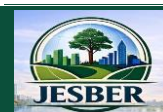


JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH (JESBER)

2026, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 470-479

Published by Faculty of Environmental Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Print ISSN: 3141-5547 | OPEN ACCESS



Research article

PERSONAL-SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CALABAR EDUCATION ZONE, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Secondary school students' psychosocial adjustment is shaped not only by the social environment around them but also by personal characteristics such as their sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence, yet these characteristics have rarely been examined together within a single Nigerian secondary school population. This study examined the influence of personal-social characteristics, specifically sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence, on psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. Four null hypotheses were tested, each stating that a given personal-social characteristic does not significantly influence psychosocial adjustment. A two-stage stratified and simple random sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 919 senior secondary two (SS2) students from 34 of the 84 public secondary schools in the education zone. Data were collected using researcher-administered questionnaires that categorised each characteristic into low, moderate, and high levels, and were analysed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), with Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc tests applied where ANOVA results were significant, all tested at the .05 level of significance. Results showed that sense of coherence significantly influenced psychosocial adjustment, $F(2, 916) = 13.779, p < .05$, with adjustment improving from low to high levels of coherence; locus of control significantly influenced adjustment, $F(2, 916) = 8.633, p < .05$; and self-efficacy significantly influenced adjustment, $F(2, 916) = 31.826, p < .05$, in each case with higher levels associated with better adjustment. In contrast, exposure to violence was inversely related to adjustment, $F(2, 916) = 33.930, p < .05$, with students reporting low exposure recording the highest adjustment scores and students reporting high exposure recording the lowest. The study concludes that personal-social characteristics are important determinants of psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students and recommends strengthened school counselling, supportive learning environments, and violence-prevention interventions targeted at students with low coherence, external locus of control, low self-efficacy, or high exposure to violence.

KEYWORDS

Psychosocial adjustment; Sense of coherence; Locus of control; Self-efficacy; Exposure to violence; Secondary school students; Calabar Education Zone; Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial adjustment is a critical component of adolescent development because secondary school students must cope simultaneously with academic demands, emotional changes, peer relationships, family expectations, and wider social pressures. How well a student manages this combination of demands depends not only on the support available in the school and home environment but also on personal characteristics the student brings to these situations, such as their general orientation toward coping with life's demands, their beliefs about control over outcomes, their confidence in their own abilities, and their prior exposure to threatening or violent experiences.

Because secondary education produces the human capital on which national development depends, understanding how such personal-social characteristics shape students' psychosocial adjustment is a matter of considerable educational and social policy importance, in Nigeria as in other developing educational systems. Students who adjust poorly are more likely to experience social withdrawal, emotional instability, and academic difficulty, while well-adjusted students are better placed to complete secondary education successfully and to transition into stable, productive adult life.

A considerable body of research, reviewed in detail in the following section, has examined how personal attributes and social-support factors jointly shape adolescents' school-related adjustment, generally confirming that adjustment is not determined by personal characteristics or the social environment alone but develops through the interaction of the two. Within Cross River State and Calabar Education Zone specifically, a growing body of local research has begun to connect students' personal and social characteristics to specific dimensions of adjustment, though largely one dimension at a time.

Despite this progress, existing studies in Calabar Education Zone have generally examined isolated dimensions of adjustment, such as social adjustment or emotional adjustment, in relation to a single predictor, such as personality or family communication, rather than examining the broader construct of psychosocial adjustment in relation to a fuller set of personal-social characteristics. This leaves school counsellors and administrators without a combined, locally grounded picture of how sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence, considered together, relate to students' overall psychosocial adjustment.

This study therefore sought to determine the influence of personal-social characteristics on psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study set out to determine the extent to which sense of coherence influences psychosocial adjustment, to determine the influence of locus of control on psychosocial adjustment, to determine the extent to which self-efficacy influences psychosocial adjustment, and to determine the influence of exposure to violence on psychosocial adjustment among the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Evidence on Personal and Social Predictors of Adjustment

International research consistently shows that adolescents' school-related adjustment is shaped jointly by personal attributes and the social support available to them. Azpiazu, Antonio-Aguirre, Izar-de-la-Fuente, and Fernández-Lasarte (2024), studying 1,397 high-school adolescents, found that teacher and peer support, resilience, and positive affect were important predictors of school adjustment, pointing to a combination of social and personal resources rather than either alone. In a considerably larger study involving more than 55,000 adolescents, Chan, Sharkey, Nylund-Gibson, Dowdy, and Furlong (2022) and Eneyo (2025a) found that students with high levels of family, peer, and school support recorded better psychological and academic functioning than those with low or limited support, underscoring the cumulative importance of multiple sources of social support for adjustment outcomes.

