Problems and Coping Strategies of in-School Adolescents in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Adolescents in Adamawa State are struggling with a number of social challenges, particularly, insurgency which has affected different aspects of their lives. Thus, the study investigated some problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. Furthermore, the relative influence of moderating variables of gender and school location were examined. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey for the study; using a multi-stage sampling technique to select the participants. Out of the 423 questionnaires that were administered, 415 were valid for analyses. The instrument was a self-designed questionnaire entitled "Problems and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (PCSQA)". The collected data were analysed with Students' t-test statistical tool, hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State were difficulty in meeting daily needs, emotional instability and fear about the future. The coping strategies employed by the students were being hard working, help seeking from parents and being responsible in problem. In addition, there was no significant difference in the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender, while significant difference was found in school-based problems and in the school-based coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that parents with the help of government should provide for basic needs of the children; and school counsellors should equip in-school adolescents with appropriate social skills that can help them overcome their life challenges successfully.

Keywords: *Problems,Coping strategies, In-school adolescents, Adamawa State, Nigeria*

Introduction

The stages of human development can be broadly classified into childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Each of these stages of life is marked by diverse growth and development, which usually pose a great problem for individuals. However, problems during adolescence are enormous considering the rapid physical, psychological and sociological changes that occur in this phase. The World Health Organisation (2014) defined adolescence as a phase of cognitive, psychological and physical development that usually unfolds between the periods of puberty and adulthood. It occurs between 10 and 19 years, Kruger, Gouws and Dicker (2011) described adolescence as a state of change wherein adolescents become more rational, capable of more complex thinking which helps them to criticise and evaluate before arriving at a definite conclusion. It is also a time for developing independence. Adolescence differs from the preceding stage of development, in that the changes youngsters experience are more obvious and sudden. It is a stage where an individual fully

grows from childhood to manhood or to womanhood.

Adolescence is a period of development from puberty to adulthood. It is a period demanding a significant adjustment to the physical and social changes which distinguish childhood behaviour from adult behaviour (Fleming, Watson, Robinson, Ameratunga, Dixon, Clark & Crengle, 2007). The stage of puberty brings in a number of physiological, psychological and sociological changes that make the child a qualitatively different person. In this period, early adolescence can be differentiated from youth in that early adolescents are just entering this phase, whereas youth refers to adolescents in the older age range (Claiborne & Drewery, 2010). These changes affect the personality and adjustment in later life.

Due to the changes in this period, adolescents are often faced with a number of crises or challenges. The increasing population of in-school adolescents in Nigeria has revealed a variety of problems (such as non-conducive learning environment and lack of adequate educational materials) which they have to bear. The United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018) estimated that approximately 1.2 billion of world's population are adolescents (16 per cent of the world's population) and the majority of them live in developing countries. However, the complex and diverse maturation process of adolescents varies across culture. In view of this, Kruger, Gouws, and Dicker (2011) contended that adolescents' successful navigation of this phase to adulthood will results in biological maturity, an ideal self-identity, positive peer friendship/group belonging and the mental capacity to deal with the onslaught of life's challenges. On the other hand, Lahey, vanHulle, and Keenan (2008) posited that adolescents' failure to adequately manage physical, emotional, mental, and moral occurrence at adolescence can lead them to deviant identity and behavioural anomalies. Many adolescents have challenges or problems that are school-

related. The problems are characterised as truancy, anxiety from attending school, poor academic performance and school drop-out. Levy (2016) opined that between one and five percent of adolescents develop a fear of going to school which may be a generalised fear or one associated to an individual (a teacher or another student) or experience at school (such as physical education class). The decision of adolescents to miss or drop out of school might be deliberate and this consequently can lead to general academic underachievement and little success in school-related tasks.

