

**SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL  
ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA**

By

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**Abstract**

*Social withdrawal was predictors of self-harm and suicide ideation which are threats to security of life of secondary school adolescents in Nigeria. This paper discussed social withdrawal behaviour among adolescents in Nigerian Secondary Schools. Secondary source of data collection was used. The information was gathered from print resources and online publications, journals, articles by well established institutions and organizations. The paper identified social withdrawal behaviour of self-harm, depression and suicide ideation as risk factors for insecurity of life secondary school adolescents in Nigeria. The implication include that social withdrawal behaviours are mostly common among adolescents than Nigerian adults. Social withdrawal affects mostly males than females' in-school adolescents. Emotional development of socially withdrawn children was poorer across all ages, the counsellor should assist adolescent who shows symptoms of emotion imbalance to develop coping mechanisms to face challenges of life headlong rather than running away from it. In order to finding plausible solution to social withdrawal (Self-harm and Suicide Ideation) concerns. The paper suggests that guidance and counselling services should be mandatory for secondary school adolescents, government should employ trained counsellors and posted to all educational levels in the country, the Ministry of Education should organise seminars and training for secondary school counsellors in Nigeria. This would equip them with skills on how to detect signs of social withdrawal among adolescents through self-examination, self-evaluation and analysis of alternatives. The school counsellor should used transactional analysis and assertiveness techniques to assist adolescents with social withdrawal behaviur in secondary schools across the country.*

**Key Words:** Adolescents, Counselling, Depression, Insecurity, Suicide Ideation, Self-Harm, Social Withdrawal.

**Introduction**

Nigeria has been witnessing increase waves of insecurity to life and properties in almost all the states of the federation in the recent times. There was Boko Haram insurgency in the North, agitation for resource control in the east and kidnapping as well as banditry in the

southern part of the country. Governments at various levels are making efforts at tackling the security issues before the outbreak of covid'19 and economic recession which worsening the security situation in the country, the end SARS protest and ASSU strike have compounded the already security concerns in the country because there was insecurity almost everywhere. Insecurity is when citizens' life and property are no more safe inside and outside their environment. Insecurity in Nigeria goes beyond the aforementioned scenarios; the researcher will like to be aligned with Hassan (2014) who defined insecurity as a negative feeling involving fear, anxiety and uncertainty. This could lead to social withdrawal behaviour

According to Rubin (2021), social withdrawal is a lack of peer interactions and distancing self from the mix of peers, colleague and all social activities in the school and in the environment. Generally, it is belief that adolescence period is an energetic time for the adolescents and it is expected that at this period, interpersonal and intra-personal relationships is necessary for the development of social skills. Adolescents may isolate themselves from peers or school activities due to poor communication skills, fear of embarrassment, anxieties, among other. Some of the risk factors of social withdrawal are depression, anxiety, victimization, and rejection by peers, exclusion from social gathering or activities among others (Rubin & Tuscano, 2021).

Social withdrawal behaviour is a problem when adolescent distancing self from social and school activities. Not only that, socially withdrawn adolescents usually feeling of unsociability, social avoidance and high level of shyness which prevent them from making interpersonal relationship. In the absence of urgent attention to identify social withdrawal concerns among adolescents may results into depression, anxiety, fear, self-harm and even suicide ideation among others. Many avoidable deaths have been attributed the adolescents withdrawal from social setting for longer periods of time.

Social withdrawal is a serious challenge to national security and threat to the existence of in-school adolescents because of it effect on low self-efficacy. Bowler (2016) pointed to the need for additional research on social withdrawal and perception in Africa. The critical stakeholders have pay lip service to social withdrawal behaviour among in-school adolescents and considering negative impacts of social withdrawal behaviour on the security of life of adolescent and nation at large. Hence, the study created awareness of social withdrawal as a predictor of self-harm among secondary school adolescents in Nigeria and also to create awareness of social withdrawal as determinant of suicide ideation among in-school adolescents in Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

Insecurity is when there is threat to life of human being and properties from internal and external forces which could results into fear of uncertainty, anxiety and phobia among others. Okarah (2014) refers insecurity as the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. Insecurity is the antithesis of security and can be described as state of fear, hazard, danger, want to safety, uncertainty, and want of confidence among others (Achumba et al, 2013). Oluyomi and Grace, (2016) insecurity is feelings of uncertainty, threat to life and dangers. According to Udoh (2015), insecurity is the state of being subjected to danger or injury and no nation can develop when there is a high level of insecurity of life and property in society. It is observed by the researcher that critical stakeholders such as government, parents, teachers and school administrators have pay little or no attention to the issue of social withdrawal behaviour among in-school adolescents and it consequences on the national security is great. The

role of guidance and counselling in assisting adolescents with social problems cannot be overemphasized.

