

Psychological Variables as Correlates of Incestuous Behaviour among Adolescents of Reproductive Age in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between psychological factors and incestuous behaviours among adolescent of reproductive age in Oyo State. A total of five hundred adolescents in senior school one in Ibadan constituted the sample for the study. Their ages ranged between 12 and 18 years with a mean of 15 years and standard deviation of 4.1. The instruments used were author-constructed questionnaires with 0.76 and 0.79 reliability co-efficient respectively. The data obtained were analysed using multiple regression analysis. The result indicated that significant relationship existed between parenting style and emotional stability but not with affection style. The results further indicated that a combination of the independent variables significantly predicted incestuous behaviours. Based on the findings, it was recommended that, guidance counsellors, psychologists and social workers should take cognizance of those variables that have been found to influence incestuous behaviours among the adolescents.

Key words: Incestuous behaviour, adolescents, parenting style, emotional stability and affection style

INTRODUCTION

Background information: Most adolescents are naturally curious about some aspect of sex and are likely to ask questions almost from the time they attain maturity or puberty. The challenge for the parents is to give answers that match the child's intellectual and emotional level and do not tell the child more than what he or she is really to hear.

Psychologists and others in the helping professions recognize sexual abuse as the hardest to spot when compared to child's physical abuse, emotional abuse and child's neglect. The neglect and physical abuse of a child are easier to determine, while incestuous relationship and behaviour as a form of sexual abuse is the most devastating forms of a child abuse. Studies show that majority of the offenders are trusted members of the family.

Incest often goes unreported because its victims are warned not to tell, or if they tell, they are not believed. Separation or absence, parental modeling, family history of anti-social behaviour and disturbances of parent-child attachment have repeatedly arisen in the literature as important predictors of incestuous relationship and behaviour. In fact some authors see the practice as a component of African culture^[1] in the

same way as it is with other groups of the world^[2]. An incestuous behaviour may therefore be defined as any overtly sexual contact between people who are either closely related or perceive themselves to be – if that special trust that exist between a child and parent figure or sibling is violated by a sexual act, that act becomes incestuous^[3].

The majority of incestuous behaviour on children and the adolescents in particular are by someone they know, 90-98% of the abusers are male, a large proportion of whom are married and have children. The risk is higher when the child lives with a step-foster or adoptive father. Incestuous behaviour comes from every class, profession, racial and religious background. It is also seen as symptomatic of a family in crisis and unless it is dealt with, the victims will be continually abused and damaged. The wounds of the victims will bleed throughout life unless properly treated^[4].

A large number of incest suffered in silence. Incestuous behaviour is seen as a violation of the person and of human and legal codes of behaviour. It is an anger and a pathological assertion of power. Although incestuous behaviour is a sexual assault, it has more to do with aggression than with sexuality^[5]. Victims of incestuous behaviour can be any age, the greatest danger exist for women aged 10-25.

Review of literature: Incestuous behaviour as a form of sexual abuse among parents and particularly adolescent boys and girls in the Nigerian society is a problem that has not been seriously addressed.

A survey study carried out by Ford and Beech^[6] reveals that incestuous relation were significantly common between adolescent brother and sister and more pathological is between father and daughter.

In a well known study on sex offenders, Gebhard and his associates^[7] found physically mature daughters tended to be very devout, moralistic and fundamentalists in other religious beliefs. There is also evidence that the structure of families in which incest occurs is unusually patriarchic and traditional, especially with the subservient position of women relative to men^[8]. There is in addition parental neglect of and emotional distance from the children^[9]. Furthermore, it is believed that incest is more prevalent when the mother is absent or disabled^[10]; this may happen because mothers otherwise usually protect their daughters from interfamilial sexual abuse.

Stone, examined data from a focus-group of adolescents from cities across the United States indicate that they lack accurate knowledge about incestuous behaviours and the laws governing it, describing it as medically dangerous, emotionally damaging and widely illegal. Findings also revealed that anti-social views, conservative morality and religious beliefs are primary sources of adolescents' attitudes towards sexual abuse. Participants expressed personal opposition to incest, but supported its continued legality as a woman's choice. Although, most of the teenagers expressed positive feelings towards their parents they did not feel that mandatory parental involvement would be helpful and in some cases could be harmful.