More recent evidence has clarified how personal and social factors combine mechanistically. Azpiazu, Ramos-Díaz, Axpe, and Revuelta (2025) and Eneyo (2025b) reported that peer support was directly associated with fewer school integration problems, while family and teacher support contributed indirectly through students' self-concept and resilience, personal attributes conceptually related to the sense of coherence and self-efficacy examined in the present study. Similarly, in a study of Chinese secondary school students, Yu, Wu, and colleagues (2024) found that social support was significantly associated with social adjustment, with psychological resilience and subjective well-being helping to explain this relationship. Taken together, this global evidence establishes that psychosocial adjustment is not determined by individual characteristics alone but develops through the interaction of personal attributes, such as resilience and self-concept, and the social environments surrounding adolescents, a conclusion consistent across very different educational and cultural settings.

Regional and African Evidence

Within Nigeria, research has increasingly confirmed that both personal and social characteristics shape secondary school students' adjustment, though most studies have examined a single dimension of adjustment at a time. Oni and Soji-Oni (2022) found that social anxiety and peer acceptance significantly influenced adolescents' social adjustment in Nigerian secondary schools, demonstrating the importance of interpersonal experience alongside the more internally oriented personal characteristics examined in the present study. Within Cross River State specifically, Amalu, Bekomson, Enamhe, Chukwurah, and Amalu (2024) found that psychological, physiological, and social needs satisfaction significantly influenced social adjustment among secondary school students.

Evidence from Calabar Education Zone itself has begun to accumulate but remains fragmented across single predictors and single dimensions of adjustment. Ugwu and Kalu (2025) reported significant relationships between personality factors and social adjustment among students in the Zone, while Opoh, Nwafor, Adams, and Ekpoto (2025) identified a significant relationship between family communication and emotional adjustment among students in the same Zone. These studies agree with the global literature in confirming that personal characteristics, whether personality traits or communication-related family factors, matter for students' adjustment, but each addresses a narrower outcome, social adjustment in one case and emotional adjustment in the other, rather than the broader construct of psychosocial adjustment.

The global and regional evidence reviewed above broadly agree that adjustment-related outcomes are shaped jointly by personal attributes and features of the social environment, and both bodies of evidence identify resilience-related personal resources, whether labelled resilience, self-concept, personality, or needs satisfaction, as consistently protective. Where the two bodies of evidence differ is in scope and specificity: the global studies tend to examine composite social-support constructs alongside a single personal attribute such as resilience or self-concept, whereas the regional and local Nigerian studies tend to isolate one predictor, whether personality, needs satisfaction, or family communication, against a single narrow outcome. Neither body of evidence, taken alone, offers a combined test of the four specific personal characteristics of interest here, sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence, against the broader psychosocial adjustment construct, which is precisely the gap this study was designed to fill.

Local Research Gap

None of the studies conducted within Calabar Education Zone has examined sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence together as correlates of the broader psychosocial adjustment construct, and none has done so within a single, adequately powered sample drawn from across the whole education zone. The present study therefore addresses this gap by evaluating, within a stratified sample of 919 SS2 students drawn from 34 public secondary schools across Calabar Education Zone, the combined influence of these four personal-social characteristics on students' overall psychosocial adjustment, thereby extending the zone's existing single-dimension evidence base into a more integrated picture that school counsellors and administrators can act upon.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

This study was carried out in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria, located at the south-eastern fringe of the country within the South-South geopolitical zone. The Zone comprises seven Local Government Education Authorities, namely Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Biase, Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, and Odukpani, and lies between latitudes 4°18' and 5°25' North of the Equator and longitudes 8°30' and 8°16' East of the Greenwich Meridian, covering a land area of approximately 13,074 km². Most of the Zone comprises rainforest and freshwater swamp vegetation, which supports various forms of agricultural practice, and the Zone hosts 84 public secondary schools in addition to numerous private secondary and primary schools.

