Psycho-Social Variables and Social Adjustment of Orphans in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to examine the influence of psycho-social variables on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of the study, two research questions were raised and two null hypotheses were formulated respectively to guide the study. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study comprised of all the 670 children in all the five selected orphanages in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 210 respondents were selected using Taro Yamen Formula. "Psycho-Social Variables and Social Adjustment of Orphans Questionnaires (PSVSAOQ)" was used for data collection in this study. The instrument was validated by three experts two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one from the Department of Psychological Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer research questions while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using dependent t-test. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant influence of self-concept and caregivers support on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that school counsellors should design and implement specific programmes that focus on developing emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-concept to help orphans better cope with social challenges and build healthier peer relationships. Finally, schools should establish peer support groups where orphans can share experiences, receive encouragement, and learn positive coping strategies from each other.

Keywords: Psycho-Social, Variables, Social, Adjustment, Orphans

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

The term orphan is used to refer to a child who has lost both parents due to death. In common usage, only children who have lost both parents are considered as orphan. Various groups use different definitions to identify orphans. UNAIDS Global Report (2008) viewed orphans as individuals who through "death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, or separation are without the care of both parents". This implies that an orphan does not have any surviving parent to care for him/her. However, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2012), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2010), label any child who has lost one parent as an orphan. In this approach, a maternal orphan is a child whose mother has died, a paternal orphan is a child whose father has died, and a double orphan is a child who has lost both parents (USAID/UNICEF/UNAIDS, 2008). This definition contrasts with the older use of half-orphan to describe children who had lost only one parent.

According to Gophan (2021), in many cultures, orphans may be stigmatized, leading to social exclusion and discrimination. This can further exacerbate their feelings of isolation and loneliness. Without parental figures, orphans may lack the necessary support networks that facilitate socialization and emotional development. This can hinder their ability to form healthy relationships. Orphans often face difficulties accessing education due to financial constraints, lack of resources, or the absence of guardians to support their academic endeavors. The economic circumstances of orphans can significantly impact their development. Many orphans live in poverty, lacking access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare. This economic instability can hinder their

overall well-being and development. In some cases, orphans may be forced to work at a young age to support themselves or their siblings, which can limit their educational opportunities and perpetuate cycles of poverty. The challenges faced by orphans can have long-term implications for their mental health and overall well-being. Research indicates that orphans are more likely to experience. Studies have shown that orphans are at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Rutter, 2019).

Due to the cumulative effects of loss, trauma, and socio-economic challenges, orphans often report lower levels of life satisfaction compared to their peers. Some orphans may turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism for their emotional pain, further complicating their mental health challenges. Addressing the needs of orphans requires a multi-faceted approach that involves various stakeholders, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and communities. Providing psychosocial support through counseling and support groups can help orphans process their grief and develop coping strategies. Mental health professionals can facilitate discussions and provide tools for emotional regulation. Ensuring access to education for orphans is crucial for their long-term development. Initiatives such as scholarship programs, tutoring, and mentorship can help orphans succeed academically and develop life skills. Community involvement is essential in supporting orphans (Embleton, 2014).

Programmess that engage community members in caring for orphans can create a sense of belonging and provide emotional and financial support. Governments should implement legal frameworks that protect the rights of orphans, ensuring they have access to essential services and preventing discrimination. Developing foster care and adoption systems can provide orphans with stable, nurturing environments. Supporting families willing to adopt or foster can help integrate orphans into loving homes. Orphanhood presents significant challenges that can impact the psychological, social, and economic well-being of affected children. Understanding the complexities of orphanhood is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems (McGowan, 2015). Orphans can be assisted in overcoming their obstacles and advancing their general development by encouraging community involvement, offering educational possibilities, and guaranteeing access to emotional assistance. Addressing the needs of orphans is not only a moral imperative but also a crucial investment in the future of society as a whole.

Child protection laws are critical in safeguarding the rights and welfare of orphans. These laws aim to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation, ensuring that children receive appropriate care and support. Laws often define orphanhood and establish criteria for guardianship and custody. Clear definitions help ensure that orphans are recognized and protected within legal frameworks. Many countries have established mandated reporting systems that require professionals to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, including those involving orphans. Child protection laws typically include provisions for foster care and adoption, aiming to place orphans in stable, nurturing environments. However, the effectiveness of these systems varies by region. Social welfare policies play a vital role in providing financial and social support to orphaned children and their caregivers (Jerome, 2017). Many countries offer financial support, such as cash transfers or subsidies, to families caring for orphans. These programs aim to alleviate poverty and promote stability. Orphans often face health disparities due to the loss of parental support. Social welfare systems that provide access to healthcare services are essential for addressing these disparities. Some social welfare policies focus on community-based interventions, promoting local support networks and resources for orphans and their caregivers. Education is a critical factor in the development of orphaned children. Policies aimed at ensuring access to education for all children, including orphans, are essential. This can include scholarships, school fees waivers, and provision of school supplies. Some policies promote inclusive education practices that accommodate the unique needs of orphaned children, ensuring they receive the support necessary to succeed academically. In addition, social adjustment becomes essential to orphanage or child protection.

