

# DETERMINANTS OF TEACHERS’ PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Teachers are employed in schools to perform specific roles that will support students’ crave for academic excellence. For students to realize this, the academic environment must be devoid of psychological disturbances and intimidation. Disappointedly, studies have shown that emotional abuse existed in schools and perpetrators included teachers. Researches in this area have shown variables such as parental education, family type and size, socio-economic status as correlates of teachers’ psychological abuse. Apart from the fact that some predicting variables are yet to be tested via researches, the joint and separate effects of some variables are yet to be empirically determined. Therefore, the current study examines the extent to which the separate and combination of gender, age, class and school type of students would impact on teachers’ psychological abuse. The sample for the study consists of 500 students randomly selected from ten secondary schools in Ado-Odo Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. ‘Teachers’ Psychological Abuse Rating Scale’ with a 4-point rating scale is employed to generate data. The results of the two hypotheses analyzed with stepwise multiple regression analysis show that the combination of gender, age class, and school type could only account for 16.2% of the variance in teachers’ psychological abuse with the class of the participants (junior and secondary schools) as the most potent predictor. It is recommended that multi-dimensional research efforts should be adopted to isolate all contributing variables of psychological abuse by teachers and psychologists should cooperatively develop psycho-educational interventions on relational skills development.

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**Keywords:** Determinant, psychological abuse, Nigeria, teachers, school type

## **Introduction**

Child abuse is globally recognized as a huge problem (Lampe, 2002; Runyan, Wattam, Ikeda, Hassan, & Ramiro (2002); World Health Organization, 2006). A Denver pediatrician, Henry Kempe, was widely recognized as the first person who attracted the attention of US citizens in 1950s to the damaging effects of intentional injuries to children as revealed by x-ray evidences. Generically, child abuse is conceived by Malik (2010) to be acts of commission or omission originated from human beings aimed at inhibiting the development of inherent potentials in children. Child abuse has been described as a complex, cosmopolitan and longstanding problem which exists at home, school, street, society, work and religious places (El Bcheraoui, Kouriye & Adib, 2009; Kaur & Verma, 2010). It is, however, more prevalent within joint and nuclear families (Anuradha & Rehman 1991) and most especially dysfunctional family (McEachern, Aluede, & Kenny, 2008).

Child abuse generally covers four broad areas of physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. Just like children, adolescents are also not invulnerable to these dimensions of abuse at home and school/workplace. Of all these, emotional abuse is recognized to be central (Ba-Saddik & Hattab, 2012). Specifically, emotional abuse which is also known as psychological abuse/maltreatment occurs at home and workplace. It is described as the hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors which are directed at gaining compliance from others (Keashly, 1998). Consequences of abuse in workplace settings have been established and some countries in Europe and Africa have legislation against it (Namie & Namie, 2000). Research findings have shown that adolescents have suffered psychological abuse in schools (Olweus, 1996; McEachern, Aluede, & Kenny, 2008).

In the school setting, Hart, Germain, & Brassard (1987) assert that teachers are not expected to serve only as educators but also as important socializing agents whose responsibility will include fulfilling basic socio-emotional needs, such as belongingness and esteem needs of students. In this vein did El Bcheraoui, Kouriye, & Adib (2009) observe that the duty of adults in educational settings is to provide a safe environment that is capable of supporting and promoting children's dignity and development but unfortunately children, for centuries, were abused under the guise or excuse of corporal discipline. It has even been reported that some students have their first experience of emotional abuse in school (Nesbit & Philpott, 2002). Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro (2005) reported that findings have suggested that problematic teacher-child relationships appeared rather early in school and that these problems continue over time

## Literature Review

Generally, teachers are expected to be *in loco parentis* to students. In traditional African setting, according to Umobong (2010), child training was the prerogative of parents and community members but the advent of western education has made parents to hand over their training responsibility to the school which now put more demands on the school basic functions. Consequently, teachers' tasks have become enormous leading to all kinds of maltreatment and neglect of students on daily basis. It has been established that most teachers are familiar with emotional abuse and how to identify its signs, (Osei-Hwedie & Hobona, 2001). Conlee (1986) submits that students, at all grade levels, experience abusive emotional assaults from teachers in classroom environments.

