

INFLUENCE OF WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE SELF CONCEPT OF ADOLESCENTS IN LAGOS MAINLAND

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents in Lagos mainland. This study was limited to adolescents in public secondary schools in Mainland Local Government Area Lagos State. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The respondents were one hundred and fifty (150) selected from (5) five senior secondary schools in Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State. Five (5) schools were selected using stratified sampling technique. Then respondents were selected from the five schools using stratified random sampling technique based on gender and witnessing of domestic violence. The opinions of the selected respondents were captured with the use of a researcher-developed questionnaire entitled "Witnessing Domestic Violence Questionnaire" (WDVQ). T-test and two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical tools at 0.05 level of significance were used in the analysis of the data. The results of the study reveal a significant influence of witnessing domestic violence on adolescents' self-concept, with gender differences playing a role. However, age and socioeconomic status do not show significant impacts. The findings underscore the serious implications of witnessing domestic violence on adolescents' social adjustment and psychological development, emphasizing potential gender-related variations in these experiences. Implementing school-based counseling programs, community awareness campaigns, and targeted support for affected adolescents can contribute to mitigating the adverse effects and fostering a healthier development of their self-concept.

Keywords: Domestic violence, self-concept, adolescents, gender.

Introduction

Adolescence is an important period of physical, social, psychological, and cognitive growth (World Health Organization, 2023; Scott & Saginak, 2016). Adolescence is a period of growth and development bridging childhood and adulthood. The physical and emotional changes in this period influence behaviours in that adolescence is a time of risk

taking and experimentation (Allen & Waterman, 2019). Also, adolescence is a critical period of life in which abilities to express and understand emotions, to assign meaning to emotional experience, and to regulate feelings may be particularly helpful for psychological and social adjustment (Romer, Reyna & Satterthwaite, 2017). Any adverse experiences may affect the development of positive self-perception (self-concept) thereby resulting to adjustment problem

Self-concept can be described as self-valuing, self-confidence, and this has an important place in a person's life especially in adolescence. Starting with babyhood attachments, individual develops a sense of identity and self-concept in parallel with the sense of identity (Harris & Orth, 2020). During this period, there are various factors contributing to perception of self. Among these factors are socio-economic conditions, working in the streets, disability, adolescents' physical appearance, health situation, their perception of their parents as work-focused, physiology, friend relationships and domestic violence (Kozina, 2019). Conceptually, self-concept refers to the individuals' awareness of his/her potentialities, limitation and evaluation of self. This includes the individual's attitudes, qualities, judgment, abilities and values of his/her behaviour. It can also be said to be the perception an individual has about his/herself. Self-concept reflects how an adolescent evaluates himself or herself in domains (or areas) in which he or she considers success important (Hapsari Huang, & Kanita, 2023).

In particular, among these factors witnessing domestic violence may have negative effects on self-concept of adolescents by affecting their developmental process in all areas (Ferrara et al., 2016). Being brought up in a domestic violent home can affect children's development in a negative way. Studies have shown that adolescents witnessing domestic violence may develop low self-concept. Adolescents with adversely affected self-concept may be estranged from the society and their social relationships may be weakened. In time, the said adolescents start to see themselves differently from the society and the process of social acceptance becomes difficult (Tsavoussis, Stawicki, Stoicea & Papadimos, 2014).

According to Williamson et al. (2018), adolescents witnessing domestic violence are more likely than adolescents from intact homes to have less intimate relationship with their parents. Sometimes they also drop out of school because of lack of concentration; they could become sexually active at an earlier age because there may not be proper monitoring of their behaviour. Apart from this, they sometimes may result to drugs and associate with anti-social peers and this may lead to having lower self-concept.

According to Batoool and Lewis (2020), the family needs to be intact for adolescents to experience the warmth and nurture of a loving family. Emotional and behavioural problems may stem from parental conflict before and after divorce, as well as from the separation itself. In the view of Stiller, Neubert and Krieg (2021), a smooth functioning family can provide support and nurture to an adolescent during times of stress and crises. Moreover, children or adolescents witnessing domestic violence emotionally habitually develop guilt and disordered behavior, such in many cases, experience gender-based violence and abuse as acceptable behaviour (Fanslow & Kelly, 2016). Adolescents who repeatedly witness violence can emulate the aggressive behaviour by adopting such violence behavior - commonly in males (Anderson, Kinsey & Smith, 2017).

Socio-economic status has been identified as an influential factor in exacerbating or mitigating the complexities of being exposed to domestic violence for adolescents. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face increased challenges due to limited access to resources and housing instability, worsening the impact of domestic violence. Ahmad, Ishtiaq and Mustafa (2017) highlighted the role of socio-economic factors in the adoption of coping strategies among adolescents experiencing domestic violence. Their study revealed that age, gender, parents education and family income were major factors that influenced how well these adolescents were able to deal with these incidences. Socio-economic status may also influence educational opportunities, affecting an adolescent's ability to cope and succeed academically (Osagiobare & Ebohon, 2020).