Social adjustment means the accomplishment with which one person adjusts to other persons in general and to the group with which they are acknowledged in particular (Akpan-Idiok and Ackley, 2018). Normal people have acquired such social skills as the capability to deal sensitively with others. People, who are competent in superior social adjustment, typically engage in positive social attitudes such as eagerness to help others. Social adjustment is the true adaptation of an individual to a social environment in the process of performing a role

with a view to maximizing gains or minimizing losses. According to Good (2011), social adjustment is the process whereby the individual attempts to maintain further his security, comfort all creative inclination of his social environment through meaningful efforts.

Social adjustment 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 having inter-dependability with other individuals. It is an organizational bchaviour 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 internal, external and social environment (Yengimolki *et al.*, 2015). Adjustment, being behavioural process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium among the various needs or between the needs and the obstacles of the environments, sequentially begins when a need is felt and ends when it is satisfied. For instance, hungry people are stimulated by physiological state to seek food and when the hunger is satisfied, the stimulating condition that impelled such activity is reduced, and thereby adjusts to this particular need (Mudasir and Ganaie, 2013). The adjustment process, as noted by Nadeem and Bhat (2014), involves four parts: 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 are impelled. 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. It is adjustment which is responsible for the organization of behaviour to life situations in every sphere. Adjustment help in 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 with the environment. Ogini and Ofodile (2014) argue that, adjustment occurs over time in common speech which is referred to as an adjustment period. The length and depth of the adjustment required is dependent upon the complexity of the change that catalyzes it, and the underlying resilience of both the person and the environment. Adjustment create a relationship between the individual and the environment. Every individual plays certain part in the individual's social relations. An individual is trained to play a role in such a way that the maximum needs of the individual will be fulfilled (Makwana and Kaji, 2014).

Since adjustment is a sort of shifting to a more defensive position in order to face the challenge of circumstances after getting failure on earlier attempts, living organisms could maintain a balance between its needs and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs. Hence, from birth to death, every individual is an active organism with a purpose and continuous activities. In the argument of, individuals strive to satisfy not only the needs of the body but also all those urges and drives which are the dynamic forces influencing the individual's thoughts, attitudes, emotions and behaviour and the satisfaction of these, determine the extent of the desirable adjustment of the individual's personality (Laskar, 2016; Igbo, *et al.*, 2016). Thus, social adjustment is an achievement and explains how efficiently an individual can perform duties in different circumstances. Social adjustment in the context of this study is seen as the ability of orphans to adjust to situation such as joining groups, participating in extra-curricular activities, feeding. Social interactions with other students and asking or answering questions in the class, among others could be a predictive remedy to psycho social variables.

It is important to understand that the term "psycho-social" has a broad meaning when considering health research and social epidemiology. It is formed from two words, psychological and social. Psychological factors could be positive, such as happiness, affect, and vitality or negative such as anxiety, perceived stress and depression symptoms. On the other hand, psycho-social factors include social support, loneliness, marriage status, social disruption, bereavement, work environment. (Leserman, 2008; Upton, 2014). Psychological variables refer to elements in psychological experiments that could be changed, such as available information or the time taken to perform a given task. These elements play a significant role in shaping individual behaviour, emotional regulation, and overall mental and physical health. To leverage

orphan on these elements, the following factors as enumerated by Jackie (2019) are social networks, self-regulation, self-concept, caregivers' support and self-awareness may be considered. In this study, self-concept and caregivers support are considered.

A person's self-concept is a multifaceted understanding of a his/her idea of self, feelings, and beliefs about their identity, skills, and worth in the world. This idea enthuses how people view themselves in various situations, which influences their motives, interactions with others, and sense of self. According to Raphael (2020), how one sees support from friends, significant others and caregivers has a direct link with one's self concept. Interventions such as counselling, mentorship programmes, and community support initiatives can play a crucial role in helping these children cultivate resilience, enhance their self-esteem, and develop the skills necessary for positive relationships.