Studies have consistently affirmed the existence and manifestations of all dimensions of psychological abuse among students in schools cutting across gender, class, school type, and age. These dimensions cover isolation, degradation, exploitation, rejection, corrupting, ignoring, and terrorizing among others. For instance, a study conducted in Edo State, Nigeria among 1537 secondary students drawn from multistage proportionate sampling technique by Okoza, Aluede, & Ojugo (2011) indicated that male students unlike their female counterpart experienced more emotional abuse dimensions of terrorizing, isolating, ignoring, and verbal assaulting. While senior secondary school students more than junior secondary students experienced dominating and terrorizing, the junior students more than senior students suffered from isolation. Also in Nigeria, Umobong (2010) gave instances *when* teachers/school authorities intentionally/unintentionally indulge in psychological abuse of students. For instance, he made reference to schools where teachers addressed students with sinister words or phrases such as idiots, never do well, I knew you will never perform well. At times, students are confined to dark rooms as a form of punishment or locked up for inability to pay school fees. In Zimbabwe, just like Nigeria, Shumba's (2002) study has also established the fact that female teachers used vulgar language, shout and scold, humiliate, and label students as stupid, ugly, foolish. In Yemen, teachers have been found to constitute the highest proportion of perpetrators of emotional abuse (45.6 %) in a study conducted by Ba-Saddik & Hattab (2012). A study which investigated the correlates and the prevalence of psychological abuse by teachers in North America by Casarjian (2000) showed that 34 per cent of the 700 students used for the study reported six incidences of psychological abuse by teachers while 11 per cent reported 31 cases within the school year. A cross-sectional study conducted by El Bcheraoui, Kouriye & Adib (2009) among 1177 Lebanese children aged 10-18 revealed that: 81% of the students had experienced emotional abuse for at least once in school; almost 20% experienced it often;

male students and students in public schools were more likely to suffer verbal abuse; insult by schoolmates and teachers was the most frequently recalled abuse. In Israel, Benbenishty, Zeira, Astor, & Khoury-Kassabri (2000) study found that almost one third of students who participated in their study reported that staff member had maltreated them emotionally.

From the foregoing, it is evident that there are certain factors inherent in students that tend to make them susceptible or at the risk of being abused by teachers. One of the prominent determinant variables is the chronological age of the victim. Perera, Østbye, Ariyananda & Lelwala (2009) recognized adolescent period as a determinant variable. Adolescent period could be subdivided into early (12-15years), middle (15-18years), and late (18-22years) periods. Specifically, it was postulated by Perera, Østbye, Ariyananda & Lelwala (2009 ) that students at late adolescent period are at higher risk of exposure to both physical and emotional abuse because they tend to have more freedom to move around with increases opportunities to get in contact with psychological abusers in school and community. In the same vein, Okoza, Aluede & Ojugo (2011) observe that adolescent period of life is a time of storm and stress which is characterized by conflict and mood swings. Except parents and teachers understand developmental tasks of the adolescents at this turbulent time, crises may ensue between teachers and students which may probably prompt teachers to emotionally abuse them.

Apart from age determinant, the gender of the adolescent has also been found to influence vulnerable to psychological abuse by teachers. Studies have shown that behavioural characteristics of males make them to be at higher risk of psychological abuse than females. It is, therefore, not surprising when 36% of male students reported emotional abuse by teachers compared to 27% of female students in study carried out by Sebre (n.d ) in the port-city Ventspils, Latvia. Studies have established the fact that boys have more behavior and school-related attention problems than girls (Hughes, Cavell & Willson, 2001) and this seems to make them vulnerable to abuse by teachers than girls (Brendgen, Wanner & Vitaro 2005). Birch & Ladd (1997); Casarjian (2000); Kesner (2000) have also showed that boys unlike their female counterpart are more likely to have a conflictual relationship with their teachers. Male students from low-income and education families are mostly at risk according to Benbenishty, Zeira, Astor, & Khoury-Kassabri (2002) finding. Despite the fact that male students are more vulnerable to psychological abuse by their teachers studies have indicated that there were no significance differences with regards to frequency of abuse (Theoklitou , Kabitsis, Kabitsi, 2012) between them and their females counterpart.

The class in which adolescent belong has also been identified as a possible predictor of psychological maltreatment by teachers (Benbenishty,

Zeira, Astor & Khoury–Kassabri 2002; Okoza, Aluede & Ojugo, 2011). Students are expected to progress from junior to senior secondary school. The students in the junior classes are mostly at their early adolescent phase of life unlike those in the senior classes who are in the late adolescent phase. Students in junior class have certain distinguishing characteristics from those in senior class. Students in senior class have been found not only to be vocal but also powerful in protecting themselves against constituted authorities in school (Benbenishty, Zeira, Astor & Khoury–Kassabri 2002). This class dichotomy as observed by Okoza, Aluede & Ojugo, 2011 tend to bring about difference in perceptions and interactions with teachers which eventually would influence their emotional abuse with teachers. However, the difference that class dichotomy tend to generate has been found to be insignificant (Okoza, Aluede & Ojugo, 2011).