Precarious environments can have direct effects on the health of adolescents. According to Flannery, Wester, and Singer (2004), students in dangerous school environments are prone to fighting, injury and emotional stress. There are significant factors, such as child abuse, domestic violence or violent neighbourhood that are likely to increase violent behaviour in adolescents. Violence in the media, whether it is reflected in cartoons, shows, movies or music can desensitise adolescents to the effects of violence and may also legitimise and glorify violence (Gladden, 2002). However, other factors, such as violence at home and in the neighbourhood are stronger predictors of violent behaviour in adolescents (Zur, 2016).

School problems during the adolescent years according to Levy (2016), maybe as a result of rebellion, an agitation for independence and mental health disorders which include family conflict, anxiety, depression, drug and substance use, behaviour and learning disability. School is pivotal to adolescents' development because much time is spent there. DeSocio and Hootman (2004) emphasised that students learn to socialise with peers and equally reach developmental climax in schools. However, the school could be detrimental to adolescents if not properly handled because students are prone to intense psychological stress which may then lead to acute mental health difficulty in both their

present and adult lives. Changes in family relations, puberty, peers, and education have the tendencies to have an extensive impact on adolescents' life (Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005).

Adolescents may consequently adopt various coping strategies so as to be able to adjust to problems. According to Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011), a coping strategy is the process in which people relate with actual problems in their everyday lives.

Adolescents relate with problems in accordance to their appraisals, making use of active strategies, persistence, exertion, problem-solving, cognitive distraction or seeking social support. Managing transitional problems from childhood into adolescence requires positive and effective coping behaviour (Markova & Nikitskaya, 2017). Coping is tending to be more advanced with children's experience of opportunities for social learning and modelling. Compass, Connor Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen and Wadsworth (2001) identified engagement and disengagement coping strategies. Positive coping centres on the cause of problems or one's emotions or thoughts which include problem-solving, emotional control, cognitive restructuring, and acceptance. However, negative coping is on the origin of the problem or one's emotions or thoughts which include avoidance, withdrawal, and denial. In view of the above, this study investigated the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem
Adamawa State is one of the North Eastern States in Nigeria and its capital is Yola. It is one of the North-Eastern states being tormented by the Boko-Haram terrorists in Nigeria. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a United Nation Refugee Agency, from 2009, the activities of Boko-Haram has led to more than 2.2 million people to be internally

displaced, 20,000 civilians killed, and as many as 7,000 women and girls abducted (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). Also, an estimated 92 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North-Eastern Nigeria live within host communities and 8 per cent in camp settings (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017).

With these inconceivable experiences, many people (including the in-school adolescents) have been affected by fear and chronic fear has been found to have negative consequences on education, especially in in-school adolescents. When an individual is exposed to intense fear, the activation of the stress response systems lead to an elevation of several stress chemicals in the body and could alter the function of some neural systems and can cause damage to certain brain structures such as the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus and the amygdala (Ndajiwo, 2015). These structures are involved with thought, emotion, memory, learning, fear, and behaviour. It should be noted that adolescents who have been exposed to intense fearful events tend to lose the ability to differentiate threat from safety which in turn may affect their ability to interact socially with others and often leads to the development of some anxiety disorders (Ndajiwo, 2015).

United Nations Children's Fund (UNCEF) (2015) reported that attacks on schools and school adolescents could attenuate education access, especially in the region exposed to the insurgency, where there was 60 per cent of the 10.5 million out of school children. Most of the children as well as their families have shown signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. Where parents also experienced stress and depression, it tends to make matters even worse for the child. Furthermore, concerns were being raised that the Boko-Haram group deploys adolescents for their operations, like suicide bomb attacks. Reports also have it that some adolescents fight along with Boko

Haram members (Ndajiwo, 2015). Consequently, many youngsters may find it difficult to cope with their lives. Studies have been carried out on adolescents' problems and their coping strategies. Chinawa, Manyike, Obu, Odetunde, Aniwada, Ndu and Chinawa (2014) investigated the behavioural disorder among adolescents attending secondary schools in South-East Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that about 3% adolescents reported that they have had sex before but not in the last 3 months. Also, adolescents who attempted suicide in a year were about 11% within the age range of 15 years plus; while about 31% committed suicide. The findings also indicated that a lot of adolescents with behavioural disorders were from upper-class families.

