

Effects of Trauma on the Mental Fortitude of University Adolescent Students in The University of Buea

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Abstract

The article focused on "Effects of Trauma on the Mental Fortitude of University Adolescents students in the University of Buea". This study was guided by the following specific research objectives; to find out the effect of fear on the mental fortitude of University Adolescent students in the University of Buea, to investigate the effect of depression on the mental fortitude of University Adolescents in the University of Buea, to investigate the effect of anxiety on the mental fortitude of University Adolescent students in the University of Buea, and to find out the effect of dissociation on the mental fortitude of University Adolescent students in the University of Buea. The study made use of cross-sectional survey research design with a sample size of 200 students from the University of Buea. The questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study. The descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected from respondents done and presented with the use of simple percentages and tables. The findings of this study revealed that fear affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea, Findings also indicated that depression negatively affect adolescents mental fortitude in the University of Buea. Findings equally unveiled that anxiety affect adolescents mental fortitudes in the University of Buea. Lastly, findings revealed that that dissociation affects the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea. Based on the findings, it was concluded that trauma affect the mental fortitude of university adolescents in the University of Buea. Based on the findings, it was recommended that services should be put in place to counsel adolescent students when faced with trauma so that they can build in them positivity for positive health. Social support is important to build in them mental toughness.

Keywords: adolescents; trauma; fear; depression; anxiety; dissociation and mental fortitude.

Introduction

Trauma are stressors that develops from being exposed to an incident in which there is a threat to survival and adaptation (Silove, Steels & Psychol, 2006). Trauma is a normal reaction to an extreme event (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service, 2007). It is important to

note that it is not necessarily the event itself that causes trauma, but a person's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experience surrounding that event. Trauma is not purely emotional, there are also physiological and neurological components (Saltzman, Holden, & Holahan, 2005). Typical reactions to traumatic experiences include fear and anxiety, sleep disturbances, physical complaints (such as headaches or stomach pain), antisocial behavior, depression and sadness, and fear of separation from loved ones (Boscarino, 1996).

Trauma experienced by adolescents is particularly important because significant physical and emotional growth is occurring at this age (Hales & Yudofsky, 2003). The stressors that adolescents' encounter will help to shape their growth and perspective, and can have long-lasting impacts (Crane & Clements, 2005). There is evidence that the stress associated with traumatic events can change major structural components of the central nervous system and the neuroendocrine system (Shaw, 2000). Severe traumatic stress affects the chemicals in the brain and can change brain structures, leaving a lasting effect (Spear, 2000).

The impact of a traumatic event differs depending on the type of disaster or trauma, its suddenness, and its extent, as well as the person's social surroundings, his or her past experiences, and his or her culture (Silove, 2006). Teens may experience trauma in different ways depending on their stage of development. There is no way to predict how someone will react to a traumatic event because we are all so different.

Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in school-aged children and adolescents worldwide (Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler & Angold, 2003). Parfitt (1990) maintain that anxiety-related symptoms can help some athletes in terms of mental preparation and performance, although some researchers disagree with the definition of anxiety that facilitates performance, arguing that this premise was fundamentally confused with negative emotions and that a number of top anxiety researchers mislabeled positive emotions as anxiety (Burton, 1990).

All children experience fear during adolescence, including fear of the dark, monsters, and strangers (National Scientific Council on the

Developing Child (NSCDC, 2010). These fears are normal aspects of development and are temporary in nature. In contrast, threatening circumstances that persistently elicit fear and anxiety predict significant risk for adverse long-term outcomes from which children do not recover easily. Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, significant maltreatment, and the persistent threat of violence in the community are examples of such threatening circumstances in a child's environment (NSCDC, 2010).

Depression forms a major part of this public health problem with a life time prevalence of about 17-18 percent in the western world (World Health Organization, 2018). It is the third leading burden of disease worldwide and the first in middle-and high-income countries World Health Organization, 2018).

Young people affected by poor mental fortitude, such as depression and anxiety, have an increased risk of other kinds of poor mental health, as well as substance dependence, suicide and unemployment (Merikangas & Burstein, 2010). Depression is more common among women and girls than among men and boys but still comprises a common problem for men (Monirpour, 200). Poor mental fortitude is an umbrella term and generally includes self-reported symptoms of anxiousness or distress as well as mental disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Dissociation is a broad range of experiences linked to feeling of strangeness that can take various forms such as unfamiliarity or detachment and can occur in relation to various domains such as one's body, emotions, or external environment ((Loewenstein, 2018). Dissociation has been most studied in relation to trauma. However, dissociation might be best considered a set of transdiagnostic experiences (Schimmenti and Caretti, 2014) that are common and clinically significant in their own right. Dissociation has been linked with depression anxiety, panic disorder, paranoia, worry and sleep difficulties (Giesbrecht and Merck-elbach, 2004).