Research Design

The study adopted a non-experimental, ex-post facto research design, comparing students who already differed in their naturally occurring levels of sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence, none of which was manipulated by the researchers, on their psychosocial adjustment outcomes. This design was appropriate because the study sought to examine how already-existing personal-social characteristics were associated with variation in students' psychosocial adjustment rather than to test the effect of an experimentally introduced intervention.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study comprised 9,184 senior secondary two (SS2) students, made up of 3,963 males and 5,221 females, drawn from the 84 public secondary schools in Calabar Education Zone. The population distribution across the seven Local Government Education Authorities is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Population distribution of SS2 students by Local Government Education Authority in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State

S/N	Local Government Education Authority	No. of Schools	Male	Female	Total
1	Akamkpa	19	412	437	849
2	Akpabuyo	6	164	182	346
3	Bakassi	3	79	91	170
4	Biase	18	375	403	778
5	Calabar Municipality	16	1,568	2,113	3,681
6	Calabar South	7	892	1,477	2,369
7	Odukpani	15	473	518	991
	Total	84	3,963	5,221	9,184

Source: Planning, Research and Statistics Unit, Cross River State Secondary Education Board, Calabar (2021).

A two-stage stratified and simple random sampling procedure was used to select the sample. In the first stage, schools within each Local Government Education Authority were stratified, and 40% of the schools in each stratum were randomly selected by balloting, yielding 34 schools in all. At the school level, one intact SS2 class was used; where a school had only one SS2 class, the entire class participated. In the second stage, 10% of the students in the area were drawn using simple random sampling, yielding a total sample of 919 SS2 students for the 2020/2021 academic session. The sample distribution is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample distribution of SS2 students by Local Government Education Authority in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State

S/N	Local Education Authority	No. of Schools Selected	No. of Students Selected
1	Akamkpa	8	85
2	Akpabuyo	2	35
3	Bakassi	1	17
4	Biase	7	78
5	Calabar Municipality	6	368
6	Calabar South	3	237
7	Odukpani	6	99
	Total	34	919

Data Collection

Data were collected using researcher-administered questionnaires designed to measure students' sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, exposure to violence, and psychosocial adjustment. Each of the four personal-social characteristics was measured using six items, with respondents' scores used to categorise them into low (6-11), moderate (12-18), or high (19-24) levels of the characteristic concerned. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires in each sampled school after obtaining the approval of the school principals, briefed the randomly selected students on the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses, and retrieved all copies of the questionnaire immediately after completion.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the four hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. For each personal-social characteristic, the one-way ANOVA compared the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of students in the low, moderate, and high categories of that characteristic. Where an ANOVA result was significant, Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc test was applied to locate the specific pairs of categories between which the difference occurred. No statistical procedure beyond descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and Fisher's LSD post hoc test was applied to the data.

Operational Definition of Variables

Sense of coherence refers to a student's global orientation of confidence that the demands they encounter are structured, predictable, and explicable, that adequate resources are available to meet those demands, and that the demands are worthy of engagement. Locus of control refers to the extent to which a student attributes outcomes in their life to their own actions, an internal orientation, as opposed to external forces such as chance or powerful others, an external orientation. Self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their own capacity to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations successfully. Exposure to violence refers to the extent to which a student has witnessed or experienced aggressive or violent conduct within the home, school, or community environment. Psychosocial adjustment, the dependent variable in this study, refers to the extent to which a student achieves a harmonious balance between internal psychological functioning and the demands of social relationships within the home, school, and wider community. Each of these variables was measured in this study using the six-item scales described above.

RESULTS

Influence of Sense of Coherence on Psychosocial Adjustment

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant influence of sense of coherence on psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone. Students were categorised into low, moderate, and high levels of sense of coherence based on their scores on six items measuring this characteristic. Descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA summary are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA for the influence of sense of coherence on psychosocial adjustment (N = 919)

Level of Sense of Coherence	N	Mean	SD
Low	323	18.78	5.00
Moderate	460	19.53	4.83
High	136	21.49	5.93
Total	919	19.55	5.13

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-level
Between groups	706.454	2	353.227	13.779*	.000
Within groups	23482.630	916	25.636		
Total	24189.084	918			

*Significant at $p < .05$.

