

# Secondary School Students' Perceptions of Psychosocial Strategies for Managing Behaviour Problems

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## Abstract

The study was designed as a survey to investigate secondary school students perceptions of psychosocial strategies for managing behaviour problems in Ebonyi North education zone of Ebonyi State. Two research questions guided the study. 200 students from eight secondary schools were sampled for the study through simple random sampling. Two instruments were used for data collection with reliability scores of 0.76 and 0.87 respectively. The data were analyzed using mean scores. The result revealed, among other things, that uncooperative attitude of teachers and lack of respect for students by teachers are some of the perceived causes of behaviour problems. It further revealed that isolation, labeling/name calling, flogging and kneeling down are among the strategies perceived by students for managing behaviour problems. Some recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

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## 1. Introduction

Secondary education is populated by students who are mainly adolescents. The period of adolescence is variously described as a period of heightened emotionality (because adolescents react unproportionally to events facing them), a critical period (because adolescents experiment with life unaware of the implications of what they do), and a period of role confusion (because they are confused concerning the role models they will identify with) (Omebe & Mgboro 2017). The above descriptions indicate the challenges facing adolescents as they try to adjust to problems in the society. While trying to adjust some adolescents adopt either destructive or positive strategies, which Freud called Thanatos or Eros respectively (Omebe & Mgboro 2017). The adoption of negative behaviours to manage the problems facing the individual indicates that the individual has behaviour problems. Behaviour problems can be regarded as those attitudes, and actions employed by the individual which do not enhance the well-being of the individual and the society. The behaviour problems constitute a set of activities that do not conform with the goals of the schools and do not lead to the promotion of the school ethos (Ekoja & Amali, 2004).

Four types of criteria define behaviour problems (Ekoja and Amali 2004). These are: Statistical criteria which indicate behaviour problems that occur least frequently. Where people talk to themselves, laugh alone uncontrollably, undress in the public (these are actions most people do not engage in) they have behaviour problems. However this criterion does not consider the differences in cultural values, community standards, and places hence it might not be a good criterion for distinguishing desirable and undesirable behaviours.

- Ideal mental health which indicates that deviations from the ideal are revelations of varying degrees of behaviour problems. Where the individual is not motivated to achieve a goal, there is no balance in psyche, no maturity, competence, autonomy and resistance to stress the individual is said to have behaviour problems. However, it should be noted that the goal or ideal to be used for defining acceptable behaviour is a matter of theoretical frame of reference or values accepted by the people involved.
- Multicultural criteria which assume that a fixed set of behaviour exist, and they manifest across different cultures. (Dragons, 1985). What it implies is that behaviours like alcoholism would be similar in origin, process and manifestations in different parts of the world. It follows that the treatment remains the same everywhere. However cultural relativist theorists emphasize diversity in symptom manifestation of behaviour problems. This view holds that deviant behaviours reflect the life style, cultural values, and world views of afflicted people. Notwithstanding the differences in argument the World Health Organization (1981) accepts that some behaviour problems are similar in origin, process and manifestation, and are also diverse based on the cultural values and lifestyle of the people.
- Practical criteria. These are often the basis for labeling people as exhibiting unhealthy or normal behaviour which psychotherapists readily focus on. Buss (1969) affirmed that practical criteria include subject discomfort (prolonged emotional reaction, anxiety and depression), bizarreness (anti-social act or false perception of reality), and inefficiency (inability to fulfill ones expected roles in life).

What is evident from the above analysis is that there is no consensus on the definition of behaviour problems. One can therefore state that any behaviour that departs from some acceptable norm; that harms the

individual or others is a behaviour problem. The question is what are the causes of behaviour problems. To this question we will turn as we examine the different models explaining the causes of behaviour problems as described by Ekoja and Amali (2004).

The Biogenic model. It was first propounded by Hippocrates by 400BC. He noted that mental disorders are caused by organic problems. In line with this view Anderson (1984) noted that there are many biological factors responsible for behaviour disorders. The premise of Biogenic model is that chemical imbalances are responsible for most behaviour problems associated with anxiety and depression (MCGreer & MCGreer 1980). These include tumors, strokes, excessive intake of alcohol or drugs and blow to the head. Others are body chemistry and heredity. The psychoanalytic model explains behaviour problems as arising from childhood trauma or anxieties. Many of the anxieties operate unconsciously but are revealed through defence mechanism. Because of the unconscious operation of the anxieties students exhibit behaviours they could not understand or explain. Based on this model the cause of behaviour is a disturbance of the child's security arising from parental acceptance, rejection or over protection. The child may therefore develop a need to go closer to people, when he experiences parental acceptance in form of warmth, attention, hugging, provision of materials; when he experiences rejection in form of no attention, withdrawal of necessary materials, no body contact, he tends to move away from people. When there is over protection which is revealed in form of not exposing him to challenges, not allowing him play with mates, no freedom to explore the environment he tends to move against people (Cakar, 2013).