In order to help adolescents to easily overcome transitional problems of adolescence and for the fact that few studies have delved into the problems and coping strategies of adolescents, it is therefore imperative that this study investigated the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State

Research Questions
The following questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study:
1. What are the problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State?
2. What are the coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State?
3. Is there any difference in the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender?
4. Is there any difference in the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on school location?

Research Hypotheses
The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested.

1. There is no significant difference in the problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender.
3. There is no significant difference in the problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on school location.
4. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on school location.

Methodology
The study was a cross-sectional descriptive survey. The population for this study comprised of 249,840 secondary school students in Adamawa State (Adamawa Ministry of Education, 2016), that is 212,815 public and 37,025 private secondary school students. The sample size for the study was 384 based on the estimate in the Research Advisor (2006). However, 423 respondents were selected to cater for non-response. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting a sample for this study. At stage 1, proportional sampling (using cluster sampling due to the population density of districts of study) technique was used to select 9 Local Government Areas from the three senatorial districts (Adamawa North, Central, and South) in ratio 4:3:2 respectively. At Stage 2, two secondary schools were randomly selected from each of the nine selected Local Government Areas. Simple random sampling was used to select forty-seven respondents from the two selected secondary schools in each local government area, which composed of public and private school respectively, making a total of four-hundred and twenty-three (423) respondents for the study.

A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Problems and Coping Strategies of Adolescents Questionnaire (PCSAQ)" was used for the study consisting of Sections A, B, and C. Section A focuses on the demographic

data of the respondents. Section B consist of twenty (20) items which sought information on the problems of in-school adolescents, while section C also consists of twenty (20) items sought information from the respondents on their coping strategies. Four Point Likert-Scale format was employed in order of: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points; Agree (A) = 3 points; Disagree (D) = 2 points; and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The highest obtainable score for an item is 4, while the least obtainable score is 1. The average score is 2.5 (1+2+3+4=10/4). Therefore, any score ranging from 2.5 and above was considered as the major problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents, while scores lower than 2.5 was considered the least problems and coping strategies of in-

school adolescents. The four formulated hypotheses were subjected to t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

The instrument' content validity was ascertained and the reliability of the instrument was obtained through test re-test method with a co-efficient of 0.63. The instrument was administered with the help two research Assistants. The data were analysed using percentage and t-test at alpha level of 0.05.

Research Question 1: Demography Location of Respondents /Mean and Rank Order of Problems of in-school Adolescents in Adamawa State

Findings

Table 1: The Demographic Location of Respondents were Presented Using Percentage

Variables		Frequency	Percentages %
School Location	Rural	204	49.2
	Urban	211	50.8
Total		**415**	**100.0**

According to Table 1, 204 (49.2%) respondents were from rural located schools while 211 (50.8%) respondents were from schools in the urban centres.

Table 3 shows that eleven out of the twenty items were highlighted as the significant coping strategies employed by in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. This was because the mean scores of those items were greater than the average (benchmark) mean value of 2.50 for determining the coping strategies of the participants. The top three

ranked items, that is, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd were items 5, 19 and 4, with mean values of 3.16, 3.13 and 3.03 respectively. On the other hand, items 14, 12 and 15 were the least three ranked items, that is, 18th, 19th and 20th, with mean values of 1.96, 1.87 and 1.85 respectively. It could be inferred from the top three ranked items that the major coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State were being hard working, seeking help from my parents and taking responsibility for solving the problem.