As Table 3 shows, the mean psychosocial adjustment score rose from 18.78 among students with low sense of coherence, to 19.53 among those with moderate sense of coherence, to 21.49 among those with high sense of coherence, indicating that adjustment improved as sense of coherence increased. The calculated F-ratio of 13.779 ($df = 2, 916$; $p = .000$) is significant at the .05 level, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Fisher's LSD post hoc test was applied to locate the source of the difference; the result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Fisher's LSD post hoc multiple comparison of psychosocial adjustment across levels of sense of coherence (N = 919)

Levels Compared	N (1 vs 2)	Mean (1 vs 2)	Mean Difference	p-level
Low vs Moderate	323 vs 460	18.78 vs 19.53	-.75*	.042
Low vs High	323 vs 136	18.78 vs 21.49	-2.72*	.000
Moderate vs High	460 vs 136	19.53 vs 21.49	-1.97*	.000

*Significant at $p < .05$.

The post hoc comparisons in Table 4 show that students with a low level of sense of coherence recorded a significantly lower mean psychosocial adjustment score than those with a moderate level ($MD = -.75, p < .05$) and those with a high level ($MD = -2.72, p < .05$), and that students with a moderate level recorded a significantly lower mean score than those with a high level ($MD = -1.97, p < .05$). The source of the difference was therefore traced to all three levels of sense of coherence, confirming a progressive relationship in which higher sense of coherence is associated with better psychosocial adjustment.

Influence of Locus of Control on Psychosocial Adjustment

The second hypothesis stated that locus of control does not significantly influence psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone. Descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA summary are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA for the influence of locus of control on psychosocial adjustment ($N = 919$)

Level of Locus of Control	N	Mean	SD
Low	224	18.37	5.12
Moderate	504	19.80	5.02
High	191	20.29	5.25
Total	919	19.55	5.13

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-level
Between groups	447.517	2	223.759	8.633*	.000
Within groups	23741.567	916	25.919		
Total	24189.084	918			

*Significant at $p < .05$.

As Table 5 shows, the mean psychosocial adjustment score rose from 18.37 among students with a low locus of control, to 19.80 among those with a moderate locus of control, to 20.29 among those with a high locus of control, indicating that adjustment improved as locus of control shifted toward a more internal orientation. The calculated F-ratio of 8.633 ($df = 2, 916; p = .000$) is significant at the .05 level, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Fisher's LSD post hoc test was applied to locate the source of the difference; the result is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Fisher's LSD post hoc multiple comparison of psychosocial adjustment across levels of locus of control ($N = 919$)

Levels Compared	N (1 vs 2)	Mean (1 vs 2)	Mean Difference	p-level
Low vs Moderate	224 vs 504	18.37 vs 19.80	-1.43*	.000
Low vs High	224 vs 191	18.37 vs 20.29	-1.92*	.000
Moderate vs High	504 vs 191	19.80 vs 20.29	-.49	.261

*Significant at $p < .05$.

The post hoc comparisons in Table 6 show that students with a low locus of control recorded a significantly lower mean psychosocial adjustment score than those with a moderate locus of control ($MD = -1.43, p < .05$) and those with a high locus of control ($MD = -1.92, p < .05$). The difference between moderate and high locus of control was not statistically significant ($MD = -.49, p > .05$). The source of the significant difference was therefore traced to students with a low, more externally oriented, locus of control.

Influence of Self-Efficacy on Psychosocial Adjustment

The third hypothesis stated that self-efficacy does not significantly influence psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone. Descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA summary are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA for the influence of self-efficacy on psychosocial adjustment (N = 919)

Level of Self-Efficacy	N	Mean	SD
Low	305	17.81	4.80
Moderate	534	20.21	4.73
High	80	21.81	6.81
Total	919	19.55	5.13

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-level
Between groups	1571.646	2	785.823	31.826*	.000
Within groups	22617.437	916	24.692		
Total	24189.084	918			

*Significant at $p < .05$.

