

 Research Article

## Mental Health and Out-of-Schools Problems among Adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Mental health and out-of-schools problems are related to an individual's social and physical health and is of global priority. The mental health is the complete physical, social, and mental well-being of an individual. Adolescence, including the ages between 10 and 19 years, is the phase in which changes in mental health usually occur. Half of all mental health disorders begin by the age of 14 years, but most cases are not detected or treated at all. This study examined the mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The survey research method was used to conduct the study. The target population of the study comprised of adolescents in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. One hundred (100) questionnaires were randomly distributed to the respondents and retrieved for data analysis. A self-developed questionnaire was used for the study. The bio-data of the respondents were analysed using simple percentage and frequency counts, while the stated research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study include: the level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State on the high side; there are prevalence of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. Recommendations were made and they are: teachers should ensure in providing a friendly teaching and learning environment relaxed with low threat in order to ensure that learning is stress-free and also a core source of motivation; Teachers should ensure the usage of appropriate teaching strategies and techniques, enhance more collaborative relationship with their students and also provide basic facilities in schools including a serene atmosphere for learning; Secondary school authorities and teachers in Lagos should ensure comprehensive monitoring of adolescents within the ages of 12-15 years with utmost priority due to the prevalence of mental health issues among them, and also take stringent punitive measures in addressing truancy and bullying from senior students.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Awareness, Education, Mental Health, Out of School Problems

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely regarded as the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat poverty, illiteracy and the foundation of social equity. According to the National Policy on Education, it states that education is compulsory, and it is the right of every citizen irrespective of gender, social status, religion and ethnic background. Based on this fact, the Federal Government of Nigeria has at different times made frantic efforts in increasing the number of children enrolled into schools. However, it is sad to see that only a few percentage of these children have access to education in Nigeria. Mental health problems and mental disorders among children and adolescents constitute a significant burden of disease in the population of many nations. There is world-wide concern about the seeming growth of incidence and prevalence of mental health problems and severe mental disorders.

Mental health is a critical aspect of overall well-being that often goes overlooked in many societies around the world. Mental Health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential, can cope with the Normal stress of life, works productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community. In Nigeria, a country known for its rich culture, diverse traditions, and youthful population, the issue of mental health has gained increasing attention in recent years. Nigeria, with its estimated population of over 200 million people, is often described as the “Giant of Africa.” It is a nation filled with vibrant youth who are the driving force behind the country’s growth and development. However, beneath this surface of youthfulness and vitality lies a hidden crisis which is mental health problems. These problems encompass a wide range of conditions, including anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar disorder, and stigmatization among others. The impact of these disorders is profound, affecting not only the individuals themselves but also their families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

According to the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) conducted by the United Nations International Emergency Children Fund (UNICEF) has shown that the population of out of school children in Nigeria has risen from 10.5 million in 2010 to 13.2 million in 2015. It has also been said that over 45 percent out of school children in West Africa are Nigerians, which has ranked Nigeria as having the highest number of out of school children in the world. It is a very alarming situation that needs urgent attention, but permit me to hone-in on yet another issue that is close to home. For a number of these children who are out of school, they can blame the financial situation of the country for their plight. Mental health is the psychosocial and mental well-being of an individual which influences and guides his behavioural pattern to cope and adjust to the environmental pressures and demand of his environment and make appropriate choices and decisions.

According to World Health Mental Report (2022), mental health is a state of mental well-being which enable people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. The report further highlighted that, mental health is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health enables people live harmoniously with themselves and others while making appropriate choices and decisions since most of their psychosocial, economical and biological needs are met, such individuals experience lesser strain and pressure which are part of the precursor of mental health issues or challenges.

Mental health is a vital component of the total health of an individual because the entire thought process takes place in mind, ideas originate in mind and all kinds of directions are issued from mind which guide, shape and regulate communication, conduct and behaviour and determine personal and social functioning as well as adjustment (Bhargava & Raina, 2017). Mental health issues among adolescents in senior secondary schools are synonymous with mental health disorders or conditions experienced by adolescents in schools which influences and interferes with their psychosocial and mental well-being as a result of the demands and pressure of educational and academic related school activities which impair their behavioural tendencies, biological disposition, sensory and perceptual processes and prevent them from learning adequately.