- The Humanistic and Existential model. The model posits that since man is basically good if people were left unencumbered by societal restrictions and allowed to develop freely the society would be dominated by fully functioning and actualized people. However because of society's imposed conditions on the individuals, the individuals' self concept and behaviour become defined only by the standard of worth which others in the society approve. Such reliance on others force people to develop a distorted self concept which is at variance with the individual self potential. There is disharmony or incongruence between the person's inherent potential and his concept as determined by others. Such conflicts appear to be the basis of behaviour problems. Just like the humanist, the existential therapist affirm that the cause of behaviour problems is that many people have lost their world (being) because of their understanding of impending non-being-(death). This understanding is the source of anxiety, aggression, and hostility (Amaechi, Eke & Oparaji, 2017).

- Family system model. The model posits that family members are all involved in a network of interdependent roles, values and norms; one's action affects the entire family system. People's behaviours therefore reflect family influences and values. Behaviour problem is therefore a reflection of unhealthy family communication among members of the family (Cheng, 2012). What therapists do therefore is to focus on family system in order to solve behaviour problems.

Some of the students' observed behaviour problems are destructive tendencies (mutilating books, tearing and defacing pictures) which reveal bottled-up aggression and pent-up indignation; hyper-activity which result from excessive hormone such that the child can not concentrate on classroom lessons (Chuah, 2013); stubbornness, frequent emotional upsets, bullying and being too sensitive to and rejection of constructive criticism and suggestions. Amidst the above behaviour problems some psychosocial strategies employed by teachers for managing them include discussing with parents, discrimination, presentation of unusual materials (Onuorah, 2003), planned ignoring, sending one to manual work, labeling, flogging, isolation from others, signal interference, non puncture time out, kneeling down, removal of seductive objects and restructuring of classroom. On extreme cases the students involved in behaviour problems were suspended from school (Omede, 2017). Notwithstanding the above psychosocial strategies employed for managing behaviour problems, the behaviour problems exhibited by the students have continued to be on the increase in Ebonyi North education zone. Some students leave the school during classes, some come to school vary late, some of them attack their teachers and bully their fellow students, while some students drop out completely from school and join cultist, armed robbers or kidnapers. The gravity of the problem is such that the state governments had at various times established anti school loitering campaign teams to enforce good behaviours among students. One wonders whether the students perceive the strategies employed by the parents, school authorities, and the government at large as means of managing behaviour problems.

The purpose of the study therefore is to find out the students' perception of psychosocial strategies adopted by teachers for managing behaviour problems.

Two research questions guided the study:

- (i) What are the students perceived causes of behaviour problems among secondary school students?
- (ii) What are the students' perception of psychosocial strategies adopted by teachers for managing behaviour problems?

## Method

The study was a descriptive survey type focused on finding out students' perception of psychosocial strategies

for managing behaviour problems among secondary school students in Ebonyi north education zone. The zone comprises four Local Government Areas. Abakaliki, Izzi, Ebonyi, and Ohaukwu. Each of the four Local Government Areas has 10, 16, 15, 28 number of government secondary schools respectively. Two co-educational government secondary schools were sampled for the study from each of the Local Government Areas through purposive sampling. Eight co-educational secondary schools were therefore sampled for the study. From each of the eight secondary schools 25 students were sampled through simple random sampling. The total number of students sampled was 200.

Data for the study were collected using the researchers' made structured questionnaire. It was designed in a 4-point rating scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire consists of 20 items and two sections: A and B. Section A focused on students perceived causes of behaviour problems while section B focused on students perception of psychosocial strategies for managing behaviour problems. The items of the questionnaire were generated through review of some studies on behaviour problems (Cakar 2013, Ugodulunwa, 2003; EKOja & Amali, 2004; Ikeagu, 2005; Unachukwu & Nwankwo, 2006). Face validity of the instrument was carried out by two experts in Educational Psychology and one from Educational Measurement and Evaluation. Their corrections and suggestions were effected and integrated in the final production of the questionnaire. The split half internal reliability method was used in computing the reliability coefficient based on the responses of 20 students in the pilot test. The reliability coefficient obtained using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was 0.76 and 0.87 for section A and B respectively.

The mean score was used to answer the research questions. Any item with a mean score of 2.5 and above was accepted while items with mean scores less than 2.5 were regarded as not accepted by students.

## Result

The results of the data analysis are shown in the table 1 and 2 below

Research question I: What are the students perceived causes of behaviour problems.