In recent years, Wolfe^[11] noticed that incestuous relationship among the adolescents are greeted and treated with threats and bribes to keep the victim quiet, from reporting. Weber^[12] observed in his research that, shame and guilt abound within the home and the family may well be struggling with other serious offences when incestuous relationship is noticed among children. Studies further confirm that, incest victim's mother is in a particular difficult situation, sometimes torn between her husband and the child, sometimes facing financial uncertainty, threat to leave home or be arrested. It is impossible to know what percentage of incest cases are not reported to the police, but it is safe to say that it is sizeable, perhaps the great majority^[13].

Incest is now acknowledge to occur much often than had earlier been assumed. A study of 796 college students found-out that an astounding 19 percent of the women and 8.6% of the men had been sexually victimized as children. Of the victimized women, 28% had incestuous relations, of the men, 23%^[10].

Verlever and Donald^[14] examined enhancement of self-esteem among female adolescent incest victims. A controlled comparison report findings from a therapeutic intervention consisting of homogenous group therapy/clients. Female incest victims in the experimental group (N = 15) showed a significant increase in positive self-esteem and developed a significantly increased knowledge of human sexuality, birth control and venereal disease when compared to the control group (N = 15).

Phelan and Patricia^[15] investigated the process of incest: Biological father and stepfamilies. The study compared characteristics of incest biological father and daughter families (N = 46) and stepfather and stepdaughter families (N = 56). Biological fathers are more frequently engaged in full intercourse, more frequently involved multiple daughters and more frequently began the sexual activity when their daughters were adolescent than did step fathers.

Above all, rape, sexual molestation, harassment and other sexual attacks by strangers, however traumatic, are usually single events, but incest may continue for years with intercourse taking place daily or several times a week^[5].

Given the above background and the rumours, speculations and mysteries about incestuous practice, the need for its study has become inevitable at a time like this.

Statement of the problem: Incestuous behaviour among families and particularly adolescents of reproductive age is an issue of great concern to parents, guidance counsellors, educators, school authority, religious bodies and the society at large.

It has become an open secret to observe the adolescents engaged in an undefined sexual relationship; engaged in sexual behaviour without considering family background and some have been carrying unwanted pregnancy; while some drop-out of school and others in suicide attempts.

The extent of the problem cannot be determined because, most incestuous behaviours are not reported or prosecuted by the law enforcement agent and where they are apprehended by the law enforcement's agent, the victims are threatened or bribed by the perpetrators to deny the act.

Purpose of the study: This study examined the relationship between psychological factors and incestuous relationship among adolescents of reproductive age in Oyo State, Nigeria.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were answered:

- To what extent would psychological factors (as parenting style, emotional stability and affection style) when combined predict incestuous behaviour among adolescents of reproductive age in Nigeria?
- What is the relative contribution of the factors to the prediction of incestuous behaviour in Nigeria?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design: This study employed a descriptive survey research design in which data were collected through questionnaire from the respondents on the variable studied.

Subjects: The target population for the study comprised secondary school adolescents in senior school one in Oyo State. A total of 500 subjects were randomly drawn from five Local Government Areas out of a total of thirty-three Local Governments in Oyo State. In all, a total of one hundred adolescent students participated in the study in each of the five Local Government Areas of Oyo State.

Sample and sampling procedure: A total of twenty-one secondary schools in Oyo State were stratified on the basis of Local Government Areas. A simple random sampling technique was used to select five schools that participated in the study. In each of the selected school, simple random sampling technique was also used to pick one class of senior school one that participated in the study. The researcher therefore used stratified cluster sampling procedure to assemble the sample for the study.

In all, the sample consisted of five hundred participants (males 278 and 222 females) from five Local Governments Areas. Their ages ranged between 12 years and 18 years. Their mean age is 15 years and the standard deviation of their ages is 4.1.

Research instrument: The two instruments used to collect data for the study were: (i) Adolescents Incestuous Self-Evaluation Scale (AISES) and Self-Responding Psychological Inventory with three sub-inventories. The sub-inventories are:

- Parenting style inventory
- Emotional stability inventory
- Affection style inventory

The two instruments were author-constructed. Both instruments were meant to collect information on the level of adolescent involvement in incestuous behaviour.

The Adolescent Incestuous Self-Evaluation Scale (AISES) contained 20-item responses and the Self-responding psychological inventory contained 36-item responses as parenting style inventory = 11 items, emotional stability inventory = 15 items and affection style inventory = 10 items.

The instrument contains 4 points likert-type items of strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point). The higher the scores (above 160) the higher the level of adolescents involvement in incestuous sexual relationship and behaviour. The internal consistency and revalidation reliability of AISES and SRPI are 0.76 and 0.79 and 0.75 and 0.78, respectively.