When Students are pressured by daily school related activities, it could become cumbersome for them to learn, cope and adjust in school which could be detrimental to their mental well-being, and could result to different behavioural disorders. The heightened increase of mental health challenges among students has been attributed to a variety of factors from academic pressure to experienced psychobiological developmental milestones (Khombo et al., 2023). Mental health challenges or disorders which are the opposite of mental health are a global reality, affecting millions of people across the world (Batada & Leon, 2019). Adolescent stage in human development is a very demanding and tasking stage for the young adult, since it is a stage of transition from childhood to adulthood which emanates with diverse challenges to the adolescent couple with biological and psychological changes which comes with severe academic pressure for students to succeed in school, and also adjust to their social environment, which end up posing distinct challenges to them such as emotional changes, mental health related problems, behavioural changes, social challenges, aggressive behaviours, conflict of interest between the adolescent and the society amongst others which influences the adolescents behaviour and mental well-being.

Secondary school Adolescents undergo rigorous school related activities which involve daily studies and extracurricular activities that take a toll on their physical and mental health hence, they become stressed

up and disorganized. Students who experience such academic stressful life events often have worse health outcomes and reduced quality of life (Essel & Owusu, 2017). Mental health issues among adolescents in schools constitutes a major concern due to the stressful and demanding nature of school related activities on the adolescent accompany with the pressure saddled upon the adolescent to perform well academically in the course of his daily school related activities. An overarching argument is that secondary school students fall in the adolescent demographic group, which is an important developmental period and should have age-appropriate interventions to deal with their mental health issues (Barrow & Thomas, 2022).

Mental Health in educational institutions is an important public health concern as about 20-27% of mental disorders frequently occurs early in life from adolescence, which if recognized early, appropriate interventions can be instituted and a better health outcome (Kutcher et al., 2016). Due to the demanding nature and pressure upon learners to succeed academically, social challenges encountered in schools such as bullying, domestic and substance abuse, daily class attendance, daily home assignments, transition from one class to another, inability to create social relationships with fellow students and teachers, terminal assessment amongst others which are all demanding to adolescents especially, when their mental well-being are not adequately catered for, or their psychological needs met which could result to poor academic achievement, mental strain, disruptive behaviour, anxiety and depression.

This set of unruly school children can be found in primary and secondary school across the state with only very few exceptions. There's therefore a need to nip this trend in the bud before it gets entirely out of hand. We have had enough to blame sharing and it is getting us nowhere. Getting these children off the street cannot be done by only the parents or the school authorities, it cannot even be achieved solely by the government. There is a need to harmonize and synergize the effort made towards ensuring that this ugly trend is reversed before it causes total decadence, not only in our educational system alone, but also in our society as a whole. To tackle this issue, there is a need to understand the rationale behind reducing the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Based on this, the aim of this study to find out mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

The school is an institution of learning, a vehicle and transitional point where every planned and structured educational activity takes place. The school environment ought to be conducive in order for learners to explore and harness all their inherent potential and achieve their expected educational and life aspired goals. Also, such conducive learning environment should possess well-ventilated spacious classrooms with adequate computer gadgets for learning and provide for a good teacher and student relationship and be receptive to socio-cultural needs of learners which partly depends on the mental well-being of the learner, such environment should equally consider the physical, mental health and psychological well-being of all learners irrespective of their socio-cultural, religious and economic backgrounds. The school atmosphere, especially when conducive enough to meet up with the demands of learners, and contribute tremendously to the mental health and well-being of learners.

However, the school itself may become a source of boredom, storm and stress due to the demanding nature and pressure upon its learners to succeed academically, social challenges encountered in schools, daily home assignments, bereavement of a loved one, transition from one class to another, extracurricular activities amongst others which are all demanding to adolescents especially, when their mental well-being are not adequately catered for, or their psychological needs met which could result to poor academic achievement, mental strain, disruptive behaviour, anxiety or depression which could even lead to suicide. More worrisome is the peculiar sociological and socio-economic problems that adolescents find themselves such as unbridled freedom, possession/control of too much money, poor role-models, too-much play-and-less work syndrome, irrational ambition, doggedness and self-medication. More so, studies have been done on the fight against mental health problems generally, little or no studies have been done on perceived causes and consequences of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents. These are the issues that spurred the researcher to attempt to investigate the mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State.

## 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. Specifically the present study was:

1. To ascertain the level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State;
2. To determine the prevalence of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State.