The type of school that students attend has also been identified as a correlate of teachers' psychological abuse. Basically, school type has been broadly classified into public and private. Public schools are owned by governments at local, state, and federal levels as it is operational in Nigeria while private schools are owned by individuals or group of individuals including missions' schools. It is not only that teachers' psychological abuse has been found to manifest in both public and private schools it has been established among students aged between 10-18 in Lebanon that students in public school system reported diverse dimensions of all types of abuse than those in private schools although those in children in public schools were also more likely to suffer from verbal abuse (El Bcheraoui, Kouriye & Adib, 2009).

The impact of psychological abuse in schools is destructive. Regrettably, some teachers had no knowledge of it or considered it as part of their job to include provision of support for abused children (Osei-Hwedie & Hobona, 2001) or are even unaware of its impacts on behaviours (Shumba, 2002). It has been observed that college students who experienced verbal abuse from teachers missed vital learning opportunities as well as be at risk of behavioral, emotional, and social maladjustment (Brannan, 1972). Repeated verbal abuse by the teacher has been found to significantly predict delinquent behavior during early adolescence (Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro, 2005). Correlation studies have consistently demonstrated that emotional abuse is associated with psychological disorder such as suicidality (Briere & Runtz, 1988); depression (Rich, Gingerich, & Rosen 1997; Anthonysamy & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007); low self esteem (Sackett & Saunders, 1999). Teachers have reported that physical, sexual, and emotional neglect of students resulted into negative disruptive (hyperactive, impulsive, aggressive), attention-deficit, internalizing (withdrawn, anxious, depressed) behaviours, academic difficulties and other maltreatment-related sequelae

(Martin, Cromer, & Freyd, 2010). When maltreatment takes a prolonged time of occurrence, Goebbels, Nicholson, Walsh, & De Vries, (2008) submits that adverse outcomes tend to be severe. However, emotional abuse has not been found to be related to later juvenile offence (Stewart, Dennison, & Waterson, 2002).

### **Statement of the Problem**

From the foregoing the existence of psychological maltreatment in schools is not in doubt and teachers' involvement in the perpetration cannot be contradicted. Specifically, researches have highlighted frequency of occurrence in schools (Casarjian, 2000), gender differences in perpetrators (Shumba, 2002;), dimensions (Okoza, Aluede, & Ojugo, 2011), correlates (Benbenishty, Zeira, Astor & Khoury–Kassabri 2002; Perera, Østbye, Ariyananda & Lelwala, 2009; El Bcheraoui, Kouriye & Adib, 2009)) and effects (Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro, 2005; Martin, Cromer, & Freyd, 2010). However, it is to be noted that there are paucity of empirical studies on correlates of psychological abuse in schools, especially in Nigeria. The existing studies have not used related statistics that would reveal and document the separate and combined effects of identified determinant variables. Thus, there is a need to execute a research that would provide information in this direction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The prospective focus of the study, therefore, is to determine the influence of four psycho-institutional variables namely: gender, age, class, and school type on psychological abuse inflicted by teachers.

### **Hypotheses**

- 1) There is no joint significant effect of gender, age, class, and school type on psychological abuse inflicted by teachers.
- 2) There is no relative significant effect of gender, age, class, and school type on psychological abuse inflicted by teachers.

### **Methods**

The participants were 500 students (male-280; female- 280) randomly selected from ten public and private secondary schools in Ado-Odo Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. 120 students were from the junior secondary and while 380 were from the senior secondary schools. 188 students from public and 312 students from privately owned secondary schools. The participants' age ranged from 12-18 years with a mean age of 14.05 and standard deviation of 1.27.

Ex-post facto design was adopted for the study because the event under investigation has already occurred. 'Teachers' Psychological Abuse Rating Scale'' developed by the researcher was employed for data generation. It is an adapted version of Questionnaires on Seven Dimensions Emotional Maltreatment at Home (QSDEMH) by Gesinde (2011). The scale

has 21 items with three items on each dimension of isolation, degradation, exploitation, ignoring, corruption, terrorizing, and rejecting. Responses to the scale were recorded on a 4-point likert rating scale of very often =3; often = 2; sometimes; = 1, and never = 0. A two week interval of Pearson Correlation Product Moment test-retest reliability index was calculated to be 0.93. Clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the principals of the participating schools and ethical standards of confidentiality and freedom to be part of the study rigidly followed. Teachers’ fears on issues relating to the disclosure of data were allayed and verbal consent of participating students taken after the objectives of the study have clearly spelled out. The instrument for data collection was anonymous in that respondent’s name was purposely omitted. It took between 15-20 minutes to complete a copy of the scale. All the questionnaires were collected on the same day of administration with the assistance of five research assistants.