Reliability of Adolescent Incestuous Self-Evaluation Scale (AISES): The AISES adopted the cronbach alpha to measure the internal consistency of the instrument. The result outcome had 0.3342 for eleven items (parenting style); 0.2567 for fifteen items (emotional stability); 0.3988 for ten items (affection style).

The incestuous behaviour scale equally had the standardized items alpha of 0.7046 for twenty-items. The item total correlation for parenting style, 0.1438 to 0.2077; Emotional Stability, 0.1167 to 1677 and Affection Style, 0.4183 to 0.5429.

Procedure and data collection: The participants for the study were administered the two questionnaire with the assistance of two guidance counsellors. The collected questionnaires were scored and the data obtained from them were analysed to answer the research questions. On the whole, 500 copies of the questionnaires were distributed and returned fully filled, giving a return rate of 100%.

Data analysis: Data analysis involved using multiple regression analysis procedure to examine the relationship between Incestuous Behaviours (Dependent Variable) and Psychological Factors as Parenting Style, Emotional Stability and Affection Style (Independent Variables).

RESULTS

Research question 1: Using a combination of the independent variables to predict incestuous behaviour and relationship among adolescents of reproductive age.

- Psychological variables: Parenting style, emotional stability and affection style
- Dependent variable: Incestuous behaviour

Table 1: Regression analysis on sample data using a combination of independent variables to predict incestuous behaviour among adolescents

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------|
| Multiple R | = | 0.17169 | | | |
| Multiple R-Square | = | 0.02948 | | | |
| Adjusted R-Square | = | 0.01767 | | | |
| Standard Error | = | 3.72163 | | | |
| Analysis of variance | | | | | |
| Sources of variation | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F-ratio | P |
| Regression | 207.38894 | 6 | 34.56482 | | |
| Residual | 6828.29906 | 493 | 13.85051 | 2.49556 | <0.05 |
| Total | 7035.6889 | 499 | | | |

Table 2: Testing the significance of regression weights on relative contributions of independent variables to the prediction of incestuous behaviours

| Variable description | B | SEB | BETA | T | P |
|----------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|--------|------|
| Parenting style | 0.41351 | 0.019078 | 0.096987 | 2.167 | 0.05 |
| Emotional stability | -0.081072 | 0.038281 | -0.094489 | -2.118 | 0.05 |
| Affection style | -.020790 | 0.031058 | -0.030762 | -0.669 | N.S. |
| Constant | 23.351133 | 1.412689 | - | 16.530 | - |

* N.S. = Not Significant at 0.05 level, p<.05 Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 3: Summary of inter-correlational matrices showing the relationships between affection style, emotional stability, parenting style and incestuous behaviour

| Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------------|-------|------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| Incestuous behaviour | 22.93 | 3.75 | 1.000 | | | |
| Affection style | 25.06 | 3.27 | -0.03 | 1.000 | | |
| Emotional stability | 25.01 | 4.38 | **-.019 | 0.08 | 1.000 | |
| Parenting style | 19.12 | 8.89 | **0.19 | 0.18 | 0.09 | 1.000 |

N = 500, Note: Correlation are significant at 0.05 alpha level, ** Stands for correlations significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 1 indicate that a combination of the three independent variables (parenting style, emotional stability and affection style) as predictors of incestuous behaviours among adolescents yielded a coefficient of Multiple Regression (R) 0.01767 and a Multiple R-Square of 0.02948 accounting for 1.8% of the variation in adolescents incestuous behaviour. The table also shows the F-ratio of the ANOVA as 2.49556 significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Thus, the results show that, the three independent variables when taken together were significant predictors of adolescents' incestuous behaviour.

Research question 2: Relative contribution of independent variables to the prediction of incestuous behaviour among adolescents.

The results on Table 2 showed that, parenting style contributed significantly to incestuous behaviour ($b = 0.10$; $t = 27$; $p < 0.05$). The result of the Regression Weights implies that, Parenting Style accounted for 10% in the prediction of incestuous behaviour among the adolescents. The result further showed that, Emotional Stability had a significant contribution to incestuous behaviour ($B = -0.09$; $t = -2.2$; $p < 0.05$). The findings also indicated that, Emotional Stability accounted for 9%. The

negative significance of emotional stability means that, the lower the emotional stability the higher the adolescent involvement in incestuous behaviour.

However, the results indicated that Affection Style ($B = -0.03$; $t = -0.67$; $p > 0.05$) was not a significant predictor of incestuous behaviour.