The immediate physical and social environment of orphans can significantly impact their socialization. Utoka (2016) maintains that much human learning occurs in a social environment and individuals gain knowledge of the environment, and learn acceptable and appropriate behavior by observing models and the consequences of modeled behaviors. Personal observation by the researcher revealed that most orphanages do not provide blissful and exciting atmosphere for the orphans. A supportive social environment can facilitate positive social adjustment among orphans, while lack of support can lead to challenges in social adjustment and overall well-being (Pire, 2019).

Caregiver services can have a positive impact on the social adjustment of orphans. Caregivers can provide orphans with the physical, mental and emotional care they need. Orphaned children are more likely to suffer from emotional distress, malnutrition, poor healthcare and a lack of education. Caregivers can help to address these issues by providing orphans with access to basic necessities, such as food and healthcare, and by offering emotional support. Caregivers can also help orphans access education and other opportunities that can help them develop important skills and achieve their goals. Caregivers services has to do with the physical, emotional and psychological assistance provided to orphans by their caregivers such as guardians, foster parents, or institutional staff. Lack of effective caregiver support could pose a threat to the orphans thereby influencing their social adjustment. Caregivers' services reduce orphans' behavioral problems, such as aggression and delinquency and promotes positive behaviors (Heller *et al.*, 2015). In the light of the foregoing, and that Akwa Ibom state has functional orphanages where orphans are catered for and the place of the underscored psycho-social factors in promoting or hindering social adjustment of orphans, it is therefore imperative for the researcher to carry out a study on how these psycho-social variables influence the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ideally, every child should grow up within a supportive family and social environment that nurtures emotional intelligence, builds a positive self-concept, and offers consistent guidance and affection from caregivers. Such an environment plays a crucial role in shaping children's social adjustment, equipping them with self-awareness, self-regulation, and confidence to interact effectively with peers and broader society. When these psycho-social variables are adequately developed, children typically display healthy social behaviours, resilience, and an ability to cope with life's challenges, leading to balanced social integration and personal growth.

However, in the context of orphans in Akwa Ibom State, this ideal situation is often not the case. Many orphans experience significant emotional and social challenges stemming from the loss of parental care, which may negatively affect their self-concept and ability to regulate emotions. The lack of consistent caregivers' support and a nurturing social environment can further contribute to feelings of rejection, isolation, and maladjustment. Reports and observations suggest that some orphaned children struggle with low self-esteem, withdrawal, behavioural problems, and difficulty forming positive peer relationships, which collectively undermine their overall social adjustment and academic engagement. Given these concerns, there is a compelling need to examine the influence of psycho-social variables on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to examine the influence of psycho-social variables on the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to;

i. Determine the influence of self-concept on the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State
ii. Determine the influence of caregiver services on the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study;

i. What is the influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State?
ii. What is the influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State?

The following research hypotheses are formulated to guide the study;

i. There is no significant influence self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

ii. There is no significant influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

METHODOLOGY

The Correlational research design was used for this study. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom State is the second largest producer of crude oil in Nigeria; even though agriculture is seen as the main stay of the economy. The population of this study comprised 670 children in all the five selected orphanages in Akwa Ibom State. A sample population of orphans was 210 (47.7% of the population) determined statistically using Taro Yamen Formula was used for the study. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in drawing the determined sample size using the ballot system. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Psycho-Social Variables and Social Adjustment of Orphans Questionnaires (PSVSAOQ)". Data generated was subjected to inter-item analysis using Cronbach Alpha Statistic for reliability coefficient determination. The reliability coefficients of 0.73 and .81 for "Psychosocial variables and Social adjustment" respectively were obtained. The instrument was served to the orphans in their respective locations. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer research questions while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using dependent t-test.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the influence of self- concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State (N= 204)

	Variables	$\bar{x}$	N	SD
Pair 1	Self-concept	3.11	204	0.47
	Social adjustment of orphans	2.58	204	0.74

The result in Table 1 shows the weighted mean scores of 3.11 and 2.58 obtained by the respondents for self-concept and social adjustment respectively and their respective standard deviation scores of 0.47 and 0.74. These standard deviation scores are small which indicate a relatively low variability in the responses. Also,

since the weighted mean scores are above the cutoff point of 2.50, it means that there is influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question Two: What is the influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State (N= 204)

	Variables	$\bar{x}$	N	SD
Pair 1	Caregiver services	2.95	204	0.73
	Social adjustment of orphans	2.58	204	0.74