Age-related factors, including developmental stages and coping strategies, also influence how adolescents process and respond to these incidents (Adebayo, 2014). Younger adolescents may experience confusion and fear, while the older ones grapple with emotional distress. Whereas witnessing domestic violence impacts both genders significantly regardless of age, girls were found to be more exposed to domestic violence running the risk of being victims in adulthood (Asagba, Noibi and Ogueji, 2021), whereas boys were more likely to repeat the patterns of abuse witnessed from their fathers (Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Ormrod, R. (2011). which goes to show that adolescents who go through these experiences will not feel good about themselves Idemudia and Makhubela (2011) highlighted the impact of these exposures on the emotional wellbeing of adolescents, with differential impacts observed as boys tend to externalize emotions through aggression, while girls may internalize emotions, leading to symptoms such as depression.

As young people attain adolescence, their responses to living with domestic violence are more likely to attract a mental health diagnosis or a label of delinquency (Selph, Bougatsos, Blazina & Nelson, 2013). Surveys showed that long-term exposure to

domestic violence during childhood or adolescence is related to an individual's experience of psychological issues and lowered sense of satisfaction with life, during adulthood (Miller-Graff, Cater, Howell & Graham-Bermann, 2016; Pang & Thomas, 2019). In their study, Jackson, Jones, Semenza and Testa (2023) reported that experience of domestic violence is also associated with delinquency in adolescence.

Pang and Thomas (2019) identified violence as a threat to adolescents' well-being. The adolescent may become socialized in violent behaviour. He or she may become confused and angry. An adolescent who has undergone or witnessed violence may become withdrawn, anxious or depressed on one hand; on the other hand, the adolescent may become aggressive and exert control over younger siblings or other people's children. They may become aggressive, becoming troublesome at home and at school. They may also become withdrawn, isolating themselves from others and may underachieve, academically. These adolescents may develop low self-concept, finding it difficult to trust others. Adolescent victims may also exhibit harmful health behaviour like excessive smoking, alcohol abuse, use of drugs and engaging in risky sexual activity.

A wide range of adolescent adjustment problems were found to be associated with exposure to marital conflict. These included externalized problems such as conduct disorder, delinquency, antisocial behavior and aggression as well as internalized problems such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal (Menon, Cohen, Shorey & Temple, 2018). Both boys and girls were affected. Adolescents who live in households with domestic violence are said to be at higher risk for maladjustment than are adolescents who do not live with such violence.

Exposure to domestic violence can have serious negative effects on adolescents. Such effects may include low self-concept, behavioural problems such as aggression, phobias, insomnia and depression, low level of social competence, poor academic performance and low level of problem-solving skills (Williamson et al., 2018). Exposure to chronic or extreme domestic violence may result in symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder; such symptoms include emotional numbing, increased arousal, and avoidance of any reminders of violent events. Because witnessing domestic violence can terrorize adolescents and significantly disrupt adolescents' socialization.

Adolescents may, for example, become involved in the violence when trying to intervene during attacks. There is also debate about how to refer to adolescents who are affected by domestic violence and there has been a move away from viewing such adolescents as 'passive victims' or 'silent witnesses' towards recognizing their capacity to think, engage and respond. Acknowledging this includes recognizing that adolescents need to

understand what is happening to them, to be listened to and helped to develop coping strategies, as well as have their accounts inform the planning and delivery of services.

It is against this background that this study, a survey of the effect of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents in Lagos Mainland was carried out.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant influence of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents.
2. Gender difference in witnessing domestic violence will not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept.
3. Age difference in witnessing domestic violence will not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept.
4. Socio-economic status will not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept witnessing domestic violence.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The justification for its use lies in the nature of the variables involved in the study. Respondents' opinions and attitudes were surveyed and the results to be obtained consequently assisted the analysis. This design involves the use of questionnaire. Data were collected, collated, analyzed and interpreted to find the effect of witness domestic violence on adolescents' self-concept.

The study was carried out among senior secondary school students in Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State. The Mainland Local Government Area is located in the Southern part of Lagos State, which is located in the Western part of Nigeria. Mainland Local Government Area is one the 20 Local Government Areas of Lagos State under the Federal Government of Nigeria. It falls within the metropolitan Lagos and has an estimated 317,980 population. The Mainland Local Government has a total of public senior secondary school enrolment of 6,379 students [3,253 (51%) male and 3,126 (49%) female].

