

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELF-ESTEEM OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOLING ADOLESCENTS LIVING WITH BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND THOSE LIVING WITH NON-BIOLOGICAL PARENTS IN ABAKALIKI, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

Matthew Ojone<sup>1</sup>

Dept of Nursing, Ebonyi State University, (EBSU) Abakaliki, NIGERIA  
+23480366113783

\*Sylvester O. Okenyi Ph.D., LL.B,<sup>2</sup>

Dept. of Educational Foundations, ESUT Enugu.

Tel: +2347037665502. E-mail: okenyisylve@hotmail.com

AND

Ezeruigbo Chinwe F S<sup>3</sup>

(chinwe.ezeruigbo@yahoo.com +2348067683472)

Dept of Nursing, EBSU Abakaliki, NIGERIA

**2= Corresponding Author\***

**Abstract:** *The focus of the present study was to compare self-esteem among adolescents living with their biological parents and those living with non-biological parents within Abakaliki metropolis. A total of 583 schooling adolescents, out of which, 383 live with biological parents: 189 (49%) male, and 194 (51%) female. 200 live with non-biological parents: 62 (31%) male, and 138 (69%) female. A questionnaire of two sections was used: section A-deals with personal demographic data. Section B- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale with 10 questions for the assessment of the self-esteem of respondents. It was found that Low self-esteem among adolescent living with non-biological parents was higher than that of those living with biological parents. Besides female were mostly affected with the issue of low self-esteem irrespective of family factor than male. Also, personal characteristics (age and gender) do not influence adolescent's self-esteem but class level does. Based on the findings appropriate recommendations were made.*

**Key words:** *Self-esteem, adolescents, biological parents, non-biological parents, compare.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Researchers have approached the definition of Adolescence from many interesting but certainly illuminating perspectives. Petersen (1988) described adolescence as a phase of life beginning in biology and ending in society. Harping further on the biological perspective, Lerner & Spanier (1980) saw adolescence as the period within the life span when most of a person's biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered child-like to what is considered adult-like. For the adolescents, teachers and parents, this period is a dramatic challenge, one requiring adjustment to changes in life, in the family, and in the peer group. In contemporary society, adolescents experience institutional changes as well. Among young adolescents, there is a change in school setting, typically involving a transition from elementary school to either junior secondary school (JSS) or some form of training for chosen skills as in Nigeria; and in late adolescence there is a transition from Senior Secondary School (SSS) to the worlds of work, university, or child rearing. World Health Organisation [WHO] (2013) identifies adolescence as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. At this phase of development, if proper care is deficient it could result in such developmental challenges as low self esteem and other avoidable behavioural problems.

In Nigeria, especially in the areas under the South-eastern states like Ebonyi, for instance, there is paucity of studies to validate the claim that low self esteem and other similar behavioural problems may be linked to the type of care adolescents receive from their parents/care giver.

Self-esteem, in this sense, is described as the evaluation that one makes about self, based on one's self-worth (Hills,2008). Turner, Irwin & Millstein (1991) pointed out that, self-esteem is compromised when children are forced to adapt to any set of negative life changes or conditions in their social environment; these may include a wide range of personal and family adversities. It also

forms a base by which a person harbours negative and destructive tendencies and extreme emotions that could lead to depression, suicidal tendencies, mental and physical disorders and other forms of self-destructive behavior.

The role of family relationships and interactional processes as factors relevant to child and adolescent emotional stability and the corresponding self-esteem has received increasing attention in Nigeria over the last decade.

It has been observed that unwarm relationship is common among adolescents living with non-biological parents (Adeniyi, Okafor & Adeniyi 2011). This raises an issue for a deeper study. Biological parents, in this sense, are those who are directly linked to their offspring by birth (United Nations, 2011). Biological adolescents are the direct offspring of their parents; hence they are biologically related to the parents through procreation. Non-biological adolescents are those adolescents who find themselves living with parents (often legally by adoption or by some cultural arrangement) and who are not related to them by birth, (Patterson & Riskind, 2011)). Under such arrangements, the parents possess the adolescents through transferred parental rights and responsibilities. The view taken in this study is that biological adolescents are those living with their own biological parents while non-biological adolescent are those living with parents not related to them by birth.

Given the projected increase in adoption in some states in Nigeria due to the prevalent instabilities caused by Boko Haram and other natural disasters, researchers are curious to know how children of non-biological parents function when compared with those living with biological parents especially with regards to their conception of their self-worth/self-esteem.

Non-biological parenthood, is still viewed negatively in most parts of Nigeria (Adeniyi, Okafor & Adeniyi 2011). This negative perception of children of non-biological parents in parts of Nigeria is believed to stem from inadequate attention, support and recognition from teachers,

peers and the society at large when compared to children brought up by their biological parents. Indeed children brought up by non- biological parents are often stigmatized and this may adversely affect their self -esteem and result perhaps to other behavioural problems like depression, indiscipline, drug abuse and poor academic achievement.