The findings from the study on Table 3 revealed that there was not significant relationship between Affec-tion Style and Incestuous behaviour ($r = 498$) = -0.03 ; $p > 0.05$. There was a significant negative relationship between Emotional Stability and Incestuous behaviour ($r (498) = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$). This means that, the lower the emotional stability, the higher the incestuous behaviour. The findings also indicated a significant positive relationship between parenting style and incestuous behaviour $r (498) = 0.18$; $p < 0.02$. The result implies that, the higher the parenting style, the higher the incestuous behaviour. Therefore, the summary predictors variables correlated fairly well with each other.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from this study indicated that the three independent variables (parenting style, emotional stability and affection style) when taken together were effective in the prediction of incestuous behaviour among the adolescents. The result clearly indicated that 1.8% variation in adolescent incestuous behaviour was determined by the three psychological variables. This relationship is low as shown by the co-efficient of multiple regression ($R = 0.1767$) which is significant at 0.05 alpha level. The results support the findings that, the higher the scores of the responses of the adolescents, the higher their level of involvement in incestuous behaviour.

The pattern of association observed between psychological variables and incestuous behaviour is consistent with the position of Brownmiller^[16]; Gagnon^[17]; Hudson^[18]; Madonna, Vanscoyle and Jones^[9]; Lilichman and Seth^[19] and Finkelhor^[20].

The result on Table 2 revealed that the contribution made by each independent variable on the prediction of incestuous behaviour among the adolescents is shown by the T-ratio values associated with the different variables shown on Table 2.

The contribution of Emotional Stability to the prediction of incestuous behaviour among the adolescents accounted for 9% variation which is significant at 0.05 alpha level. The pattern of association observed between emotional stability and incestuous behaviour is consistent with the pattern of Campos and Sternberg^[21]; Campos and Bareth^[22]; Averill^[23] and

Wilson and Lawson^[24]. The views of Abel and Backer; Batzer and *et al.*^[25] and Scally and Marolla were in line with the above observed association, while Zajonc^[26]; Weber^[12] criticized the consistency of the above findings and position.

The parenting style contributed 10% variation of adolescent incestuous behaviours. The findings are consistent with those of Vander and Zandern; Warden^[27]; Gile^[28] and Roek^[29]. Their positions point in the direction of significant positive relationship existing between parenting style and incestuous behaviour. These findings are consistent with and extend patterns are in line with adolescents incestuous behaviours-Courtois^[30]; Harman and Hirschman^[31], while Hall; Alford and Kasper^[32]; Bazter *et al.*^[25] criticized the consistency of the above findings and position.

The non-significant relationship between affection style and incestuous behaviour among the adolescents was supported by Maslow^[33]; Farberow *et al.*^[34]; Prusoth and Myers^[35]. The non-significant position of the predictor variable and incestuous behaviours was in consistent with those of Bell and Chapman^[36]; Barabee and Newshall *et al.*^[37] and Byers and Jenny^[38]. This consistency was however criticized by Stome, Rebecca *et al.*^[39].

Implication for counselling: This study has a multi-dimensional implications for the Adolescents, the parents and the guidance counsellors.

In Nigeria, like in any other country of the world, the issue of incestuous behaviour is increasing at an alarming rate particularly among the adolescents. Therefore, social and sexual improvement programmes should be designed to take cognizance of gender perspective, which are largely defined by social and cultural conditions that shape the adolescents view of sexuality and which in turn play an important role in their access to information and services.

Also, future interventions for over adolescents should take into consideration the psychological and social pressures that this group often faces, survey their preferred channels of information and their after provide ample dissemination strategies that would foster positive change.

The parent is primarily responsible for character formation and behaviour. Hence, this study will help the parents from early childhood, build-up a healthy attitude toward sex on their children, rather than tell them alarmist tales to frighten them off relations and strangers. With the transparency and openness of the parents, it helps to develop trust and open relationship which makes it possible for the child to discuss sexual approaches made

by an adult, or older girl or boy. It is therefore, inevitable that parents, should be armed with information on sexual matters for the adolescents.

The guidance counsellors are the professionals in the helping relationships. Individuals and groups are assisted in self-understanding, develop capacities for wise and realistic decisions, overcome personality maladjustment and other personal-social problems. Therefore, this study will enable guidance counsellors to plan, implement and evaluate the actions and consequences of the adolescents on sexual matters and other related problems. It also encouraged disclosure of past and on-going in all forms of sexual abuses for intervention and protection.

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