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of Problems of In-school Adolescents in Adamawa State

N	As an adolescent, I am facing the following problems:	Mean	Rank
3	Meeting my daily needs (such as food, cloth, shelter)	2.79	1st
2	Emotional instability	2.57	2nd
18	Fear about the future	2.56	3rd
17	Fear of speaking in public	2.55	4th
9	Perceiving myself as being too lean or fat	2.48	5th
10	Inability to assimilate in class	2.38	6th

N	As an adolescent, I am facing the following problems:	Mean	Rank
19	Peer pressure	2.37	7th
13	Inability to adapt to school environment	2.35	8th
8	Inability to concentrate in all that I do	2.32	9th
14	Excessive anger	2.31	10th
7	Inability to relate well with others	2.28	11th
4	Living with single parent	2.28	11th
12	Inability to understand who I am	2.27	13th
16	Low self-esteem	2.22	14th
6	Loss of friends and acquaintances	2.21	15th
1	Eating disorder	2.16	16th
11	Sexual obsession	2.11	17th
15	Parental separation	2.10	18th
5	Loss of parents	2.02	19th
20	Parental neglect	2.00	20th

Research Question 2: What are the coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State?

Table 3: Mean and Rank Order of Coping Strategies Employed by In-school Adolescents in Adamawa State

N	As an adolescent, I cope with my problems by:	Mean	Rank
5	being hard working	3.16	1st
19	seeking help from my parents	3.13	2nd
4	taking responsibility for solving the problem	3.03	3rd
6	seeking for counselling intervention	2.97	4th
7	meeting teachers for help	2.90	5th
11	positive self-talking	2.87	6th
20	thinking about something pleasant	2.84	7th
1	thinking about other things	2.79	8th
2	thinking about something funny	2.78	9th
18	expressing my concern to my peers	2.66	10th
13	resigned to fate	2.55	11th
9	being aggressive to others	2.42	12th
3	self-criticism	2.40	13th
10	ruminating over the problems always	2.37	14th
8	blaming others	2.23	15th
17	crying often	2.21	16th
16	engaging in delinquent behaviours	2.07	17th
14	abusing drugs and substances	1.96	18th
12	drinking of alcohol	1.87	19th
15	involving in sexual promiscuity	1.85	20th

Table 3 shows that eleven out of the twenty items were highlighted as the significant coping strategies employed by in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. This was because the mean scores of those items were greater than the average (benchmark) mean value of 2.50 for determining the coping strategies of the participants. The top three ranked items, that is, 1st, 2nd and 3rd were items 5, 19 and 4, with mean values of 3.16, 3.13 and 3.03 respectively. On the other hand, items 14, 12 and 15 were the least three ranked items, that is, 18th, 19th, and 20th, with mean values of 1.96, 1.87 and 1.85 respectively. It could be inferred from the top three ranked items that the major coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State were being hardworking, seeking help from my parents and taking responsibility for solving the problem.

Research Question 3:
Is there any difference in the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender? Research question 3 was answered by testing research hypotheses one and two.

Hypothesis One:
There is no significant difference in the problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender.

Hypothesis Two:
There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender.

Table 4 shows the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents based on gender. Results showed that problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents have the corresponding p-value of 0.076 and 0.727 which are both greater than 0. 05 alpha level of significance. Hence, the null hypotheses one and two are rejected.

Therefore, problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State are not influenced by gender.

Research Question 4:
Is there any difference in the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on gender? Research question 4 was answered by testing research hypotheses three and four.

Hypothesis Three:
There is no significant difference in the problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on school location.

Hypothesis Four:
There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State based on school location.

Table 5 shows the problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents based on school location. Results showed that problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents based on school location both have p-values of <0.0001 which are both greater than 0.05 alpha level of significance. Hence, the null hypotheses three and four are not rejected. Therefore, problems and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State could be influenced by school location.