**Table 1: Students perceived causes of behaviour problems among secondary school students**

S/N	Causes of Behaviour Problems	Mean Score
1	Uncooperative attitude of teachers	2.61
2	Neglect by teachers	2.53
3	Poor school environment	3.41
4	Non enforcement of school regulation	3.23
5	Favouritism by teachers	2.52
6	Drug abuse	3.24
7	Feeling depressed	1.82
8	Hopelessness	2.3
9	Broken homes	3.21
10	Poor knowledge of subject content	2.53

Table 1 above showed students perceived causes of behaviour problems of secondary school students in Ebonyi north education zone. The students accepted items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10 as causes of behaviour problems while items 7 and 8 were not perceived by them as causes of behaviour problem.

**Research question II: What are the students' perception of psychosocial strategies adopted by teacher for managing behaviour problems?**

**Table 2, Students perception of psychosocial strategies for managing behaviour problems.**

S/N	Psychosocial Strategies	Mean Score
1	Isolation from others	3.46
2	Suspension	3.61
3	Flogging and scolding	3.72
4	Labeling/name calling	3.1
5	Writing an apology/imposition	2.73
6	Expulsion	2.6
7	Manual work	3.62
8	Presentation of unusual materials	2.3
9	Kneeling down or standing up in class	3.62
10	Ignoring and paying less attention to the student	2.51

Table 2 above revealed that except item 8 all other items with mean scores above 2.5 were perceived by students as psychosocial strategies for managing behaviour problems.

## Discussions

The findings in table I revealed that secondary school students in Ebonyi North education zone perceived 8 out of 10 items included in the instrument as the causes of behaviour problems among students. The findings

support the findings of Ugodulunwa (2003) and Ikeagu (2005) who discovered that uncooperative attitude, neglect by teachers; poor school environment, drug abuse, non enforcement of school regulations, broken homes and teachers poor knowledge of the subject content are among the causes of behaviour problems. Adolescents crave for respect hence they expect teachers to cooperate with them in decision making concerning day to day running of the school. Such situations engender trust and co-operation in enforcing the school regulations. It connotes that the inability of students to obey school regulations stem from the neglect by, and uncooperative attitude of the teachers. Furthermore drug abuse has positive correlation with behaviour problems of adolescents (Okatahi, 2003). Such abuse sometimes stem from influence of broken homes where there is lack of emotional and psychosocial support from parents (Cakar 2013). Where teachers do not have knowledge of the students' background they might treat every body in the same manner. Such unilateral treatment seem to be perceived by students as causing the consistent occurrence of behaviour problems. Moreover since knowledge is power, where the teacher is poor in knowledge of the subject content he might not be able to control the students who would decide to absent themselves from classes. Further more, the school environment appears to make students tensed up. In some classrooms the floor and walls are too rough. The school compound has no beauty-flowers, trees, pictures on the walls. The environment appears not to suggest anything concerning order, control, restraint and peace. Such a tensed-up environment might influence the manifestation of behaviour problems. It is not surprising therefore that students perceive the poor the school environment as one of the causes of behaviour problems.

The findings in table 2 revealed that the students perceived 9 out of 10 strategies in the instrument as appropriate for managing behaviour problems. The findings corroborate what Ikeagu (2005), Unachukwu and Nwankwo (2006) found out. They noted that teachers, like parents, employ isolation, flogging, labeling! name calling as strategies for managing behaviour problems. If they perceive the above actions as strategies for managing behaviour problems one wonders why there is high degree and consistent manifestation of behaviour problems among secondary school students in Ebonyi North education zone. The high degree of behaviour problems suggests that the students who are accustomed to such psychosocial strategies might have developed hard skin against the use of those strategies. This might explain in part, the continual occurrence and increase in behaviour problems among students notwithstanding the efforts of teachers. Moreover labeling and name calling might turn to be a self fulfilling prophecy which might enhance rather than discourage the bad behaviours.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

1. Teachers should work towards making the students build trust in them. Trust stem from the respect teachers give the students.
2. The school environment should be restructured to reflect peace, order and control. This is because the voice of nature may be more impacting than human voice.
3. A more comprehensive approach to managing behaviour problems should be adopted by teachers in synergy with parents.
4. Counseling of parents in non-school environment should be encouraged by the Government.

### Conclusion

The study showed that students perceived the school environment, broken homes, neglect by teachers, drug abuse and poor knowledge of the subject content as some of the causes of behaviour problems among secondary school students in Ebonyi North education zone. It was also discovered that isolation, suspension, name calling, kneeling down and manual work are perceived by students as psychosocial strategies for managing behaviour problems. The continued increase in dimension and occurrence of behaviour problems notwithstanding the strategies employed by teachers call for synergy between teachers and parents in adopting non-didactic approach which emphasizes the importance of love, warmth, care and encouragement in managing behaviour problems.

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