As Table 7 shows, the mean psychosocial adjustment score rose from 17.81 among students with low self-efficacy, to 20.21 among those with moderate self-efficacy, to 21.81 among those with high self-efficacy, indicating that adjustment improved markedly as self-efficacy increased. The calculated F-ratio of 31.826 ($df = 2, 916$; $p = .000$) is significant at the .05 level, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Fisher's LSD post hoc test was applied to locate the source of the difference; the result is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Fisher's LSD post hoc multiple comparison of psychosocial adjustment across levels of self-efficacy (N = 919)

Levels Compared	N (1 vs 2)	Mean (1 vs 2)	Mean Difference	p-level
Low vs Moderate	305 vs 534	17.81 vs 20.21	-2.40*	.000
Low vs High	305 vs 80	17.81 vs 21.81	-4.00*	.000
Moderate vs High	534 vs 80	20.21 vs 21.81	-1.60*	.007

*Significant at $p < .05$.

The post hoc comparisons in Table 8 show that students with low self-efficacy recorded significantly lower mean psychosocial adjustment scores than those with moderate self-efficacy ($MD = -2.40$, $p < .05$) and those with high self-efficacy ($MD = -4.00$, $p < .05$), and that students with moderate self-efficacy recorded significantly lower mean scores than those with high self-efficacy ($MD = -1.60$, $p < .05$). The source of the difference was therefore traced to all three levels of self-efficacy, confirming a progressive relationship in which higher self-efficacy is associated with better psychosocial adjustment.

Influence of Exposure to Violence on Psychosocial Adjustment

The fourth hypothesis stated that there is no significant influence of exposure to violence on psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone. Descriptive statistics and the one-way ANOVA summary are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA for the influence of exposure to violence on psychosocial adjustment (N = 919)

Level of Exposure to Violence	N	Mean	SD
Low	123	22.37	6.28
Moderate	654	19.50	4.75
High	142	17.35	4.62

Level of Exposure to Violence	N	Mean	SD
Total	919	19.55	5.13

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-level
Between groups	1668.394	2	834.197	33.930*	.000
Within groups	22520.690	916	24.586		
Total	24189.084	918			

*Significant at $p < .05$.

As Table 9 shows, the mean psychosocial adjustment score fell from 22.37 among students with low exposure to violence, to 19.50 among those with moderate exposure, to 17.35 among those with high exposure, indicating that adjustment worsened as exposure to violence increased. The calculated F-ratio of 33.930 ($df = 2, 916$; $p = .000$) is significant at the .05 level, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Fisher's LSD post hoc test was applied to locate the source of the difference; the result is presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Fisher's LSD post hoc multiple comparison of psychosocial adjustment across levels of exposure to violence ($N = 919$)

Levels Compared	N (1 vs 2)	Mean (1 vs 2)	Mean Difference	p-level
Low vs Moderate	123 vs 654	22.37 vs 19.50	2.87*	.000
Low vs High	123 vs 142	22.37 vs 17.35	5.02*	.000
Moderate vs High	654 vs 142	19.50 vs 17.35	2.15*	.000

*Significant at $p < .05$.

The post hoc comparisons in Table 10 show that students with low exposure to violence recorded significantly higher mean psychosocial adjustment scores than those with moderate exposure ($MD = 2.87$, $p < .05$) and those with high exposure ($MD = 5.02$, $p < .05$), and that students with moderate exposure recorded significantly higher mean scores than those with high exposure ($MD = 2.15$, $p < .05$). The source of the difference was therefore traced to all three levels of exposure to violence, confirming an inverse, progressive relationship in which greater exposure to violence is associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding that sense of coherence, locus of control, and self-efficacy each significantly and positively influenced psychosocial adjustment agrees with the global evidence reviewed above, which consistently links personal attributes such as resilience, self-concept, and positive affect to better adjustment outcomes (Azpiazu et al., 2024; Azpiazu et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2024). Sense of coherence, locus of control, and self-efficacy can be understood as closely related personal resources, each reflecting a student's confidence in their capacity to understand, manage, and influence the demands they face, so their convergent association with better adjustment in this study is conceptually consistent with the resilience- and self-concept-based mechanisms identified in the international literature.