Table 4: Mean, SD and t-test of Problems and Coping Strategies of In-School Adolescents Based on Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value
Problems of In-School Adolescents	Male	231	47.06	12.12	413	1.78	1.96	0.076
	Female	184	44.83	13.43				
Coping Strategies of In-School Adolescents	Male	231	50.91	9.77	413	0.35	1.96	0.727
	Female	184	51.25	9.68				

Table 5: Mean, SD and t-test of Problems and Coping Strategies of in-School Adolescents Based on School Location

Variables	School Location	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. T	Crit. T	p-value
Problems of In-School Adolescents	Rural	204	53.65	8.12	413	5.52*	1.96	<0.0001
	Urban	211	48.56	10.47				
Coping Strategies of In-School Adolescents	Rural	204	49.50	11.96	413	5.56*	1.96	<0.0001
	Urban	211	42.76	12.64				

*Sig. at p <0.05

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the major problems of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State were difficulty in meeting their daily needs (such as food, cloth, and shelter), emotional instability and fear about the future. This is an indication that in-school adolescents in Adamawa State are experiencing physical and psychological problems which might have resulted from poverty and insecurity. This is because the inability to meet basic needs, emotional problem and anxiety about the future may have a huge influence on adolescents' behaviour and lifestyle. According to the Harvard Mental Health (2004), adolescents with persistent emotional problems and concerns about future might experience serious distress, family disharmony, retarded development and poor education.

The finding of this study was in line with the finding of McLaughlin (2000) whose finding revealed that emotional disturbance and inability to meet a child's basic needs are part, of the problems facing adolescents in schools. Students who come to school hungry and engrossed with emotional fear cannot engage meaningfully well in school activities. It was found that the coping strategies employed by in-school adolescents in Adamawa State are being hard working, seeking help from parents and taking responsibility for solving their problems themselves. The findings of this study suggest that in-school adolescents adopted positive coping strategies in adjusting to problems they are experiencing. This implies that coping strategies employed by in-school adolescents were problem-solving, support seeking and so on, which Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) identified as more effective and productive coping strategies that could help adolescents adjust to life difficulties. Therefore, hardwork, parental help and taking responsibility for one's action are appropriate coping behaviours that could enable in-school adolescents to effectively adjust to home, school as well as overall life challenges.

Findings from the study revealed that male and female in-school adolescents in Adamawa State do not perceive the problems and coping strategies differently. With respect to their gender, adolescents in Adamawa State were facing the same problems. Also, the findings were not in tandem with the finding of Cocorada and Mihalascu (2012) which indicated a significant difference in male and female respondents in the emotional supports sought as the coping strategy. This might be because they are living in the same environment and experiencing similar social concerns. On the other hand, there was significant difference recorded based on the school location (rural or urban locations) as perceived by in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. This implies that school location determines the kind of problem experienced by in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. This finding was in contrast to the finding of Anderman (2002) that showed that adolescents' school location has no influence on the problems they faced. This is because the rural areas in Adamawa State were more victimised by the insurgency activities in the state. Also, there were significant difference in coping strategies adopted by in-school adolescents based on the school locations in Adamawa State. This implies that school location influenced the coping strategies adopted by in-school adolescents in Adamawa State. This finding supports the finding of Lopez, Perez, Ochoab, and Ruiza (2008) which established that school location affects the coping strategies employed by students in high schools. The mean value (53.65) of the rural adolescents indicated that they have discovered appropriate coping strategies than the urban dwellers because of the intensity of the problem in the rural areas of the state.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that Adamawa State in-school adolescents were faced with the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter; fear of tomorrow and emotional instability among others. However, these adolescents employed the coping strategies of hardworking, parental help-seeking and taking problem-solving responsibility among others. The hypotheses tested revealed that there was no significant difference in the gender-based problem and coping strategies of in-school adolescents in Adamawa State, whereas significant differences were found in the school location-based problem and coping strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Parents with the help of government should make provision for the basic needs (such as food, cloth, and shelter) of the children so that they can be able to become emotionally stable for school instructions and adjust effectively to their environment.

2. Counsellors should agitate that programmes that will equip in-school adolescents with appropriate social skills (such as problem-solving and assertiveness skills as well as emotional intelligence training) should be incorporated into the school curriculum as these can help them overcome their life challenges successfully.

3. The school counsellors activities and non-governmental organisation should synergise to provide for the basic needs of the students so that they can benefit maximally from classroom instruction and consequently, become responsible individuals in the society.

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