

Psychosocial Trauma and Academic Well-Being of Adolescents in Public Schools of Solwezi District, Zambia

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DOI: [https://doi.org/ 10.5281/zenodo.13832980](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13832980)

ABSTRACT

Performance and achievement in human tasks are often closely linked to an individual's well-being. This study aimed to explore the impact of psychosocial trauma among adolescents in four public secondary schools in Solwezi District, Zambia. The research was guided by the following objectives: to assess the prevalence of psychosocial trauma among adolescents, to determine its causes, to examine its effects, and to identify strategies for improving the academic well-being of adolescents in these schools. The study was grounded in Albert Ellis's Cognitive Behavioral Theory and Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development Theory. It employed a convergent parallel mixed-method design, collecting qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. The target population was 620 individuals, with a sample size of 243, including 236 adolescents and 7 teachers. Data collection was conducted online through standardized questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis based on the study's objectives, while quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 25, with results presented in tables, frequencies, means, and percentages. The findings revealed that 61.25% of adolescents experienced psychosocial trauma, posing a significant concern for their academic well-being. Socioeconomic and family-related factors were identified as the primary causes of this trauma. Additionally, adolescents affected by trauma were found to have limited engagement in school activities, poor academic performance, low emotional involvement in learning, and reduced academic efficacy. Their overall academic well-being, as measured by an average mean score of 2.68, was notably low. The study recommended strategies such as sports, counseling, and peer group discussions to alleviate psychosocial trauma and enhance the academic well-being of these students.

Key words: Psychosocial trauma, academic well-being, adolescents' abuses, Solwezi district, Zambia

Citation:

Chileshe, B., Mbwaiyo, A., & Okpalaenwe, N. (2024). How family income level influence girls' academic performance in public mixed secondary schools in Mukaa Sub-County Makueni County. *Journal of Africana Articles*, 2(13),1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13832980>

Introduction

Psychosocial trauma is spectrum factor associated with academic well-being among adolescents. This research focused on the psychosocial trauma and academic well-being of the adolescent in 4 public secondary schools. Trauma is generally understood to be the emotional reaction to a traumatic experience. Horrible, terrifying, and dangerous situations can result in trauma and stress. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2016), persistent stress from trauma can harm a person's emotional and cognitive health either temporarily or permanently.

According to Trauma Healing Handbook for Africa (2022), trauma is emotional and psychological consequences stressful events of everyday life that diminish the quality of life, leaving a person with the sense of worthlessness. Webster' dictionary, defines trauma as "wound." Trauma may be described as physical wounds. Psychosocial trauma is generated within the society through interaction with nature and economic dynamics of life.

There is no unanimity on the definition of student's academic well-being. However, from my experience trauma can affect students' academic well-being. According to Hughes (2020, p.3), academic well-being is "What is true for our wellbeing is also true for our learning and academic performance". This goes back into ancient Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle's foundation of the concept of being concluded that life lay in a balance of doing and living well (Nangwasha & Waitherero, 2021).

Students who experience psychosocial stress from things like abuse, bullying, and family disruption may find it difficult to focus in class. Some students might be carrying a huge load that causes them stress if they are unable to speak up about the sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse they

have received from friends, family, or strangers. In due course, they might experience depression and other mental health problems.

Fiorilli et al. (2017) and Widlund et al. (2018) have conceptualized the construct of academic well-being as combination of negative and positive factors create learning difficulties and burnout). The studies affirmed that, experiences of the positive constructs, like academic self –concept, school engagement, connectedness, and choices in the environment can play a role in academic well-being. Academic achievement, academic stress, and academic contentment are examples of elements that contribute to academic well-being, (Shek & Chai, 2020). The combination of positive and negative emotions notion is commonly referred to as multidimensional by (Aristovonik et al., 2020). The state of mind in which a person works, whether inside or outside, is another definition of academic well-being since there is involvement of thoughts emotions and behavior to produce a result of a given task.

Psychosocial trauma and academic well-being are two sides of one coin which have been discussed under different headings in academic circles. Unfortunately, most researchers have considered diverse performance and achievement, ignoring psychosocial trauma effects in the academic well-being among the adolescents. Currently, (Wildlund et al., 2018) has been defined academic well-being as an amalgamation of academic self-concept, perceived learning difficulties, and school burnout coupled with school engagement and satisfaction. It is a mixture of positive and negative factors.