Adolescence is a time of social and emotional development. Adolescence is a time of increased brain development (Hales & Yudofsky, 2003). Struggling with the effects of a traumatic event during adolescence can lead to social isolation, declining school performance, behavioral problems, and other issues that can impact both current quality of life and future functioning.

Problem Statement

Most adolescents in Sub Saharan Africa are very resilient due to the challenges and hurdles they face in their life journey. Due to hardship, high rate of unemployment, poverty, they are vulnerable and find themselves engaging in deviant behaviours like taking drugs, alcoholism, cyber crime, promiscuity, violence, just to name a few. This often comes with consequences where some commit suicide, drop out of school. This is because of the lack of mental toughness and fortitude to thrive with life.

Literature Review

Trauma refers to response to event in which a person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the integrity of self or others event (Caporino et al, 2003). Trauma refers to the physical and emotional response of an individual to events that threaten the life or physical/psychological integrity of that person or of someone critically important to him or her (Porter, Lawson, & Bigler, (2005).

Trauma can be divided into two different types: event trauma and process trauma. An event trauma is a sudden, unexpected, stressful event that is limited in its duration and location. A hurricane or a fire, for instance, is an event trauma. Process trauma is defined as continued exposure to a long-lasting stressor, such as war or physical abuse (Shaw, 2000). Typical reactions to traumatic experiences include fear and anxiety, sleep disturbances, physical complaints (such as headaches or stomach pain), antisocial behavior, depression and sadness, and fear of separation from loved ones (Boscarino 1996).

First, adolescents are at high risk for experiencing traumatic events (Crane & Clements 2005). In addition to the traumatic stressors encountered by adults, adolescents are also at risk of trauma related to bullying and embarrassment in school, violence in the home and community, experimentation with drugs, and other risky situations (Shaw 2000). In the course of discovering their identities, some adolescents engage in risky behavior and power struggles with parents and experience wide-ranging emotions (Hales & Yudofsky 2003). However, because of the behavioral issues that occur during adolescence, people may overlook the emotional needs of this population (Crane & Clements 2005).

Adolescence, a developmental period between ages 10–19 years, is a period in which individuals' transit from childhood to adulthood. It involves the main transformations in the domain of physical, psychological, social, and cognitive development. This change is associated with a state of role confusion, high-level stress, and emotional instability (World Health Organization, 2017).

Adolescent development is a time of moving from the immaturity of childhood in to the maturity of a young adult (Arnett, 1999). Adolescent development is categorized into four major aspects, biological, emotional, cognitive and social (Kangan & Gumbiner, 1990). Hall (1904) consider adolescents as youths who are merely experiencing a change in human experience. Some of the characteristics that defined adolescent include youths with, a higher level of attention seeking, engaging in risky behaviors, and a strong dependence on friendships.

Mental fortitude refers to the idea of being able to push past failures by remaining positive and competitive. It also involves training and preparing oneself to be mentally ready for whatever challenge comes our way (Fader, 2022). Mental fortitude appears to contain four critical attributes including motivation, coping with pressure, concentration, and confidence. Mental fortitude is a form of emotional mastery and it is a skill one can develop and improve on (Crane & Clements, 2005). The ability to find an opportunity in any challenge is a hallmark of mental fortitude. Adolescents with mental fortitude know that they are on a path that will bring them fulfillment and this allow them to create an extraordinary life.

Gould, Hodge, Peterson and Petlichkoff (1987) posits that mental fortitude as the most important psychological attribute in determining adolescent success. Jones, Hanton and Connaughton (2007), reported 30 attributes of mental fortitude and proposed a framework on how these attributes can be used. Specifically, the framework consists of four separate dimensions (that is attitude/mindset, training, competition, and post-competition) and offers insights into which of the attributes are necessary in the different settings.

Jones and Moorehouse (2007) provided a useful practical framework based on the attributes of mental fortitude research that categorizes the various attributes into the four pillars of mental fortitude (that

is motivation, self-confidence, attentional focus, coping with pressure).

Method

The cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study; and with a sample of 200 adolescents selected across some faculties in the University of Buea, Cameroon. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire.

Sample Description

S/N	FACULTIES (8)	Student Population
1	Faculty of Arts	1423
2	Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine	1545
3	Faculty of Education	2525
4	Faculty of Engineering and Technology	1024
5	Faculty of Health Sciences	1223
6	Faculty of Science	2423
7	Faculty of Social and Management Sciences	6534
8	Faculty of Laws and Political Science	7723
	COLLEGES (2)	
9	College of Technology	680
10	Higher Technical Teachers' Training College, Kumba	450
	SCHOOL (1)	
11	Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters	324
	Total	27874

Table 1: Population of the Study.

