

# Psycho-Social Factors as Correlate of Childhood Adversity among in-School Adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study investigated psycho-social factors as correlates of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested. A correlational research design was adopted. The sample size comprised 200 in-school adolescents drawn from selected secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area, while the sample size was determined using the Research Advisor Table. A multi-stage sampling technique (stratified, proportional, and simple random sampling) was used to select participants. Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: the Psycho-Social Factors Questionnaire (PSFQ) and the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ). The instruments were validated by three experts, and reliability was established through a trial test conducted outside the study area using

Cronbach's alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.72, 0.70, and 0.71. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions, while linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a strong correlate relationship between parental support and childhood adversity and between self-esteem and childhood adversity. Regression results also showed that parental support significantly correlate childhood adversity and self-esteem significantly correlate childhood adversity. The study concluded that psycho-social factors, particularly parental support and self-esteem are significantly related to childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area. It was recommended that government and school management should strengthen functional counselling units in schools and implement regular programmes that

build students' confidence, coping skills, communication skills and problem-solving abilities.

### Introduction

Psycho-social factors are increasingly affecting how well students adjust to school and this may lead to poor academic performance, low motivation and emotional distress (Okoro, 2021). Many in-school adolescents find it difficult to cope with a new school environment because their social life and feelings influence how they learn and behave. For example, in-school adolescents who do not get enough support from parents, friends or teachers may struggle to settle into school routines, take part in class activities and meet academic expectations (Usman, 2021). When this happens, such in-school adolescents may feel disconnected, lose interest in school work and begin to perform poorly, which may increase the risk of dropout. Psychological problems such as low self-efficacy, poor stress control and weak emotional regulation may reduce in-school adolescents' ability to handle academic demands (Yakubu, 2020). In-school adolescents with low self-efficacy may doubt themselves, fear failure and give up easily when tasks become difficult, which affects adolescents effort and academic results (Okafor, 2020). Stress and anxiety may reduce concentration and make it harder for in-school adolescents to plan their studies and stay consistent. Although these psycho-social factors are important, many schools still focus mainly on teaching and grades and pay less attention to students' social and emotional needs (Okoro, 2021).

Psychosocial means both the mind part and the social part of a person's life. It combines psychological factors like how someone thinks, feels, understands situations and forms attitudes, with social factors like the people and conditions around them, such as family life, friendships, school or work environment, culture and community support (Gibson, 2021). This idea shows that a person's thoughts, emotions and behaviour do not develop in isolation. Instead, they are strongly shaped by daily interactions with parents, siblings, friends, teachers and others as well as by wider community expectations and social pressures (Önal, 2023).

For example, a supportive home and positive peer relationships may improve confidence and coping, while conflict at home, bullying or social rejection may increase stress, anxiety and poor decision-making, affecting how a person behaves and performs in life (Önal, 2023).

Childhood adversity means serious negative or stressful experiences that happen to a child while they are growing up and that may harm their safety, development and overall well-being. It covers many painful situations, such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence at home, parental separation or divorce, serious poverty, living with a parent who has mental illness or drug/alcohol problems and losing a parent or close caregiver. These experiences may make a child feel unsafe and unsupported and they may affect how the child thinks, feels, behaves and relates with other people including friends and teachers (CDC, 2024). When these hardships happen often or continue for a long time especially when the child does not have stable care and protection from supportive adults they may lead to toxic stress, which is a harmful level of stress that may disturb normal brain and body development. Toxic stress may reduce a in-school adolescents ability to focus and learn in school, weaken emotional control, and increase the risk of long-term problems such as anxiety, depression, risky behaviour and chronic health conditions later in life (Remmers, 2024).

When a child grows up in fear, instability or hardship, it may affect how they see themselves and how well they handle stress as they get older (Kocatürk & Çiçek, 2021). One major effect is on self-esteem, which is a person's overall sense of self-worth. Many studies show that adolescents who experienced childhood adversity often have lower self-esteem and this may weaken their mental health and confidence (Ossai, 2023). Low self-esteem may also show in real-life problems such as poor school performance, drug or alcohol use, depression and risky behaviours during adolescence (Antony, 2025). In addition, low self-esteem is often linked with emotional problems like anxiety, stress, and sadness (Hendrianto&Istriana, 2024). Studies also report a clear negative relationship between childhood trauma and self-esteem, meaning that as adverse

experiences increase, self-esteem often decreases (Kapoor, 2022). This is important because self-esteem shapes how adolescents think, feel and behave. It influences their confidence, relationships, decision-making and ability to cope with challenges (Chen & Ma, 2023). Adolescents with high self-esteem are more likely to cope well, stay motivated, and avoid harmful behaviours, while those with low self-esteem may struggle socially and become more vulnerable to depression and substance misuse (Valladares-Garrido, 2025). Positive self-esteem may protect adolescents by helping them manage stress and recover from difficult life events (Naeem, 2023).

