PARENTAL STYLE AS A PREDICTOR OF ALEXITHYMIA AMONG ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract
The study investigated parental style as a predictor of Alexithymia among adolescence using a Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and Toronto Alexithymia scale (TAS) as measuring instruments. A cross sectional Survey design was adopted using a sample of two hundred (200) adolescents systematically sampled from St. John’s Secondary School Awka and Comprehensive College Nawfia, Anambra State with their age ranged between 15 – 21 years and average mean (Ì) of 18. Multiple regression analysis (enter method) was used for the data analysis as statistical package. The result showed that authoritative parental style, except for permissive parental style predicted alexithymia among adolescents. The Beta (β) co-efficient for authoritative are DDF = .07, DIF = -.02, EOT = -.16*, P<.05, permissive DDF = .22*, DIF = .18*, EOT = -.12, P<.05, Discussion of the results together with recommendation were made.

Key words: Parental style, Alexithymia and Adolescence.

Introduction
G. Stanley Hall is the father of the scientific study of adolescence. In the early 1990s he proposed the “storm – and – stress view”. The storm – and – stress view is Hall’s concept that adolescence is a turbulent time change with conflict and mood swings. Thoughts, feelings, and actions oscillate between conceit and humility, good and temptation, happiness and sadness. The adolescent may be nasty to a peer one moment and kind the
next moment. At one time the adolescent may want to be alone, yet seconds later companionship. However, adolescence is more appropriately viewed as a time of decision making and commitment rather than a time of rebellion and crisis. Adolescents are not a homogeneous group, and different portrayals of adolescence emerge based on the opportunities and support given to adolescents. Piaget, (1960) believed that formal operational thought develops at 11 to 15 years of age. Its three main characteristics are that it is abstract, idealistic and logical. Elkind (1978) state that adolescent egocentrism is common.

Kohlberg (1986) Proposed a cognitive developmental theory of moral development that has three (two – stage) levels: (1) preconventional, (2) Conventional, and (3) Post – conventional. The three levels vary in the degree to which moral development is internalized. Among his critics, Gilligan (1982) believes Kohlberg under represented the care perspective.

Erikson (1968) believes that adolescence is characterized by identity versus identity confusion, the fifth stage in his eight–stage theory. Adolescents enter a psychological moratorium between childhood dependency and adult independence, seeking to discover who they are and where they are going in life. Marcia (1980) proposed that exploration and commitment determine four identity statuses: diffused, fore closed, moratorium, and achieved. Rites of passage occur in primitive culture but are mostly absent in most industrialized countries. Many at – risk adolescents have more than one problems. One of such problem is alexithymia: A disturbance of affect and cognition indicated by difficulty in describing or recognizing one’s own emotions, and a reduced affective and Fantasy life. (From Greek alexein to avert + Thymos spirit + - ia indicating a condition or quality). Alexithymia is precisely defined and extensively investigated construct that has been primarily applicable in the field of psychosomatic medicine, general psychiatry, personality and counseling psychology (Taylor & Bagby, 2000). It is a multi dimensional construct composing subtypes such as: Type 1 and Type II which represent a normal manifestation of affect regulation while:- Type 1 and Type II are considered a psychological disorder.

In 1970 Nemiah and Peter Sifneons investigated on the cognitive and effective aspect of patients that suffer from psychosomatic disease and found out that many psychosomatic patients have difficulty in describing subjective feelings, exhibit impoverished fantasy and have concrete literal cognitive style that is externally oriented (Taylor & Bagby, 2000). With this the both came to conclusion that individual who engage in externally oriented thinking tend to lack a vivid imagination event and lack the capacity to create an interesting inner world.

In 1976 based on the presentation and debate on alexithymia at 11th European psychosomatic research conference held in Germany led clinicians and researchers to agree on a “precise definition of alexithymia” as difficulty in identifying and pressing
emotion and external expressing emotion and external oriented thinking (Taylor & Bagby 2000). This definition shows that alexithymia is a maladaptive psychological disorder that is characterized by:

- Difficulty in identifying feelings
- Difficulty in expressing feelings
- External oriented thinking that occurs as a result of dispassionate thinking or inability or inability to access and communicate feelings to others (Taylor, Parker & Bagby, 2000).
- Inability to identify and verbally describe emotion
- Suffering occasional explicable physiological disturbance such as stomach ache.
- Being logical or unsentimental without being unfriendly.

The possible consequences of these characteristics among adolescents may include post traumatic disorder because it was theoretical investigate or that the difficulty in identifying, processing and regulating feelings among adolescents is a risk factor of post traumatic disorder (Taylor & Bagby, 2000), depression, phobia, self blame, anxiety, low self esteem and emotional depletion occurring in later developmental stage (Gjerde 2004). If all these are the possible consequences of alexithymia among adolescents, there is need to know the possible cause of these alexithymia characteristics among adolescents. Since alexithymia is an external oriented factor, one of external oriented factors that may have and influence on the development of alexithymia among adolescents is “parental style”.