### **Importance of Guidance and Counselling to Secondary school Adolescents**

The importance of educational guidance and counselling in assisting adolescents to resolve academic, socio-personal and psychological concerns cannot be over emphasized. Counselling help adolescent who are trouble in developing coping strategies which enable them to face their challenges rather than running away from it and by this, adolescents are able to function more effectively in the school in particular and society at large. Ogwa (2021) observed that counselling services guide, inform, direct and assist people in making choice, adjustment and solving of problem including how to overcome insecurity and ensure tranquility. Odemelam and Uwani (2009) observe that the individual could be assisted to understand and ensure security in Nigeria. The application of attachment counselling therapy could provide safety, comfort, encouragement and positive regards making it possible for the individual to conflict insecurity and distress associated painful memories, conflict, doubt and confusion (Ogwa, 2021). insecurity as concerned with feelings of uncertainty, dangers or threats to life (Oluyomi & Grace, 2016). Insecurity is feelings of uncertainty, threat to life and dangers.

### **Social Withdrawal**

Social Withdrawal (SW) is adolescent refusal to relate or associate with peers, friends, family members among others in the social setting. It is also mean a situation when adolescents refused to interact with school mates with attendant behavioural problems (Rubin et al., 2009). SW also correlated with poor social competence and consequences like peer rejection and victimization, negative self-regard, anxiety, shyness. Xu et al. (2022) observed that subgroups of social withdrawal include shyness, unsociability and social avoidance. Evans and Hurrell (2016) found that social withdrawal behaviour like self-harm is not when prioritised within the school despite students' expressed need.

### **Social Withdrawal as predictor of Self-harm among adolescents**

Self-harm is intent to hurt oneself by cutting, burning the skin, picking at wounds or scars, hitting or deliberately overdosing on medication, drugs or other substances causing harm. Hawton, Saunders and O'Connor (2012) refer self-harm to adolescent deliberately hurting their bodies with the intended outcome being to cope with the experience of distress. High conflict or violent relationships, sense of isolation and lack of social support, family or loved one's history of suicide, financial and work stress (Stone, 2017), are contributing factors to self-harm and suicide, poor academic achievement, and increased level of depression, anxiety and suicide ideation (Lin & Dodge, 2020). In the absence of urgent attention to self-harm, it may results into suicide ideation.

### **Social Withdrawal as determinant of Suicide Ideation among Adolescents**

This has to do with thinking of ways to end one life. WHO (2020) refers to suicide ideation to how to kill oneself and that it range in intensity and frequency from fleeting to more concrete, well thought out plans for killing oneself, or complete preoccupation with self-destruction. These thoughts are not uncommon among young people. Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death (WHO, 2020). WHO (2020) has documented that more

than 700 000 people die by suicide every year. Furthermore, for each suicide, there are more than 20 suicide attempts and suicide attempts have a ripple effect that impacts on families, friends, colleagues, communities and societies. Suicidal behaviour is the acts such as suicide and attempted suicide. This also includes suicide related verbal and non-verbal communications and expressing suicidal intent (Owusu-Ansah et al., 2020; Baldwin et al., 2017). Suicidal ideation is more common at the beginning of adolescence (Hamza, 2012; Nock, 2008; Krug, 2002). The prevalence rate of severe and moderate suicidal ideation is significantly more in undergraduate and female students as compared to post graduate and male students (Ram et al., 2018). The psychological distressed among the adolescents increased the likelihood of suicidal ideations (Tanji et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2015).

Dorney et al. (2019) and Tandom et al. (2018) explained that suicide is associated with poor mental wellbeing among 15- to 24-year-olds worldwide. Similarly, It is estimated that between 15 and 30 million individuals engaged in self-harm behaviour in 2020 (Colins et al., 2011). The Global School-Based Health Survey in 83 countries showed that adolescents within the age bracket from 12 to 15 years (16.5%), planned for (16.5%) and attempted suicide (16.4%) in the past 12 months (Tangs et al 2020). Mars et al. (2019) noted that self-harm behaviour is a predictor of future suicide, especially among male older adolescents (Hawton et al., 2020).

Olibamoyo et al. (2022) noted that suicide is hardly found in adults less than 45 years. For Nigeria, WHO reports that 17,710 cases of suicide were recorded in 2016 at across all ages, 8,410 were females while 9,300 were males representing 3.70, a 0% increase from 2015. 3.60% in 2017, a 2.7% declined from 2016, 3.50 in 2018, a 2.78% decline from 2017, 3.50 2019, a 0% increased from 2018. This is mostly common among young people aged between 15 and 29 years. In the same vein, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2020 identified suicide as the leading cause of death for young people aged between 15 and 24 years. This is a situation with serious security implications for any country (Nock et al., 2013; WHO, 2012). This implies that increase rate of suicide among this age group is a big threat to security of future leaders of this great nation, Nigeria.