Parental support refers to the care, love, guidance and help that parents or caregivers give to a child, such as listening, encouraging good behaviour, providing basic needs and being emotionally available. For in-school adolescents, parental support is very important because it may shape how they cope with difficult experiences and how they behave in school and at home. Research shows that strong parental support reduce the harmful effects of childhood adversity by helping adolescents feel safe, valued and understood, even when they face stress like poverty, family conflict, or loss (Greeson & Bowen, 2018). When parents show warmth, consistent discipline and emotional support, adolescents are more likely to develop better coping skills and positive self-esteem, which protects them from depression, anxiety, and risky behaviour linked to adverse experiences (Yap, 2020). Low parental support or harsh parenting increases the impact of childhood adversity on adolescents. When parents are neglectful, emotionally unavailable, or frequently hostile, adolescents may feel rejected and alone, which make adversity more damaging and lead to poor emotional control, aggression, school disengagement and substance use (Lippold., 2019). In-school adolescents who lack parental support may also struggle to concentrate, feel less motivated and perform poorly because they do not have a stable home base to help them manage stress (Pinquart, 2021).

Self-esteem refers to how much a person values and believes in themselves. For in-school adolescents, self-esteem is important because it

shapes how they think about their abilities, relationships and future. When an adolescent has experienced childhood adversity (such as abuse, neglect, violence at home, poverty or loss of a caregiver), it may damage their sense of self-worth and make them feel powerless, ashamed, or “not good enough” (Brown, 2017). Many studies suggest that adolescents with low self-esteem find it harder to cope with stress and are more likely to interpret difficult events as personal failure, which worsen emotional problems like sadness, anxiety and hopelessness (Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-esteem may also increase the negative outcomes linked to childhood adversity among in-school adolescents. For example, adolescents who feel worthless may withdraw from friends, avoid school activities, and lose motivation to study, which can lead to poor academic performance (Donnellan, 2025). They may also be more likely to engage in risky behaviour such as substance use, fighting or unsafe relationships as a way to cope with pain or to gain acceptance from peers (Mann, 2024). In contrast, positive self-esteem may act as a protective factor. Adolescents with higher self-esteem are more likely to seek help, use healthier coping strategies and stay focused on their education even when they face difficult family or social conditions (Masten, 2024). It on this premise the researcher investigates psycho-social factors as correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

### Statement of Problem

Globally, psycho-social factors are now widely recognized as key reasons why some adolescents struggle to adjust to school. Many young people face emotional disorders during adolescence and these problems may reduce concentration, motivation and classroom participation, which affect grades and increase dropout risk (UNICEF, 2024). Because of this, global education bodies also stress that schools should not focus only on teaching and grades, but should also promote safe, inclusive environments and support students' social and emotional well-being as part of learning (OECD, 2024). In simple terms, students learn better when they feel safe, supported and emotionally

stable and they struggle more when their social relationships and mental health are poor (UNESCO, 2024). In Nigeria, similar concerns are reported, as many in-school adolescents experience exam pressure, anxiety and peer influence that affect school adjustment and academic outcomes. Studies in different parts of the country show that psycho-social factors and academic anxiety are linked with students' academic achievement, meaning that students who are not coping socially and emotionally may perform worse in school (Usman, 2023). At the state level in Benue, research also reports that psychological issues such as anxiety and depression significantly influence academic achievement among junior secondary school students, showing that mental and emotional struggles can directly affect learning outcomes in the state (Abeshi, 2022). In Makurdi Local Government Area, some studies have looked at school anxiety and other psycho-social problems among students. For example, research in Makurdi shows that test anxiety can reduce students' interest in learning and affect their academic performance. (Amali 2020) observed that when students do not get enough support from friends and when they doubt their own ability, they may struggle more to cope with school demands. It on this premise the researcher investigates psycho-social factors as correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to investigate psycho-social factors as correlate of childhood adversity of in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Specific objectives of the study include;

1. examine parental support as correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.
2. ascertain self-esteem as correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the correlate of parental support and childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What is the correlate of self-esteem and childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are formulated and tested at  $\alpha=0.01$  level of significance

1. Parental support has no significant correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Self-esteem has no significant correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine psycho-social factors as correlates of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The study area was Makurdi Local Government Area, while the population consisted of 200 in-school adolescents drawn from selected secondary schools in the area. The sample size was determined using the Research Advisor Table. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, involving stratified sampling, proportional sampling and simple random sampling to ensure fair representation of participants. Two researcher-developed instruments were used for data collection. These were titled the Psycho-Social Factors Questionnaire (PSFQ) and the childhood adversity Questionnaire (CTQ). The instruments were subjected to content and face validation to ensure their appropriateness and relevance to the study objectives. Validation was carried out by three experts: two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one from Mathematics and Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, Moses Orshio Adasu

University. To determine the reliability of the instruments, a trial test was conducted outside the main study area. The trial-test study was carried out at Government College Secondary School, where 10 copies of the questionnaires were administered to 10 students. The data obtained from the trial-test study were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha method to assess internal consistency, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.72, 0.70, and 0.71, which were considered adequate for the study. Data collected from the main study were analysed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) to answer the research

questions, while linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The study revealed that psycho-social factors had a significant relationship with childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

## Results

### Research Question One

What is the correlate of parental support and childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?