The population of the study includes all the students in public senior secondary schools in Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State. The sample for this study consisted of 150 (75 male and 75 female) student respondents from five selected senior secondary schools in the area of study which were selected through the stratified sampling technique to represent the entire population of the study. The stratification was based on school

location, gender and exposure to domestic violence. This sample was made up of thirty (30) students from each of the selected schools. All the five schools were co-educational public schools.

Data collection was carried out with a researcher developed instrument titled Witnessing Domestic Violence Questionnaire (WDVQ). The WDVQ questionnaire was divided into three sections to gather information on the following: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, questions designed for the purpose of generating answers to the research questions and hypotheses, and four-point Likert Scale on respondents' opinion on the influence of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents.

To determine the reliability of the WDVQ questionnaire, a test-retest reliability was used to determine its stability. The researcher conducted a pilot study which involved the administration of the questionnaire on thirty respondents that had all the characteristics as the population under study. Three week later, the same instrument was re-administered on the same respondents given similar administrative condition. Consequently, each respondent's responses on the 1st and 2nd test were collated before using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the correlation coefficient. A value of 0.7 computer as the correlation coefficient showed that the WDVQ was reliable.

The data collected from the respondents were analysed statistically using the independent t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical tools at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents

The research question was tested using t-test statistics. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Independent t-test analysis on influence of witnessing domestic violence on self-concept of adolescents

Witness domestic violence	n	\bar{X}	SD	t-cal
High	86	24.37	7.66	2.46*
Low	64	26.98	5.32	

* Significant at 0.05 df = 148; critical t 2.00

Table 1 shows that a calculated t-value of 2.46 resulted as the influence of witnessing domestic violence on self-concept of adolescents. This calculated t-value of 2.46 is significant since it is greater than the critical t-value of 2.00 given 148 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that adolescents who have low witnessing of domestic violence significantly have higher self-concept than those who witnessed domestic violence highly.

Research Hypothesis 2: Gender difference in witnessing domestic violence will not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept.

Table 2

Independent t-test analysis on gender difference in witnessing domestic violence on

Gender	n	\bar{X}	SD	t-cal
Female	75	23.49	6.88	2.17*
Male	75	26.38	9.27	

* Significant at 0.05 df = 148; critical t 2.00

Table 2 shows that a calculated t-value of 2.17 resulted as the gender difference in witnessing domestic violence on self-concept of adolescents. This calculated t-value is significant since it is greater than the critical t-value of 2.00 given 148 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that male who witnessed domestic violence significantly have higher self-concept than females who witnessed domestic violence.

Research Hypothesis 3: Age difference in witnessing domestic violence will not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept.

Table 3**Two-way analysis of variance on the influence of age and witnessing domestic violence on self-concept**

Age	Witness violence	n	\bar{X}	SD
13 – 15	High	42	22.99	7.68
	Low	37	27.62	5.43
16 – 17	High	44	23.87	8.97
	Low	27	26.07	10.77

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of square	F-ratio
Age	82.42	1	82.42	2.71
Witness violence	114.20	1	114.20	4.04
Age/Witness Violence	51.33	1	51.33	1.81
Within Groups	4130.34	146	28.29	
Total	4378.29	149		

* Significant at 0.05; df= 1 & 146; critical F = 3.9

Table 3 shows that a calculated F-value of 2.91 resulted as the influence of age difference in self-concept of adolescents. This calculated F-value of 2.71 is not significant since it is less than the critical F-value 3.91 given 1 and 146 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Table 4 also shows that a calculated F-value of 4.04 resulted as the influence of witnessing domestic violence on self-concept of adolescents. This calculated F-value is significant since it is greater than the critical F-value of 3.91 given 1 and 146 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This means that those adolescents who witness low domestic violence significantly have higher self-concept than those who experience high domestic violence.

Table also shows that the interaction effect between adolescents age and witnessing of domestic violence on their manifest self-concept was not significant (F = 1.81; df = 1 & 146, critical F = 3.91, P > 0.05).

Research Hypothesis 4: Socio-economic status will not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept witnessing domestic violence.