## 1.3. Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the study stated above, the following questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State?
2. What is the prevalence of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive survey design because not all the individuals can be contacted. A descriptive research survey design was employed in this study to assess respondents' opinions on the subject matter. The researcher is unable to do incisive or in-depth study of such problems. It is a shallow or surface investigation of problems. This method of research is common in the Third World countries. The researcher interacts with study materials and therefore works on tele-guided quiz, i.e. Questionnaire. Because of the vastness of the area to be studied it is difficult to get all the population to respond to the investigation. Hence, the researcher uses a data collection technique that enables him reach out to the sample occupying the vast area. This study was conducted using adolescents in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. For this study, the study sample was made up of respondents located in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State that were selected using random sampling techniques because it was not possible to cover all because of the large number, location and other problems inherent in data collection.

A multistage sampling process was adopted to select the participants for the study. The participants were selected in three stages. At the first stage, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. At the second stage, the sample was stratified sampling on the bases of genders, etc. At the final stage, certain percentage of the sample was selected across the group using simple random sampling technique. However, only One hundred (100) respondents were randomly selected (both male and female) in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. Data were collected using two research instruments and they are questionnaire and unstructured interview of those concerned. The study made use of the researcher-made questionnaire designed by the researcher for the participants. This adopted the Likert four-point rating format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) respectively. Positive items would be scored simply as Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed, Strongly Disagreed with 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively, while negative items were scored in reverse order as 1, 2, 3 and 4. The research questions will be tested using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation.

## 3. RESULTS

The data used in this study was obtained from One hundred questionnaires and were retrieved for data analysis. There were two research questions formulated in the course of this research and were tested using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation.

### 3.1. Analysis of Research Questions

**Question One:** What is the level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State?

**Table 1.** Analysis Showing the Level of Awareness of Mental Health and Out-of-Schools Problems among Adolescents

| S/N | Statements   | Mean | S.D  |
|-----|--|------|------|
| 1   | There is pressure on me to perform in school, and its telling on me                      | 3.55 | 1.35 |
| 2   | Daily academic activities are cumbersome and stressful                                   | 2.87 | 1.17 |
| 3   | I feel very tense during test and examination  | 3.29 | 0.95 |
| 4   | I get frustrated when I don't have money to buy test books and other valuables in school | 2.78 | 1.06 |
| 5   | I am frustrated due to poor relationship with classmates and teachers                    | 2.84 | 1.07 |

Source: Field survey 2024

The study concludes that the level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State on the high side. It was found out item 1 was a very important, it having a mean of 3.55 and item 4 was considered as an influence too, and its mean was the lowest of all items having 2.78.

**Question Two:** What is the prevalence of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State?

**Table 2.** Analysis Showing the Prevalence of Mental Health and Out-of-Schools Problems among Adolescents

| S/N | Statements  | Mean | S.D  |
|-----|---|------|------|
| 1   | I often experience loss of thought due to academic pressure                                       | 3.26 | 1.34 |
| 2   | I often find it difficult to learn in class due to depression                                     | 3.53 | 1.35 |
| 3   | I cannot cope with school activities I am frustrated  | 3.09 | 1.31 |
| 4   | I always find difficult for me to create healthy relationship with teachers and fellow classmates | 3.40 | 1.35 |
| 5   | I relapse on medication due to school stress  | 2.66 | 1.16 |

Source: Field survey 2024

In this part, the study sought to examine the extent of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. It was found out item 2 was a very important, it having a mean of 3.53 and item 5 was considered too, and its mean was the lowest of all items having 2.66.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. Two research questions were formulated to guide in the study. The descriptive survey research was used to conduct the study. The population of this study consisted of adolescents in Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos State. A total number of One Hundred (100) questionnaires were randomly distributed to the respondents and were retrieved for data analysis. A structured questionnaire was used in the data collection. The stated research questions were tested using simple percentages, mean and standard deviation.

The findings of the study revealed that:

1. The level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State on the high side.
2. There are prevalence of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State.

In this section, the data collected from survey on the topic “mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State” were discussed. A total number of One hundred (100) questionnaires were randomly distributed to the respondents retrieved for data analysis. Responses to answers on research questions would be discussed. The following are the discussion of the findings based on the research questions formulated for the study:

Research Table 1 investigated that the level of awareness of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State on the high side. This affirms studies by Akande,

Olowonirejuaro, and Okwara-Kalu (2014); Onukwufor and Izuchi (2017) who identified the following school related factors or stressors on mental health especially, among senior secondary school students: Academics-The worry about academic performance can cause stress symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia or changes in your appetite and overall mood. The fear of examinations does create stress among students; Finances – Students experience stress when they do not have money to maintain their lifestyles and fulfill their academic needs. If they fail to fulfill the requirement, then it creates a stress; Relationships– Students wants to have friends, whether they are close friends or just acquaintances. When they are unable to do so or they become depressed and stressed; Time Management-A lack of time management among students can cause them stress.