Statement of the Problem

Psychosocial trauma seems to be real among adolescents in public secondary schools in Zambia. Causes of psychosocial trauma such as bullying, local gender disparity, family disruption, and child-headed households are visible in the communities. Among many causes sexual and verbal abuse is part of the concern of society. Community violence, gender-based violence, divorce, accidents, street violent attacks, death, and domestic violence are among many psychosocial traumatic experiences of the Zambian Solwezi adolescents. These psychosocial issues such as; losing both parents have created child-headed households (CHH in the Zambian district of Solwezi. Walking long distances to access school has also added to the existing hardships.

The country's outcry assumptions are that little or no attention has been paid to psychosocial issues and academic well-being among the adolescents in Solwezi district, Zambia. Looking at the current situation in Zambia, the researcher wanted to assess, examine, and explore the situation to ascertain the reality viewed as a problem. In Zambia the pass rate of adolescents has decreased; mental illness among adolescents has increased for the past 5 years (Daka, 2020). Adolescents seem to be struggling with wrong self-image, suicidal thoughts, and depression. Subsequently, psychosocial trauma experiences seem to have led adolescents into malfunctions (Kawatu et al., 2022).

The effects have recounted the systematic absenteeism in different public secondary schools. Sometimes those adolescents are blamed and are left without support due to such emotions they develop mental problems and find it difficult to concentrate in class. Some become aggressive, while others withdraw and develop antisocial behaviors. This kind of psychosocial trauma has created a sense of insecurity among adolescents in the 4 different communities. This research has been done where few people attempted. Although studies have examined psychosocial trauma in various populations, there is a scantiness of research on psychosocial trauma and academic well-being in Solwezi district, Zambia. Therefore, it is important to investigate the effects of psychosocial trauma on academic well-being to know the prevalence of psychosocial trauma in the province, understand the risks it has on learning faculties, and create awareness among adolescents, parents, and teachers.

General Objective:

The general objective was to explore the impact of psychosocial trauma on the academic well-being of adolescents in 4 public secondary schools of Solwezi district, Zambia

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the prevalence of psychosocial trauma among adolescents in 4 public secondary schools of Solwezi district, Zambia
2. To determine the causes of psychosocial trauma among the adolescents in 4 public schools of Solwezi district, Zambia
3. To examine the effects of psychosocial trauma on the academic well-being of the adolescents in 4 public schools of Solwezi district, Zambia
4. To establish strategies for enhancing academic well-being of the adolescents within the 4 public secondary schools of Solwezi district, Zambia.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How prevalent is psychosocial trauma in the four public Schools of Solwezi District, Zambia?
2. What are the causes of psychosocial trauma among the adolescents in the four public secondary schools of Solwezi, district in Zambia?
3. What are the psychosocial trauma effects on academic well-being of the adolescents in the four public secondary Schools in Solwezi, Zambia?
4. What are the possible strategies to enhance academic well-being of the adolescents within the 4 Solwezi District Public Schools, Zambia?.

Literature Review

The issue of psychosocial trauma is well-known in communities and educational institutions all across the world. Written, spoken, and electronic media frequently report high rates of psychosocial trauma episodes related to acute, chronic, and complex trauma in schools. Reviewing the literature on psychosocial trauma will include defining trauma. The DSM-7 exhibit 1.3-4 defines traumatic events as knowing that a close friend or relative has been affected by a traumatic event in addition to direct exposure (being a victim) and witnessing an incident (DSM-7) One of those may affect a person directly or indirectly. Psychosocial trauma refers to the widespread and severe suffering that people endure as a result of their interactions with one another and with society as a whole. This suffering can affect a person's mental health, and emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being in a particular macro- or micro-social environment (Chipanta et al., 2022).

Dangmann et al. (2021) conducted research in Norway on resilience and youth traumatic lives in 40 secondary schools. Their research aimed to explore the inner strength of the youth in traumatic situations. Dangmann and his team applied a cross-section study using questionnaires. The investigation revealed that 50% -90% rates of psychosocial trauma. The worst was that 6% - 40% showed the risk factors of mental health. Adolescents suffer more from bullying. Bullying has been in world literature for more than a century as seen in the Pedagogical Seminary book of (Burk 1897). In this study, they found that, in school environments in some parts of Norway, psychosocial trauma is caused by personal interactions, and family factors including divorce, family disruption, violence, and child abuse.