Table 4:

Two-way analysis of variance on the influence of socio-economic status and witnessing domestic violence on self-concept of adolescents

SES	Witness violence	n	\bar{X}	SD
High	High	34	24.17	6.92
	Low	27	26.74	5.69
Low	High	52	23.57	8.29
	Low	37	26.00	7.05

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of square	F-ratio
SES	69.76	1	69.76	2.40
Witness violence	120.05	1	120.05	4.18
SES/Witness Violence	77.25	1	77.25	2.65
Within Groups	4200.06	146	29.11	
Total	4517.12	149		

* Significant at 0.05; df= 1 & 146; critical F = 3.9

Table 4 shows that a calculated F-value of 2.40 resulted as the influence of socioeconomic status of adolescents on their self-concept. This calculated F-value of 2.40 is not significant since it is less than the critical F-value given 1 and 146 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Table 5 also shows that a calculated F-value of 4.12 resulted as the influence of witnessing domestic violence on self-concept of adolescents. This calculated F-value of 4.18 is significant since it is greater than the critical F-value of 3.91 given 1 and 146 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Again, Table 5 shows that the interaction effect between socioeconomic status and witnessing domestic violence on adolescents' self-concept resulted in a calculated F-value of 2.65. This calculated F-value of 2.65 is not significant since it is less than the critical F-value of 3.91 given 1 and 146 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study showed that there is a significant influence of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents. This is in agreement with Ferrara (2016), Pang and Thomas (2019), Tsavoussis (2014) and Williamson et al. (2018) who stated that witnessing domestic violence may have negative effects on self-concept of adolescents by affecting all developmental areas of adolescents. From the statistical analyses of the study result, it was revealed that gender difference in witnessing domestic violence significantly influence adolescents' self-concept. Boys and girls appear to differ in what they learn from these experiences. Menon et al. (2018) found that adolescent boys who witnessed domestic violence were significantly more likely to approve of violence than were girls who had also witnessed it. This is in line with Anderson et al.'s (2017) finding that among those who witnessed violence in the home revealed that adolescent females were significantly more depressed than their male counterparts. Additionally, adolescent relationship violence outcomes vary based on gender of the child witness and adult perpetrator. Witnessing adult males perpetrate is associated with higher perpetration for boys and higher combined victimization/perpetration for girls. Witnessing adult females perpetrate; either as the sole perpetrator or in a mutually violent relationship with an adult male (Forke et al, 2018). In the study of Hillis, Mercy, Amobi and Kress (2016), the researchers found that social norms justified violence against females by males and increased the occurrence of females' exposure to domestic violence. This supports present findings that indicate that exposure to domestic violence may have significant influence on gender. Similarly, Benebo, Schumann and Vaezghasemi (2018) found that females are more exposed to domestic violence than males, which provides support for our finding that gender difference in witnessing domestic violence significantly influence adolescents' self-concept. In the study of Asagba, Noibi and Ogueji (2021), female participants had a slightly higher mean score than male participants on children's exposure to domestic violence, although the finding was not statistically significant, however the findings may imply that female children may be at greater risk of being exposed to domestic violence than male children. Nevertheless, there is need for further investigation to explore the association of gender and exposure to domestic violence among adolescents in Nigeria.

The present study further showed that age difference in witnessing domestic violence does not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept. This study supported the study of Dailey (2010) who observed that adolescents age do not have influence on their attitude towards witnessing domestic violence. Adolescents who witness violence and abuse in the home may display many similar psychologic effects.

The findings of the present study also showed that socioeconomic status impact in witnessing domestic violence does not significantly influence adolescents' self-concept. This study supported the study of Stanley (2011) which revealed that domestic violence did not vary with socio-economic status. Similarly, Carlson (2009) claims no significant cultural effect, ethnicity or impact on domestic violence. This is also supported by Osagiobare, and Ebohon (2020) whose study revealed that socioeconomic status does not impact the prevalence of domestic violence in Benue state where families despite their low income status have been found to live in harmony, however regardless of socioeconomic status, domestic violence is was found to occur in most homes.

Conclusion

The prevalence of domestic violence has serious implications for social adjustment and the psychological development of adolescents. Adolescents could be severely traumatized by witnessing domestic violence or themselves being victims of this violence. Exposure to domestic violence can have serious negative effects on children. Such effects may include behavioral problems such as aggression, phobias, insomnia, low self-esteem, and depression, low level of social competence, poor academic performance and low level of problem-solving skills. Overall, the results of the current study provided robust evidence that exposure to domestic violence is associated with significant disruptions in adolescents' psychological functioning. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that there is a significant influence of witnessing domestic violence on the self-concept of adolescents, gender difference in witnessing domestic violence significantly influence adolescents self-concept, age difference in witnessing domestic violence will not significantly influence adolescents self-concept and that socioeconomic status impact in witnessing domestic violence does not significantly influence adolescents self-concept.

Recommendations

There should be an increased attention to measure and identify adolescents' clinical distress as well as resilience in the face of family violence. It is expected that not all children exposed to domestic violence show maladjustment. However, the absence of serious adjustment problems does not necessarily mean that children exposed are unaffected by the violence, because children may experience sub clinical distress or other mild problems that may later put them at greater risk for psychological or interpersonal problems. In addition, there is strong need to create awareness about effect of domestic violence at the family and community level. Domestic violence leads to the imbalance in the child's personality.

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