Research Table 2 investigated that there are prevalence of mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. This is supported by (Ogorchukwu et al., 2016) who asserted that despite the ill effects of mental diseases such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, psychosis, eating disorders, mood disorders, and psychosis, the majority of students do not seek treatment or prefer informal sources of aid to professional sources of help. This is in tendon with Harris (2018) who posited that available literature has put across that mental health disorders usually commence in adolescents, and the mean age for the onset of mental health disorders is occurring at the age of 14 years. This is also in agreement with a survey conducted by UNICEF in 2021, which reviewed that Nigeria is facing a mental health challenge, with one in six young Nigerians aged 15-24 saying they often feel depressed, have little interest in doing things, or are worried, nervous or anxious. Statistics equally shows that one-fifth of suicide cases are of persons aged 13-19 years and 27.8% of them are students.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study has obviously shown that there is prevalence of mental health related issues among secondary school adolescents in Lagos which is worrisome due to the upsurge of diverse school related factors being responsible with a devastating consequence which has led to different behavioural disorders, depression, anxiety and attempted suicide. In spite of the efforts made by Government and policy makers to reduce the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, The mental health crisis among Nigerian youth is a pressing issue that demands immediate attention because it affects how we think, feel and act. It deals with our emotional, psychological and social well-being or an absence of mental illness. It is not just a matter of public health but also a human rights issue.

Addressing mental health disorders among Nigerian youth requires a concerted effort from individuals, communities, the government, and the international community. By raising awareness, reducing stigma, and investing in mental health care infrastructure, Nigeria can work towards a future where its youth can thrive mentally and contribute to the nation's development. It is time to recognize that mental health is an essential component of the well-being and potential of Nigeria's youth. On this note, it is imperative that all major stakeholders including teachers, parents, social workers, the entire educational community amongst others concern with the mental well-being of adolescents in Lagos and its environs, and all efforts must be put bear and all hands on deck to address and nab the scourge of mental health related problems amongst school going adolescents to standstill with the urgency that it deserves, the recommendations in this study which will go a long way in addressing all mental health related problems amongst students in Lagos.

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions reached above, this paper offers the following recommendations:

1. Teachers should ensure in providing a friendly teaching and learning environment relaxed with low threat in order to ensure that learning is stress-free and also a core source of motivation.
2. Teachers should ensure the usage of appropriate teaching strategies and techniques, enhance more collaborative relationship with their students and also provide basic facilities in schools including a serene atmosphere for learning.
3. Secondary school authorities and teachers in Lagos should ensure comprehensive monitoring of adolescents within the ages of 12-15 years with utmost priority due to the prevalence of mental health issues among them, and also take stringent punitive measures in addressing truancy and bullying from senior students.

4. More funds should be allotted for the provision of basic facilities for counselling and mental health services including a specious environment in public senior secondary schools in Lagos.
5. Government should take cognizance of issues such as; security challenge, corruption and poor plan implementation in order to prevent wastage in investments made towards achieving qualitative education for all in the country. This is necessary to reduce the level of illiteracy, poverty, drop-out and the inequality that exists in the society.

Based on results and conclusion, it can be put forth that future research should focus on further identifying other risk factors that contribute to mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents. Psychological and psychosocial interventions should be conducted to reduce the impact of mental health problems on young people.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

This study focused on the mental health and out-of-schools problems among adolescents in Lagos State. The findings from the data revealed that socioeconomic factors are a major justification for the mental health and out-of-schools problems while students, and especially males had the highest number of mental health and out-of-schools problems in the data collected between January, 2010 and December, 2023. Aside from the government's intervention, schools, parents need to be involved in mental health to reduce the mental health and out-of-schools problems rate among students.

## 7. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The key limitations of the research are portrayed hereunder:

1. The time frame to undertake exploratory activities is limited.
2. To conduct interviews and distribute the questionnaires, many respondents showed reluctance to express their opinions and considered it as leakage of secrecy.

**Data Availability Statement.** The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, A. A. Oyeyemi. The data are not publicly available due to some circumstances.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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