In China, Yang et al. (2022) studied 1607 adolescents from four secondary schools in Henan province using a cross-sectional survey and descriptive statistics for data analysis. The study showed the mean score for childhood abuse, and depression was 17.5, school connectedness 35.9, and psychosocial resilience was 26.0 correspondingly. The results showed that school connectedness is a factor in school achievement. The abused student may face a challenge in concentration and relationships in academic well-being. Adolescents who have been sexually abused may find it difficult to comprehend the information since the memory may have episodes of flashbacks of the negative event. In class, they may be daydreamer in a negative sense of emotional distress such as depression, stress, and social withdrawal. Healthy social being may create positive performance, and achievement in the school environment and outside school. On the contrary psychological resilience was also a significant sign of unbroken spirit in some adolescents despite the abuse some adolescents positively managed to survive.

Research Methodology

From the 620-target population, the researcher chose the representatives who met the study's eligibility standards using the sample size calculation from Yamane (1967), which has a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The number of elements sampled in disproportional stratified random sampling from each stratum was not equal to their population representation (Zulu, 2020). The sample size was 243 adolescents', and 7 members of staff were included in the sample size to enrich the study.

Qualitative data analysis, according to Khoa et al. (2023) is the process of gathering, modeling, and analyzing data in order to obtain information that reliably supports the study. This is a crucial and delicate period for the qualitative data gathered using the interview guide to be coded and categorized into themes in accordance with the study's goals.

Conversely, the quantitative data underwent analysis subsequent to coding through the utilization of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Using data tables, the researcher employed descriptive statistics to show mean, frequencies and percentages in a summary (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The study used inductive topic analysis to examine the semi-structured interview data. The data from audio recordings of interviews and feedback were transcribed, then interpreted.

Results and findings

The study managed to interview a total of 10 adolescent students and 7 teachers from the four public schools in Solwezi district, Zambia. Audio recordings were made in addition to in-person interviews. Field notes were routinely taken and the voice of each observed class was captured. The voice recordings were transcribed afterwards. All participants were asked to confirm that the transcriptions were accurate before the study began, and their consent was obtained. The number of participants for the qualitative data is displayed in the table without any responses. Nonetheless, a few responses were briefly cited in the presentation and discussion. The summary of responses was presented as follows in Table 4.

Prevalence of Psychosocial Trauma among Adolescents in Schools

The study sought to know the prevalence level of psychosocial trauma among the adolescents from the four selected schools in Solwezi district, Zambia. To achieve this, the respondents were asked to rate the prevalence of psychosocial trauma on a scale of 1 to 10. The quantitative responses summarized results were presented in Figure 3.