The finding that exposure to violence was inversely related to psychosocial adjustment, with the largest effect size among the four characteristics examined ($F = 33.930$), agrees with Amalu et al. (2024) and Oni and Soji-Oni (2022), both of whom linked adverse social and interpersonal experiences to poorer adjustment outcomes among Nigerian secondary school students. This finding also extends Opoh et al. (2025), who linked disrupted family communication to poorer emotional adjustment within the same education zone, by showing that violence exposure, a further adverse feature of some students' home and community environments, is similarly associated with poorer adjustment in its broader psychosocial sense.

Taken together, the four findings indicate that psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone is shaped by a coherent cluster of personal-social characteristics, three of which, sense of coherence, locus of control, and self-efficacy, function as protective resources when present at higher levels,

and one of which, exposure to violence, functions as a risk factor when present at higher levels. This pattern agrees with Ugwu and Kalu (2025), who found personality factors related to social adjustment within the same Zone, while extending their single-dimension finding into a more integrated picture spanning four distinct personal-social characteristics and the broader psychosocial adjustment construct. The results suggest that interventions addressing only one of these characteristics in isolation, for example, a programme that builds self-efficacy without also addressing violence exposure, may be less effective than a combined approach that simultaneously strengthens students' personal coping resources while reducing their exposure to violence.

Some limitations should be noted in interpreting these findings. The ex-post facto design means that the four personal-social characteristics are treated as naturally occurring classification variables rather than manipulated experimental factors, so the associations reported here indicate significant difference rather than causation. In addition, all four characteristics and the psychosocial adjustment outcome were assessed through researcher-administered questionnaires completed by the students themselves, which, despite the safeguards taken during administration, remains subject to the social-desirability and recall effects common to self-report measures. Finally, the study was restricted to public secondary schools within a single education zone and to SS2 students only, so the findings should be extended to other grade levels, private secondary schools, and other education zones in Cross River State with appropriate caution.

For counselling practice, the pattern of results suggests that interventions should be prioritised according to effect size as well as theoretical relevance. Exposure to violence and self-efficacy produced the two largest F-ratios among the four characteristics examined, suggesting that violence-reduction measures and self-efficacy-building activities, such as structured goal-setting and mastery experiences within the school counselling programme, may yield the most immediate gains in students' psychosocial adjustment, without diminishing the continued relevance of strengthening sense of coherence and a more internal locus of control as complementary, longer-term counselling objectives.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine the influence of personal-social characteristics, namely sense of coherence, locus of control, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence, on psychosocial adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings show that sense of coherence, locus of control, and self-efficacy each significantly and positively influenced psychosocial adjustment, with students at higher levels of each characteristic recording better adjustment, while exposure to violence was significantly and inversely related to adjustment, with students reporting greater exposure recording poorer adjustment.

The contribution of this study lies in bringing together, within a single, adequately powered sample drawn from across Calabar Education Zone, four personal-social characteristics that prior local research had examined only in relation to narrower, single dimensions of adjustment. By demonstrating that these four characteristics jointly and consistently relate to the broader construct of psychosocial adjustment, the study provides school counsellors, teachers, and education authorities in the Zone with a more integrated evidence base for designing interventions than was previously available from any single local study.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, it is recommended that school guidance counsellors strengthen regular counselling programmes designed to build students' sense of coherence, foster a more internal locus of control, and develop self-efficacy, since higher levels of all three characteristics were associated with better psychosocial adjustment. Teachers should be encouraged to provide supportive classroom environments and to identify early those students who show signs of low coherence, an external locus of control, or low self-efficacy, so that counselling support can be directed to them before difficulties escalate.

It is further recommended that schools and parents work together to identify and reduce students' exposure to violence, given its strong inverse association with psychosocial adjustment, and that educational authorities in Cross River State strengthen school-based psychosocial support and violence-prevention programmes as a matter of policy, so that students' emotional, social, and academic wellbeing is protected alongside their academic instruction.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical approval: Institutional research ethics clearance was obtained, and school-level approval was secured from the principals of all sampled schools prior to data collection.

Informed consent: Students were briefed on the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses before participating.

Funding: No external funding was reported for this study.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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