The target population is made up of all students of the Faculty of Education, Law and Political Sciences, Social and Management Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science as seen in table 2 below.

S/N	FACULTIES	Student Population
1	Faculty of Arts	1423
2	Faculty of Education	2525
3	Faculty of Science	2423
4	Faculty of Social and Management Sciences	6534
5	Faculty of Laws and Political Science	7723
	Total	20628

Table 2: Target Population of the Study.

The accessible population is made up of all level 200, 300 and 400 students of the Faculty of Education, Laws and Political Sciences, Social and Management Sciences as seen below in table 3.

S/N	FACULTIES	Student Population
1	Faculty of Education	2011
2	Faculty of Social and Management Sciences	5823
3	Faculty of Laws and Political Science	6780
	Total	14614

Table 3: Accessible Population of the Study.

N/S	Faculty	Total
1	Education	60
2	Social and Management Sciences	65
3	Laws and Political Sciences	75
	Total	200

Table 4: Sample Population.

Analysis of demographic information

This provides information on the respondents who were part of the study. The characteristics were faculty, level of studies, sex, age range, and religion.

Characteristic		n	%
Faculty	Education	50	25.0
	SMS	50	25.0
	LPS	50	25.0
	Science	50	25.0
	Total	200	100.0
Level of study	200	33	16.5
	300	64	32.0
	400	103	51.5
	Total	200	100.0
Sex	Male	79	39.5
	Female	121	60.5
	Total	200	100.0
Age range	16-18	56	28.0
	19-21	144	72.0
	Total	200	100.0
Income	High	19	9.5
	Moderate	75	37.5
	Low	106	53.0
	Total	200	100.0

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to demographic characteristics.

Findings

This provides a summary of the major findings of the study as indicated on table 6 below.

Research Questions	Comment
Research question on: To what extent does fear affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea?	The findings revealed that majority (84.3%) students agreed that fear affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea.
Research question one: To what extent does depression affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea?	The findings revealed that that majority (78.6%) adolescents agreed that depression affect adolescents' mental fortitude in the University of Buea.
Research question one: To what extent does anxiety affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea?	The findings revealed that majority (64.9%) adolescents agreed that anxiety has an effect on adolescents mental fortitudes in the University of Buea.
Research question one: To what extent does dissociation affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea?	The findings revealed reveal that majority (76.8%) adolescents agreed that dissociation affects the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea.

Table 6: Summary of the major findings of the study as indicated.

Discussion

Fear and adolescent students' mental fortitude

Findings on research objective one revealed that majority of the students indicated that fear affect the mental fortitude of adolescents in the University of Buea. The finding is in line with the Systems Theory of Trauma by Joanie Connors (2006). This theory explains that traumatic change is seen as neither good nor bad, and as much a positive force as well as a negative one. Traumatic change can be positive when it leads to greater strength and flexibility, and to higher levels of functioning, but this is seldom noted. People who have experienced losses in childhood often are better able to cope with loss later in life.

Depression and adolescent students' mental fortitude

This findings in line with research objective two revealed that most students indicated depression negatively affect adolescents' mental fortitude in the University of Buea. These findings are supported by the Expanded crisis theory by Gilliland & James (1993) which explains that crises are seen as a state of psychological disequilibrium. Here, crisis is a result of distorted thinking related to an event, not the event itself used to help people change their perception of the crisis even. This theory holds that anyone can fall victim to transient psychological symptoms if the right combination of developmental, psychological, sociological, environmental, and situational determinants exists.

Anxiety and adolescent mental fortitude

These finding revealed that anxiety affect adolescent students' mental fortitude. It matches with the Systems Theory of Trauma by Joanie Connors (2006) explains that children who have moderate exposure to childhood diseases tend to have higher resistance to

disease later in life, and that people who have experienced losses in childhood often are better able to cope with loss later in life and vice versa.

Dissociation and adolescent students' mental fortitude

The finding revealed that dissociation affect the mental fortitude of adolescents. These findings are supported by that of Emma, Cernis, Robin, Evans, Anke, Ehlers & Freeman (2021) who conducted a study on Dissociation in relation to other mental health conditions and found that dissociation is connected to many mental health disorders.

Conclusion

The conclude this study attempted to investigate to concept of trauma on the mental fortitude of adolescents with focus on fear, anxiety, depression, dissociation. The study found that elements of trauma affect the mental fortitude of adolescents either positively or negatively that affect their mental health and they need coping strategies to overcome the stressors of life. The findings concluded that adolescents possessed elements of mental fortitude or toughness that can enable them overcome trauma and life-threatening situations. So positive mental toughness is needed for adolescents to cope with today's life adversities.

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