Other researchers have noted that couples living with non-biological adolescents have fears about the functioning of their families when the adolescents grow from adolescence to adulthood (LaRanzie, 2010; Lash & Esau, 2010). The concerns of many adoptive parents include non-acceptance of the child by either of the spouses, extended families or friends, fear of disloyalty by the adolescents, and poor family adjustment. These fears reflect in the stressful relationship existing between the adolescent and such parents. A situation that tends to depress the self- esteem of such adolescents. A major purpose of the present study is to search for facts to validate such speculations.

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

The current depressing socioeconomic condition of Nigeria and the rapidly growing urban population arising from the migration to the cities of internally displaced persons (IDP) in some parts of the country have brought about an increasing rise in the rate of non-biological parenting in Nigeria. Adolescents brought up under such conditions are prone to developing poor self esteem and other behavioural problems like depression, indiscipline, drug abuse and poor academic achievement. As apparent as the above claims might sound, researchers are yet to gather sufficient research data to prove the discrepancy in the self esteem, for example, among secondary school adolescents living with their biological parents and those living with their non-biological parents within Abakaliki metropolis, hence the basis for the present study.

Most of the studies cited above were carried outside the immediate domain of the present researchers. It is hoped that the findings of the present study will not only indicate how the variables

studied prevail locally but will go a long way in enriching other studies already done on the phenomenon.

### **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

In broad terms the purpose of this study was to :

Compare the level of the self esteem of the schooling adolescents living with biological parents and those living with non-biological parents. Variables of gender, age and class levels were also examined in this direction.

### **1.3 HYPOTHESES**

The main hypothesis of this study was:

There is no significant difference in the level of self -esteem of adolescents living with biological and those living with non-biological parents.

Variables of gender, age and class levels were also examined and tested( null hypothesis factor) at .05 level of significance as shown in the Data Analysis.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study was a cross-sectional comparative survey of students (adolescents) from selected government owned secondary schools within Abakaliki metropolis in Ebonyi State, South eastern Nigeria with coordinates 6°15'N 8° 05'E. There are six secondary educational institutions owned by government within Abakaliki Metropolis but to limit gender biasness, only mixed schools were selected with the total number of 7,098 students from which 583 (8.23%) were used for the study as shown in the Table below:

<b>Table 1.1 Studied Schools And Their Corresponding Studied Populace</b>				
<b>S/N</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Total Populace</b>	<b>Studied populace</b>	<b>Percentage studied (%)</b>
1	NSS	927	111	11.97
2	AHS	1,540	166	10.78
3	GTC	1,209	179	14.81
4	USS	3,422	127	3.71
5	MCGSS	464	***	***
6	GHS	586	***	***
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,148</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>8.21</b>

**Note:** NSS-Nnodo secondary school, AHS-Abakaliki high school, GTC-Government technical college, USS-urban secondary school, MCGSS-Modern Comprehensive girl's secondary school, GHS-Girl's high school.

Therefore, the total number of students in the selected schools is 7,098 and 583 (8.23%) were used for the study. Nnodo secondary school has the total of 927 with the studied populace of 111 (11.97%), Abakaliki high school has 1,540 but 166 (10.78%) were used for the study, government technical college has 1,209 with the studied populace of 179 (14.81%) and urban secondary school has 3,422 as its total population with the studied populace of 127 (3.71%)

## **2.1 Method of Data Collection**

The researchers went to each school mentioned to administer the questionnaire through personal contact with the students. Owing to the fact that the questionnaire was adopted from a different environmental setting, the researcher explained to the students how to fill the questionnaire so as to avoid or minimize cases of invalidity. The questionnaire is made up of 2 sections: Section

A-deals with personal demographic data. Section B contains Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale with 10 questions was used to assess the self -esteem of the respondents.

The instrument was face validated and trial tested as required. The reliability estimates were found to be high suggesting high reliability.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

Results obtained were arranged according to the hypotheses of the study and were presented using frequencies and percentages to ease discussions of findings. Independent  $z$ -test was used to compare the Self-Esteem and age of the participants.

## 2.3 Result

Parent	Gender	School									
		NSS		AHS		GTC		USS		G. Total	
		Fq.	%	Fq.	%	Fq.	%	Fq.	%	Fq.	%
Biological parent	male	24	39	37	36	99	71	29	37	189	49
	female	37	61	66	64	41	29	50	63	194	51
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>100</b>
Non-biological parent	male	9	18	18	29	25	64	10	21	62	31
	female	41	82	45	71	14	36	38	79	138	69
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>111</b>		<b>166</b>		<b>179</b>		<b>127</b>		<b>583</b>	

**Note:** Fq-Frequency, %-percentage, G-grand.

The above table showed that 383 of the studied students live with their biological parents, 189 are male and 194 are female. While 200 are living with non-biological parents with 62 male and 138 female.