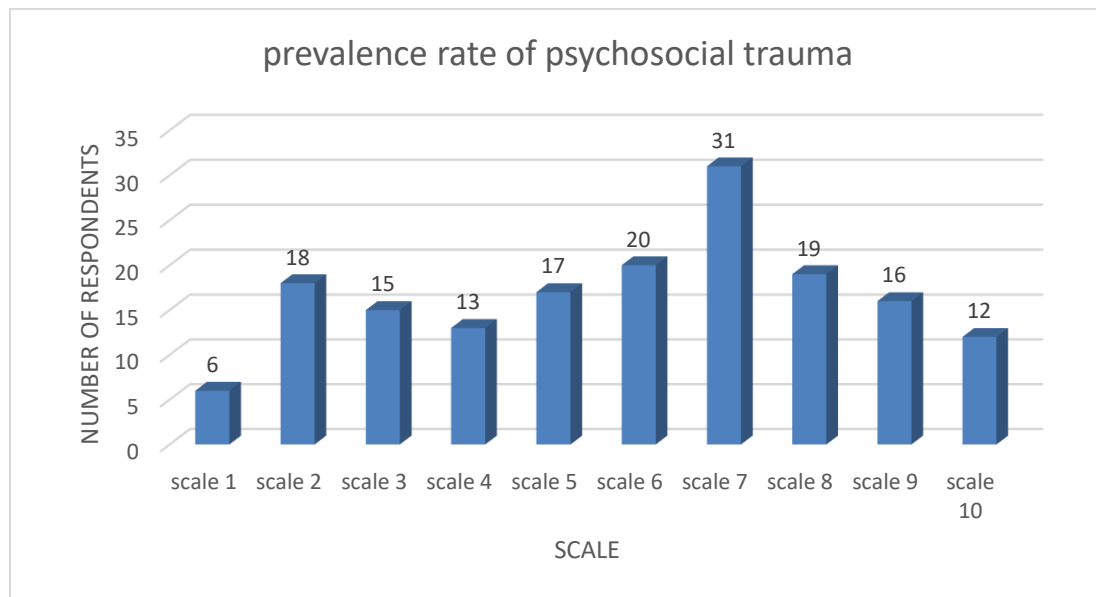


Figure 3: Prevalence rate of psychosocial trauma

The findings revealed that respondents had divergent opinions on the prevalence of psychosocial trauma among adolescents in schools in Solwezi district, Zambia. On average, the findings revealed 61.25% which interpreted as most and a concern of an alarming rate of psychosocial

trauma, as shown in Figure 3, with 98 respondents out of 160 using a scale of 0-6, giving a rate prevalence above six on average. A prevalence of 61.25% is significant; this implies half of the population studied experience psychosocial trauma, and it is potentially affecting their academic well-being. This study found prevalence rate as most compared to the 2014 Central Statistical Office results on psychosocial trauma prevalence, which was 24% in Solwezi, Zambia (CSO, 2014). The study is also aligned with Alozkan et al. (2023), who found psychosocial trauma intervention effects to be moderately offered as observed among the adolescents' population in Zambia

The interviews conducted on prevalence received various responses, with similar narratives, and the findings data supplemented from the interviewees most rated psychosocial trauma to be at 6 on the scale of 1 to 10 with narrations. For example, interviewee T1 affirmed the existence of psychosocial trauma and rated it at 6.

The prevalence of psychosocial issues in and around my school can be categorized as moderate to severe from what I have experienced and also observed in my class. Gender is a susceptibility to psychosocial trauma in my school, and the most common types of stressful events were hunger, domestic violence, distances covered to access school, and girls bullying. (Interview, 20 June 2024)

Participant T1 brought to the spotlight almost what other interviewees had expressed regarding the rate of psychosocial trauma. The observation aligned with the broader perception that there is an existence of psychosocial trauma, as indicated also in Kenya by Mbwai et al. (2020), who investigated direct and indirect witnessing of violence among adolescents in urban and rural settings. The study established that 46% of adolescent's experience psychosocial trauma.

Effects of Psychosocial Trauma on Academic Well-being

Feelings that emanate from Psychosocial Trauma experiences

The questions sought to establish the feelings that adolescents come from psychosocial trauma experiences and their impact on academic well-being. From the results, it was notable that the majority cited that they felt fear and wished not to pass through such a process. While others had feelings of isolation, sadness, loneliness, and missing their parents, anger, guilt, ashamedness, shyness, and depression.

Whereas others said that they felt like having no confidence, felt hurt with low self-esteem. Moreover, some said that they felt like failures, jealous, envious, and hopeless, absent minded, regrets and wanted to follow their mother who died. Whereas, others lacked appetite to eat, wanting to stop schooling, sleeping insomnia, hatred, having revenging thoughts, bad memories, self-hate, shameful feelings and lack of attention at the teacher. For instance, AS9 said “I feel ashamed, anger, anguishing, with emotions of abuses”. Whereas, AS7, narrated in those words, “I want to disappear to go somewhere else, stop school because I am not loved” (interview, 24 June 2024). Though, some felt frustrated, remorseful, and lacking compassion for those family members who took everything after the death of a breadwinner parent. Yet others faced anxiety, unhappy, absentee minded, irritated, curious, not loved, nervous, mental break down, infection of STIs and other diseases. Some felt like taking suicide, confused, hopeless and helpless, scared, humiliated, no future, felt stupid, poor appetite, not a well feeling, rejected with no sense of belonging, stressed, grief and discouraged and afraid of being punished. This implies that, many adolescents in these schools suffer from psychosocial trauma and this might affect their academic performance at school.

Possible Strategies for Enhancing Academic Well-being

How do you forget about the bad experiences and move on?

