carried out.

III. RESULTS

Hypothesis 1, which stated that childhood behavioural inhibition will have a significant predictive effect on social anxiety in adolescence, was tested using the simple regression analysis and presented below on Table 1.

Model	R ²	Adjusted R ²	β	F	P	T	Sig.
1		(Constant)		14.182			.000
Childhood behavioural inhibition	.022	.019	-.15	6.643	<.05	-2.577	.010
a. Predictors: (Constant), Childhood behavioural inhibition							
b. Dependent Variable: Social anxiety in adolescence							

The result above showed that childhood behavioural inhibition predicted social anxiety in adolescents [F = 6.643, p<.05], accounting for 2.2% variance in social anxiety in adolescence (R² = .022). The beta value showed -.15. The hypothesis 1 is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 2, which stated that perceived social support will have a significant predictive effect on social anxiety in adolescence, was tested using the simple regression analysis and presented below on Table 2.

Model	R ²	Adjusted R ²	β	F	P	T	Sig.
1		(Constant)		15.420			.000
Perceived social support	.092	.089	-.303	29.643	<.05	-5.445	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived social support							
b. Dependent Variable: Social anxiety in adolescence							

From above result, it is revealed that perceived social support predicted social anxiety in adolescence, accounting for 9.2% variance in social anxiety in adolescence [R²= .092, F = 29.643, p<.01]. The beta value was -.30. The hypothesis 2 is therefore accepted.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study examined some predictors of social anxiety among adolescents. The first finding showed a significant prediction of childhood behavioural inhibition on social anxiety among adolescents. The second finding showed a significant prediction of perceived social support on social anxiety among adolescents. These findings suggests that variances in social anxiety was explained by childhood behavioural inhibition and perceived social support respectively. The results in this study was in agreement with literature. For instance, West and Newman (2016) found significant influence of childhood behavioural inhibition on social anxiety. Also, other studies found significant influence of childhood behavioural inhibition on social anxiety (e.g. Clauss et al. 2012; Hirshfeld-Becker, et al. (2007).

In the same vein, perceived social support was a significant predictor of social anxiety in related studies. For instance, Singh, et al. (2020) found that more social support from close friends was significantly related to lower social anxiety level. Moghtader and Shambo (2019) also submitted a significant negative correlation between perceived social support and social anxiety in a cross-sectional survey. Social support and adaptive functioning has also been found in a related Nigerian study (Ogueji & Olley 2019). The findings in the current study was also in agreement with the bio-informational theory that guided the current study (Lang, 1985).

An implication of the findings in the current study is that the predictor variables need to be given priority during the development of anti-social anxiety intervention programs for the study population. This is supported by the significant predictions of these variables found in this study. However, the current study is not without limitations. The method of data collection, i.e. self-report method could have given chances for self-report bias. There is the need for further studies to support the mitigation of this limitation in later studies.

V. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

This study recommends that intervention programs to mitigate social anxiety among adolescents should be cautious of the predictive impacts of childhood behavioural inhibition and the presence of social support for adolescents. Conclusively, this study concluded that childhood behavioural inhibition and perceived social support are significant predictors of social anxiety among adolescents. There is the need for further studies that support interventions against social anxiety among this population.

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Conflict of Interest

None was declared

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Department of Psychology, Covenant University, Sango-Otta, Ogun state, Nigeria.

Informed Consent

Both verbal and written consents were obtained from all participants. All participants consented that their data should be used for this research.

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