<b>Table 1.3 Relationship Between Parental Influence And Gender Of The Adolescents</b>		
	<b>Low self-esteem Fre. /%</b>	<b>High self-esteem Fre. /%</b>
<b>Biological parents</b>		
	6 (1.57)	377(98.43)
<b>Non-biological parents</b>		
	7(3.50)	193(96.50)
<b>Gender and adolescent living with biological parents</b>		
Male	2(33.33)	187 (49.60)
Female	4(66.67)	190 (50.40)
Total	6(1.57)	377(98.43)
<b>Gender and adolescent living with non-biological parents</b>		
Male	3 (42.86)	59 (30.57)
Female	4 (57.14)	134 (69.43)
Total	7 (3.50)	193 (96.50)

In answer to the main Hypothesis results in the Table above indicate that, low self-esteem is more common among adolescents living with non-biological parents than those with biological parents. In the same vein, it also points out that, low self-esteem is more common among female adolescents than their male counterparts in both cases.



<b>Table 1.5 Relationship Between Demographic Variables And Self-esteem In Adolescence</b>				
	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>		
<b>Gender</b>			$X^2$ cal 0.05	P value 0.05
Male	6	345	$X^2$ tab 3.84	
female	7	325		
<b>Total</b>	13	570		
<b>Age</b>				
≤12	1	19	$Z$ cal -0.0381	
13-15	7	231	$Z$ tab 2.638	
16-18	5	271		
≥19	1	48		
<b>Total</b>	14	569		
<b>Class Level</b>				
Junior	9	208	$X^2$ cal 5.86	
Senior	4	362	$X^2$ tab 3.84	
<b>Total</b>	13	570		

On age,  $Z$  calculated (-0.04) <  $Z$  tabulated (2.64) therefore, age does not have any significant influence on respondent's self esteem. On gender, the  $x^2$  Calculated (0.05) <  $x^2$  tabulated (3.84) thus, gender does not have any significant influence on respondents' self -esteem. While  $x^2$  calculated (5.86) >  $x^2$  tabulated (3.84) on class level hence, class level seems to influence self esteem of the respondents thereby, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### 3.0 DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Adolescents and self- esteem

This study shows that the percentage of low self-esteem (3.50%) of the adolescents living with non-biological parents is higher than the percentage (1.56%) of those living with biological parents. This tends to suggest that, self-esteem is determined by parental structure in adolescents. This finding is consistent with Young (2013) and Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2013) which stated that, through child relationships with their primary attachment figures, they generally develop the skills that they would need to draw upon for their life time, such as trust, empathy, emotion regulation, reciprocal caring and support, autonomy, conflict negotiation, and a sense of the self as

deserving of love. Their study showed also that at the third level of human needs (Maslow 1954), deficiencies due to neglect, shunning, ostracism, etc. can impact on the individual's ability to form and maintain emotionally significant relationships in general, such as friendship, intimacy and family which can override the need for safety as witnessed in children who cling to abusive parents. In contrast to the above is that, adolescents' low self-esteem is associated with family life i.e. how they view life generally, poor body image such as over/under weight, being too short, too tall. Some will develop sense of not measuring up to others when it comes to such things as body proportion (wiseGEEK 2014).

On the other hand, low self-esteem is common among female (60%) adolescents living with their biological parents than male (40%) while non-biological parent shows (28.57%) low self-esteem in male and (71.43%) in female. The explanation could be that during adolescence, maintenance of stable and high self-esteem appears as a challenging task particularly for girls. Harter, (1990) as cited in Ahmad et al (2013) made reference to some specific concerns that add burden to the task of self-development for girls, like concerns with peer acceptance, sensitivity to the conflicting social role expectations and effects of school change etc. However no gender differences were found on the domain of general and parent/home related self-esteem.

The hypothesis that the age does not have any significant influence on respondent's self esteem was accepted. This finding is not in agreement with that of Baldwin & Hoffman (2002) as cited in Hendel (2006) that self-esteem in males increased until the age of 14. After that time, with the transition from middle school to high school, they tend to have a decline in self-esteem, until at least the age of 16.

No significant gender differences were found in the domain of general and parent / home self-esteem in this study. This finding is in correspondence with the findings of Ahmad (2013). This can be explained by referring to the onset of "identity vs. confusion" stage (Erickson, 1968), where

independence and increased reliance on and closeness to peers are said to be prevalent at the expense of parent relationship. Therefore both genders equally encounter similar problems related to this developmental stage thus reflecting no gender differences in this domain. A report from Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (2008), has a counter finding showing that girls experience decline in mood at age 12 whereas in boys the decline generally begins at age 14.

The present study rejected the null hypothesis on class level, suggesting that, class level has influential support on adolescents' self-esteem. Students in junior secondary [9 (69.23%)] tend to have problem of low self-esteem than students in senior secondary [4 (30.77%)]. The reason is unclear but might be due to population variability among the studied group, advancement in age and life experience/exposure.

### **3.2 Conclusion/Recommendations**

Low self-esteem is more common among adolescents living with non-biological parents than those living with biological parents. Besides females are mostly affected with issue of low self-esteem irrespective of family factor. It is also noted that, personal characteristics such as age and gender do not significantly affect adolescents' self-esteem. Class level however, does. Inferable recommendations from the study are that parents in Nigeria should see the need for family planning, friendly, non-threatening parent-child relationship with their wards. Teachers should create a friendly classroom environment so as to enhance development of high self-esteem in the students. Further academic research in the general population and particularly among adolescents staying with their biological parents and non-biological parents is also recommended.

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