The theme question sought to know ways through which those respondents who went through bad experiences would forget and move on in their lives. The following were the suggestions that were obtained from the respondents;



Figure 7: Forgetting bad experiences in life

Findings in Figure 7, showed that majority of the adolescents in Solwezi District preferred playing majorly to forget bad experiences in their lives as compared to other methods. Furthermore, the study noted that while some preferred praying and seeking divine interventions and going to church, others would talk to close friends, whereas others resorted to forgetting and moving on. Yet others sought counsellor's advice and listening to both gospel secular music as a means of forgetting the bad experiences. The data is supported by qualitative data from AS 4, T1, and T2, who had common views on possible ways of enhancing academic well-being in a traumatic environment. According to T1, "it's important to encourage adolescents to talk openly about mental health and to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences". AS4 discussed sports, sensitization, counselling, and prayer saying, "whenever, I am sad because of my step mother shouting and insulting me I go play football". Furthermore, the findings correlate with the results of Kliziene et al. (2021), who investigated improving mental health and wellbeing in Lithuanian among the adolescents. The participants who were actively engaged in play activities had fewer symptoms of psychosocial trauma.

Conclusion

The study noted psychosocial trauma prevalence rate was most among the adolescent students which pose a serious concern in the four public schools in Solwezi district in Zambia. This was an indication that these adolescent students were going through stressful events in their lives that made them exposed and remained highly vulnerable to psychosocial trauma impacts on academic well-being.

The study observed that the most prominent causes of psychosocial trauma was socioeconomic and community factors. Factors such as high rates of domestic and gender-based violence caused direct trauma to adolescent students and indirectly their affected family and community members. Abuse and neglect of children had long-lasting psychological effects, impacting on children's development and mental health. Among many other notable causes were sexual abuse, misunderstanding, behavioral issues, bad relationships, and conflict on values of modern society.

Another significant finding of the study is that psychosocial trauma affected grossly the students' school connectedness, their learning efficacy, emotional engagement in terms of forming good relationships with fellow students and learning enthusiasm. Moreover, trauma led to a drop in class performance, whereby some students were not able to finish up their class assignments, some even failed to sit for their evaluation exams. Even those that managed to sit the exams almost half of the class failed to attain the standard targets. Most of the adolescents in this study showed negative sense of self, making it difficult for perception, motivation and difficulties to engage in learning. Adversely adolescents' attention, memory and cognitive are reduced the ability to focus is mostly affected.

When considering the variables of psychosocial trauma and academic well-being violence, death of the significant ones followed by grief, school walking distance, and hunger contribute to the aggravating of the students and their failure rate and attainment of poor grades. This study needed both variables for the authenticity of the findings to test psychosocial trauma and measure academic well-being. The study observed that psychosocial trauma contributes severely to the challenges of academic well-being of the students. This in turn led to the student's low academic achievement that reflected their poor academic wellbeing.

The study noted that improving the school learning environment, integration of more counselling facilities, employing qualified and trained teachers, mentorship programs and inclusion of

extracurricular activities like sports, in this context sport is highly valued in therapeutic activities to offer an alternative while violence is highlighted as the number one cause of psychosocial trauma. Sport is not only football but it can be any moral activity that provides physical and mental health, music and artwork would be essential in addressing the challenges of psychosocial trauma among the adolescent students and enhancing strategies for academic well-being in Solwezi district, Zambia. There is considerable evidence that psychological trauma has a detrimental impact on adolescents' academic well-being in Solwezi, Zambia. Encouragement of physical activity, such as sports, and serious consideration of therapy and other important forms of socioeconomic support may improve academic wellbeing and make a positive impact on the social, health, and educational sectors.

Recommendations of the study

Based on the findings of this study, the study made the following recommendations.

1. The administrations should conduct termly sensitization workshops in their schools on psychosocial trauma awareness for all the teachers and support staff, which should be facilitated by mental health professionals.
2. The community of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) should organize community psychosocial trauma clinics with the counsellors, psycho-spiritual therapists, and psychologists for all the parents on trauma-informed workshops annually.
3. The schools should have adolescents' psychosocial trauma and academic well-being clinics where students are encouraged to come and discuss psychosocial trauma-related concerns. This will facilitate group counselling and peer support groups with the focus on activities such as sports alleviant psychosocial trauma and improve academic well-being.

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