### **Prevalence of Social Withdrawal Behaviour, Self-Harm and Suicide Ideation among Adolescents**

The prevalence of social withdrawal behaviours like self-harm and suicide ideation have been research on by scholars. Wong et al. (2015) and Young (2019) asserted that people of 12–29 years had been withdrawn for more than 3 months stand the chances of about 2.8 times more likely to engage in self-harm and more suicide risk more than those who were not withdrawn. in another studies, Zhu et al. (2021) and Snider (2011) indicated that about 26.8% and 30.4% were experienced self-harm and suicidal behaviours. When children and adolescents become overly withdrawn, it can lead to self-harming behaviour and suicide ideation (Dexter, 2022). Zhou et al. (2021) showed that children with social withdrawal were older and had higher proportions of boys with 68.4% against 42.1 girls and social emotional delays of 63.2% against 0.0% for girl respectively and emotional development of socially withdrawn children was poorer across all ages of 3 to 24 months. This suggests that social withdrawal affects younger people than adults across all ages.

### **Causes of Social Withdrawal among Adolescents**

There are various factors which are responsible for social withdrawal behaviour among adolescents which include psychological, economic, social and academic stress, and child parent

relationship. Other causes are poor communication skills, social skills, fear of embarrassment from peers and significant others like family members and relatives. Also, environmental conditions like insecurity challenges in the society could trigger social withdrawal behaviour in an individual (Dexter, 2022), which has grave consequences on the security of life of secondary school adolescents in Nigeria with implication for Counselling practice.

### **Consequences of Social Withdrawal Behaviour among secondary school Adolescents**

The effects of social withdrawal behaviour if urgent attention and remedies are not forthcoming to assist the sufferer of the behaviour include:

Adolescents who are social withdrawn often exhibit feeling of depression, anxiety, low and self isolation among others which could leads to self-efficacy, self-harm and even to the extent of developing suicide ideation.

Social withdrawn behaviour may lead to loneliness, isolation, self-blame, frustration, feeling neglected by peers, victimization, exclusion, negative peer experience which retarded social competency development of the adolescents.

Social withdrawn adolescent may perform poorly in his/her academics because he/she lose concentration on their studies and other school activities.

The inability of the socially withdrawn adolescents to overcome stress, depression, and anxiety may result into repeating class, dropout of school and develop low self-efficacy which may eventually lead to self-harm and suicide ideation.

Social withdrawal behaviour affects nation with low productivity, decrease manpower resources through increase dropout of school, reducing economic and social development which threatening the security of the nation.

### **Implication for Guidance and Counselling**

Guidance and counselling is a calling to assist in-school adolescents and every individual to develop coping mechanisms to solve their social, personal, academic, moral, emotional and psychological concerns in order to become functional self, to the family and society at large. The counselling profession involves helping the client through systematic process to resolve his/her challenges from environment. Based on the literature reviewed, it was found that:

1. Social withdrawal behaviours are mostly common among adolescents (12-29 years) than adults. The counsellor should have concise background check or information about adolescents suspected of exhibiting social withdrawal behaviour and raise up to save such adolescent be self-harm and suicide ideation set in.
2. Social withdrawal affects mostly males than females' secondary school adolescents, the counsellor should also acquire relevant counselling skills so that would cater for both gender.
3. Emotional development of socially withdrawn children was poorer across all ages, the counsellor should assist adolescent who shows symptoms of emotion imbalance to develop coping mechanisms to face challenges of life headlong rather than running away from it.
4. Social withdrawal is the cause of self-harm and suicide ideation, the school counsellor should embark of frequent consultation class teachers and with parents of adolescent suspected to show sign of suicide ideation.
5. Social withdrawal behaviour has caused more harms than good to adolescents' life, the school counsellor should guided the adolescents through counselling talk on the assembly ground or in the school bulletin.

6. It is also a threat to the security and safety of education in the country. Therefore, the school counselling is challenge to identify students who display any symptoms of social withdrawal behaviour for individual counselling.

### **Conclusion**

This paper conclude that social withdrawal behaviours is associated with self-harm and suicide ideation which are threat to security of life of the secondary school adolescents and safety of education in Nigeria. It is a sensitive issue that should not be ignored by critical educational stakeholders like government, teachers, the school counsellors and parents for effective social interactions among secondary school adolescents.

### **Suggestions to Preventing Social Withdrawal Behaviour among Secondary School Adolescents**

- a.) Guidance and counselling services should be mandatory for secondary school adolescents.
- b.) Government should employ trained counsellors and posted to all educational levels in the country.
- c.) The Federal and States Ministries of Education should organise seminars and training for secondary school counsellors in Nigeria. This would equip them with skills on how to detect signs of social withdrawal through self-examination, self-evaluation and analysis of alternatives.
- d.) The counsellor should equip in-school adolescents' on how to detect signs of social withdrawal through self-examination, self-evaluation and analysis of alternatives. This would assist them to develop coping mechanisms and social skills to solve the challenges of social withdrawal personally.
- e.) The school management should funds and specifies a day during the week for orientation programme for students and gives up-to-date what social withdrawal is all about, causes and effects on their life.
- f.) Transactional analysis and assertiveness techniques should be use to assist adolescents with social withdrawal behaviour in Secondary Schools across the country.

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