Even though many children spend great deal of time in childcare situations away from the home, parents are still the main caregivers for the vast majority of the world’s children. And parents have always wondered what is the best way to rear their children. Parental style is the entire behavioural pattern that influences the mental development and psychological growth of children. The importance of parenting on adolescents’ emotional development have been investigated in literature. Baumrind (2000) believes parents interact with their children in basic ways. Three types of parenting style that may have impact on adolescence emotional development include:

i. **Authoritarian Parenting:** This is a restrictive, punitive style in which the parents exhort the child to follow their directions and to respect work and effort. The authoritarian parent firmly limits and controls the child, with little verbal exchange. Authoritarian parenting is associated with children’s social incompetence. In a difference of opinion about how to do something, for example, the authoritarian parent might say, “you do it my way or else… there will be no discussion!” children of authoritarian parents often are anxious about social comparison, fail to initiate activity, and have poor communication skills.

ii. **Authoritative Parenting:** Is a style in which parents encourages children to be independent but still places limits and controls on their behaviour. Extensive
verb give—and—take is allowed and parents are warm and nuturant toward, the child. Authoritative parenting is associated with children’s social competence. An authoritative parent might put his arm around the child in a comforting way and say, “you know you should not have done that; let’s talk about it, you can handle the situation better next time”. Children whose parents are authoritative tend to be socially competent, self-reliance, and socially responsible.

iii. **Permissive parenting:** This parenting style is non-directive which is characterized by parent involvement with their children. Permissive parents are responsive to their children’s feeling, wish, need and they place few demands or control on their children in secured just like neglectful and indulgent parenting (Baumrind, 2000).

In social learning theory Albert Bandura (1977) state that our behaviour is as a result of interaction in the society which is govern by (i) observation in the environment in which adolescents observes their parents behaviour. This could be attributed to the development of alexithymia among adolescents, based on their observation of their parental style. (ii) Modeling: Parents are the most influential models of adolescents. Adolescents are said to download the behaviour of their parents they observed in the environment whether positive or negative. And later copy every unit of this behaviour they have observed. Adolescents are more likely to attend to and imitate their parental style that they perceive is similar to theirs, while their parent responds to the behaviour they imitate with either reinforcement or punishment.

The ecological theory propounded by Lewin Bronfenbrenner (1979) evolve from the recognition that even though the environment has a major effect on development that many models also have limited generalizability and that development have no universality rather there are framed within the limits of a cultural and historical context. Bronfenbrenner articulated the ecological model that includes developmental influences at the individual (person), person by environmental (process) and context into categories contextual setting into 3 types: Micro system, Meso system and Exo system. Micro system refers to one’s immediate physical and social environment that directly have impact on adolescents behaviour such as homes, schools, playmates and workplace. In this system there is a set of rules and norms for behaviour that are fairly consistent across time. This might be attributed or implicated to adolescent’s development of alexithymia based on the mentioned parental style while Meso system refers to the combination of micro system that leads to new level of developmental influence. For example, to understand the effects of parenting versus peer influence on adolescence development, one must consider not only each of the family and peer (Micro system) but also the effect of the conflict between the family values and the peer group’s value on the adolescent’s development. For example, when an adolescent share a value or behaviour that is not
consistent with that of family and peers (that is a behaviour that is not always in same pattern and style with that of the peers and family) and when resort to withdrawing him/herself, finding it difficult to express, identify his/her feeling to the parents and peers.

Exo system refers to a combination of multiple Meso system which emphasizes on the maternal (mother’s) employment on adolescent emotional development. That is to understand how maternal employment, work context and historical context of women’s employment affect adolescents social and emotional development. For example when a woman is holding a high post in her office, which make her to be less reactive to her children’s feeling, needs and values and often cause conflict between her and husband. This can bring about change in the level of social interaction in the family and the children’s emotional development.

The work of Socio-cultural learning theory of human learning by Vygotsky (1978) describes as a process and the organization of human intelligence in culture. The major theme of this theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition which is believed to be learned on two levels; firstly; through interaction with other which is then integrated into the individual mental structure (cognitive) in which every function in the individual cultural development appears twice between people on social level (inter psychological) and later on the individual level (intra psychological) (vygotsky, 1978, P. 56). From this perspective, an adolescent cognitive development (ability to control feeling, identify feeling, express – feeling and externally oriented thinking) is based on the adolescent cultural interaction with people in his/her social level as to parents for example, if an adolescent grew up in a family whereby his/her parents have difficulty in controlling, identifying and expressing their feelings or a family where there is restriction to an adolescent opinion, feeling etc; this process of interaction will be integrated in the adolescent mental structure and will influence how the adolescent control, express and identify emotion. Secondly is the idea that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the area of exploration for which the adolescent is cognitively prepared, but requires helps and social interaction from parents to fully develop.