**Table 1:**  
**Pearson Product Moment Correlation Scores on Correlate of Parental Support and**

**Childhood Adversity among in-School Adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria**

		Parental Support	Childhood Adversity
Parental Support	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-0.844
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	200	
Childhood Adversity	Pearson Correlation	-0.844	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	200	200

The results presented in Table 1 indicated a correlation coefficient of -0.844, suggesting a strong negative correlate between parental support and childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This implies that in-school adolescents who receive more parental support tend to report lower levels of childhood adversity, while those who receive less parental support tend to report higher levels of childhood adversity.

### Research Question 2

What is the correlate of self-esteem and childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?

**Table Two:**

**Pearson Product Moment Correlation Scores on Correlate of Self-Esteem and Childhood Adversity among in-School Adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria**

		Self-Esteem	Childhood Adversity
Self-Esteem	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-0.876
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	200	
Childhood Adversity	Pearson Correlation	-0.876	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	200	200



The results presented in Table 2 indicated a correlation coefficient of -0.876, suggesting a strong negative correlate between self-esteem and childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This implies that as self-esteem increases, childhood adversity decreases. Adolescents with higher self-esteem tended to report lower levels of childhood adversity.

### Hypothesis 1

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B	T	Sig	P-Value
(Constant)	0.845	0.715	496.74	-39.902		0.000	
Parental support						0.000	

**F(1,198) = 496.74, p < .001**

Table 3 result: F (1,198) = 496.74, R = 0.845, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.715, B -39.902, P < 0.05 since p0.000 is less than P.05, the null hypothesis which stated that parental support has no significant correlate with childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria was therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative correlate of parental support and childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

Parental support has no significant correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

**Table 3:**  
**Linear Regression Showing Correlate of Parental Support and Childhood Adversity among In-School Adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria**

### Hypothesis 2

Self-esteem has no significant correlate of childhood adversity among in-school adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

**Table 4:**  
**Linear Regression Showing Correlate of Self-Esteem and Childhood Adversity among In-School Adolescents in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria**

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B	T	Sig	P-Value
(Constant)	0.896	0.803	807.08	-52.9		0.000	
Self-Esteem						0.000	

**F (1,198) = 807.08, p < .001**

Table 4 result: F (1,198) = 807.08, R = 0.896, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.803, B -52.9, P < 0.05 since p0.000 is less than P.05, the null hypothesis which stated that self-esteem has no significant correlate with childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria was therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant correlate with childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

Findings from research one showed a significant negative relationship between parental support and childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This means that as parental support increases, reported childhood adversity tends to decrease. In other words, in-school adolescents who receive more parental support are more likely to report lower levels of childhood adversity, while those who receive less parental support are more likely to report

higher adversity. This finding is in line with Greeson and Bowen (2018), who reported that strong parental support can reduce the harmful effects of childhood adversity by helping adolescents feel secure and supported. It also agrees with Yap (2020), who noted that parental warmth and emotional support promote healthier coping and self-esteem, which can protect adolescents from depression, anxiety, and risky behaviours commonly linked with adverse childhood experiences.

Research question two revealed a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This implies that as self-esteem increases, reported childhood adversity decreases. Practically, adolescents with higher self-esteem tend to report lower levels of adversity, while adolescents with lower self-esteem tend to report higher adversity. This finding supports Brown (2017), who explained that adverse experiences can damage self-worth and create feelings of shame and helplessness. It also aligns with Orth and Robins (2014), who reported that adolescents with low self-esteem often struggle more with stress and are more likely to interpret difficulties as personal failure, which can worsen emotional problems such as sadness, anxiety and hopelessness.

### Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a negative correlate of psycho-social factors and childhood adversity among secondary school in Makurdi Local Government Areas of Benue States, Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that:

1. Parental support has negative correlate with childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Areas of Benue State Nigeria.
2. Self-esteem has negative correlate with childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Areas of Benue State Nigeria

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on psycho-social factors as correlate of childhood adversity among secondary school students in Makurdi

Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria the following recommendations were made

1. Government and school management should ensure each school has functional counselling units with trained guidance.
2. Schools should run weekly sessions that build confidence, coping skills, goal-setting, communication skills and problem-solving

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