**Results**

Model	Regression	Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig
A	R= .033	Regression	30.640	1	30.640	.538	.464
	R <sup>2</sup> = .001	Residual	28378.808	498	56.986		
	R <sup>2</sup> adj=-.001	Total	28409.448	499			
B	R=.260	Regression	1919.714	2	959.857	18.009	.000
	R <sup>2</sup> = .068	Residual	26489.7342	497	53.929		
	R dj)=.064	Total	8409.448	499			
C	R=.368	Regression	3847.061	3	1282.354	25.895	.000
	R <sup>2</sup> = .135	Residual	24562.387	496	49.521		
	R <sup>2</sup> adj).130	Total	28409.448	499			
D	R= .403	Regression	4606.064	4	1151.516	23.946	.000
	R <sup>2</sup> = .162	Residual	23803.384	495	48.088		
	R <sup>2</sup> adj=-.155	Total	28409.448	499			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Class c. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Class, School d. Dependent Variable: Teachers’ Psychological Abuse

Data contained in Table 1 presents the regression weights of the independent variables against the table at the various stages of the analysis. The stepwise regression analysis revealed that the stepwise variables from gender to school type significantly improved the contribution of all the variables. The R<sup>2</sup> moved from 0.01 to .162 at the significant level of .000 for all the variables except consequently, the independent variables could only account for .162 or 16.2% to of the variation (R = .403; R<sup>2</sup> = .162; F (3, 495) = 23.946; p <.05).

**Table II. Testing the regression weights of gender, class, and school type in predicting teachers' psychological abuse.**

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standard Coefficient	T	SIg
A	-.499	.680	-.033	-.733	.464
B	-1.557	.262	-.263	-5.953	.000
C	-4.969	.797	-.282	-6.239	.000
D	3.061	.770	.197	3.973	.000
Constant	-11.691	3.796		-3.080	.002

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender b Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Class c Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Class, Sch d Dependent Variable: Teachers' psychological abuse  
 Data in Table II above contained the relative effect of the predicting variables on teachers' psychological abuse. It revealed the unstandardized regression weights (B) which ranged from -.499 to 4.969 and standardized regression weights (Beta) which ranged from -.033-.282 at 0.05 level of significance. On the other hand, the t-value ranged from -.733 to 6.239. From this t-value account the most potent predictor will be class of the participants ( $\beta = -4.969$ ;  $t = -6.239$ ;  $p < .05$ ) followed by age ( $\beta = -1.557$ ;  $t = 5.953$ ;  $p < .05$ ); school type ( $\beta = 3.061$ ;  $t = 3.973$ ;  $p < .05$ ); and gender ( $\beta = -.499$ ;  $t = -.733$ ;  $p < .05$ ) respectively.

## Discussion

This study aimed at determining the extent of the influence of four psycho-institutional variables which are gender, age, class, and school type on psychological abuse inflicted by teachers. The statistical analysis of data lends credence to studies that have reported the fact that students tend to suffer psychological abuse in school and teachers are perpetrators (Okoya, Aluede, & Ojugo, 2011; Ba-Saddik & Hattab (2012). It is, however, blatant from this study that the psychological maltreatment of the students by teachers is predicted by some psycho-educational variables of which gender, age, class, and school type could be held accountable. This study has shown that the three variables put together could not account for almost 89 per cent of the variation in teachers' psychological abuse. The variables predictive ability could probably not go beyond this contributory level because there are other contending variables whose influences are also germane to the determination of teachers' psychological abuse. These have been empirically found to include age, parental educational background, family type and size, (Malik, 2010; Perera, Østbye, Ariyananda & Lelwala, 2009; Kaur & Verma, 2010)). Others might be peer group, academic performance, behavioural disorders. There is probability that other contending variables may be numerous in Nigeria where this study is carried out because the challenges currently facing educational sector is copious. Data analysis of the second hypothesis showed that out of the four predicting variables, class was the most potent contributor followed by class, age, school type and gender respectively. This outcome is expected because of the contribution of



class to the predicting variables as exposed in the analysis of hypothesis one. Class is subdivided into junior or senior secondary school. Since both were used in this study it implies that either of the two could serve as a potential predictor. Students in both schools have reported all types of abuse (Benbenishty, Zeira, Astor & Khoury–Kassabri 2002; Okoza, Aluede & Ojugo, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

This study has empirically revealed that age, gender, class, and school type of students have separately and jointly influenced psychological maltreatment by teachers in school. It is therefore imperative to recommend that multi-dimensional research efforts should be adopted to isolate all contributing variables of psychological abuse by teachers and professionals counsellors and psychologists should cooperatively develop psycho-educational interventions, such relational skills development, that will drastically address the predictive influence of students' class, age, gender, and school type on emotional abuse from teachers. Teachers' training should include psychological implications of abuse on students.

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