The result in Table 2 shows the weighted mean scores of 2.95 and 2.58 obtained by the respondents for caregiver services and social adjustment respectively and their respective standard deviation scores of 0.37 and 0.74. These standard deviation scores are small which indicate a relatively low variability in the responses. Also, since the weighted mean scores are above the cutoff point of 2.50, it means that there is influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

Table 3: Result of dependent t-test analysis of the influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State (N= 204)

	Variables	$\bar{x}$	N	SD	t-value	Sig.	Decision
Pair 1	Self-concept	3.11	204	0.47			
					8.73	0.00	Significant
	Social adjustment of orphans	2.58	204	0.74			

*significant at P< .05; df= 203

The result in Table 3 shows the t-value of 8.73 and the corresponding probability level of significance of 0.00 alpha at 204 degrees of freedom. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is significant influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

Table 4: Result of dependent t-test analysis of the influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State (N= 204)

	Variables	$\bar{x}$	N	SD	t-value	Sig.	Decision
Pair 1	Caregiver services	2.95	204	0.73			
					5.54	0.00	Significant
	Social adjustment of orphans	2.58	204	0.74			

*significant at P< .05; df= 203

The result in Table 4 shows the t-value of 5.54 and the corresponding probability level of significance of 0.00 alpha at 204 degrees of freedom. This level of significance is less than .05 in which the decision is based. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is significant influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

FINDINGS

The findings of the study showed that:

1. There is significant influence of self-concept on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State
2. There is significant influence of caregiver services on social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State

Discussion of Findings

Self-concept and Social Adjustment of Orphans

The finding from hypothesis three revealed that self-concept significantly influences the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State. This indicates that orphans who have a positive perception of themselves and their personal worth tend to adjust better socially than those with a negative self-concept. Self-concept shapes how individuals view their abilities, accept themselves, and engage with others, all of which are central to social adaptation. This result is consistent with earlier research by Onyekuru and Zuru (2017) whose the results of the study showed that social self-concept and academic self-concept had high positive joint influence on school adjustment of secondary school students; the joint influence of self-concept on school adjustment is significant at 0.05 level of probability; social self-concept and academic self-concept each has a high positive and significant individual influence on the school adjustment of the students. More so, the findings also support the work done by Ezunu and Nwankwo (2022) whose findings reveal among others that there is very high significant positive relationship existing between the self-concepts and social adjustments of Nnamdi Azikiwe university students.

Caregiver Services and Social Adjustment of Orphans

The finding revealed that caregivers' support significantly influences the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State. This means that orphans who receive emotional, psychological, and practical support from their caregivers are better able to adjust socially than those who lack such support. Caregivers' support helps orphans feel valued, secure, and confident, which are essential for building healthy relationships and participating actively in social life. This result aligns with Qamara *et al* (2023) whose the results indicate a significant influence of caregivers' social support on the well-being of new student. In the same vein, the findings also align with that of Granada and Luzano (2023) whose result reveals that the overall level of family support for learners is high, with academic and school support being provided most of the time and mental, emotional, and financial support being provided all the time. Furthermore, the overall academic performance of the learners is satisfactory.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that emotional intelligence components such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-concept, as well as contextual factors like social environment and caregivers' support, have significant influence on the social adjustment of orphans in Akwa Ibom State. The results showed that orphans who possess greater self-understanding, can manage their emotions effectively, and hold positive views about themselves are better able to adapt socially. More so, a supportive social environment and consistent care from caregivers further enhance their social integration and emotional well-being. Together, these findings highlighted the critical roles of both internal emotional skills and external social supports in promoting healthy social adjustment among orphans, underscoring the need for holistic

interventions targeting both personal development and environmental enrichment to improve the lives of this vulnerable group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. School counsellors should design and implement specific programmes that focus on developing emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-concept to help orphans better cope with social challenges and build healthier peer relationships.

ii. Schools and care institutions should incorporate structured lessons or extracurricular activities that teach emotional management, positive self-concept, and social skills to promote the overall social adjustment of orphans.

iii. Caregivers and matrons in orphanages should receive targeted training on the psycho-social needs of orphans, enabling them to provide emotional support, build self-esteem, and foster resilience in children under their care.

iv. School administrators should adopt inclusive policies and programmes that reduce stigmatization of orphans, promote peer mentoring, and encourage participation in clubs and social activities to strengthen orphans' sense of belonging.

v. Schools and orphanages should partner with governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop and implement intervention programmes that address orphans' social and emotional needs, ensuring holistic support.

vi. Organize workshops for teachers, caregivers, and community stakeholders to raise awareness about the role of social environment and caregiver support in the social adjustment of orphans.

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