Max Karukivi (2011) studied the relationship between alexithymia and parenting among adolescents. 729 adolescents participated in the study. Of the sample 74% were female and 26% were male and the mean age was 19 years as of the time the data was collected. The finding of the study clearly indicated that alexithymia was found to be associated with higher parental overprotection in both males and females. This finding further in contrast to the hypothesis says that parental care was not associated with alexithymia to the same extent as overprotection. Giovanna Gianesine (2011) studied the influence of Gottman’s parenting style and alexithymia. Approximately 324 non – clinical samples of
parents with children age 3 + 10 was recruited in a two districts in switzerland with a participation rate of 40.5%. The finding of this study indicates that the correlation between parenting styles and alexithymia were all significant. Cary Anne (2007) studied family of origin as it correlates with alexithymia, in which ethnically heterogeneous 222 sample of undergraduates at university in South Eastern United State, of the 222 participated 30% were male (N = 65) and 70% were females (N = 154). The findings state the family expressiveness will be significantly positively associated with alexithymia while positive family expressiveness will be negatively associated with alexithymia and also dysfunction in the family origin moderates the association between positive family expressiveness and alexithymia. Yelsma, Anderson and Nilsson (2000), studied the impact of effective expressiveness within the family with 416 students. The finding of the study support that children who have experience emotionally expressive family atmosphere tend to be less alexithymia than those raised in unexpressiveness families. Arze Thorberg, Young, Ross, M.C.D, Sullivan Karen. A., and Lyvers Michael (2011) studied parental bonding and alexithymia. A research of the web of science (From 1992 to 2010) plumbed from (1979 to 2010) and psycin for (From 1979 to 2010) was conducted between October 2007 and May 2010. The finding of the study support that there is a Significant negative association between maternal care and alexithymia indicating a medium to large correlation effect size, the data indicated also negative association between maternal care and difficulty identifying feeling with small to medium correction effect size, and between describing feeling indicates a large correlation effect size, the association between maternal care and external oriented thinking was also significant indicating a small correlation effect size. While parental care was barely associated with alexithymia with a small correlation effect size and there was no significant association between paternal care and difficulty identifying feeling, paternal care and difficulty describing feeling and between paternal care and external oriented thinking. Lumey (1996) studied the family factors related to alexithymia characters with 127 young adults college student including 52 males (41%) and 75 females (59%) aged 17 to 28 years (mean = 20. 2 years) with predominant white (55%) and African American (34%). The finding support that there is correlation between alexithymia and family measure. General family pathology and three specific dysfunctions were significantly related to the TAS total and its factors. Also dysfunctional affective involvement was related to increase externally oriented thinking and poor problem solving was related to externally oriented thinking and was related to impair imagination. No specific family dysfunction were related to difficulty communicating feelings and the relationship between alexithymia characteristics and specific family dysfunction for each sex suggest gender limitation in the alexithymia and family dysfunction relationship.
Method

Participants
The participants were two hundred Senior Secondary Students (Adolescents) from St. John Secondary School Awka and comprehensive College Nwafia all in Anambra State systematically randomly sampled with their age ranged between 15 – 21 years and average mean (x) of 18.

Instrument
One of the instruments used was a questionnaire which consists of two sections. The first section of the instrument contained demographic data or personal data such as age, gender, ethnicity, class and parent highest education. While the second section contains the questionnaire for parental style and alexithymia. The questionnaire was developed by Buri (1991) to measure parental authority or different levels of prototypes of parenting practice, permissive, authoritative and authoritarian parent. The scale contains 30 items, out of which 3 items measures the subscale which are arranged in Likert format, ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. Some of the item include (for e.g. permissive – while I was growing up my parents felt that in a well run home, the children should have their way in the family as often as the parent do; authoritarian – even if their children didn’t agree with them, my parents felt it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what they thought was right; and authoritative – as I was growing up once family policy had been established, my parents discussed the reason behind the policy with the children in the family). Choa’s (2000) found the scale to have total cronbach alpha of .64 to .71. Uynally and Berstein (1994) found the cronbach alpha value of .70, while Anastass (1988) found the reliability coefficient of the scale to be .80. The research in a pilot study with 60 adolescents from Nigerian sample Oliajide and Igbedioh found alpha of authoritative .70, authoritarian .72 and permissive .69. The second instrument used was Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS 20) developed by Bagby, Parker and Taylor (1994), to measure people who have trouble identifying and describing emotions, who tend to minimize emotional experience and focus intentional externally. The scale has 20 items with 3 subscales namely:- Difficulty Describing Feeling Subscale (DDFS): measuring difficulty describing emotion, which has 5 items (No 2,4,7,12,17). Difficulty Identifying Feeling Subscale (DIFS): measuring difficulty identifying emotion, with 7 items (No 1, 3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 17), and Externally–Oriented Thinking Subscale (EOTS): measuring the tendency of individual to focus their attention externally, with 8 items (No 5, 8, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20). All these subscales are arranged in Likert format, ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. The reliability of the scale demonstrated a good internal consistency of Cronbach alpha = .81 and test retest
reliability of .7, p< .01. Nwafor (2014) found the alpha of DDF = .70, DIF = .73, and EOT = .70 in a Nigerian sample.

Procedure
Permission was obtained from the principal of the schools and the various class mistresses and masters. In each class the participants filled an agreement form before he/she was allowed to participate in the study. All the participants selected for the study were gathered in their various classrooms and the questionnaires was administered to them with the help of three research assistants employed. The participants were given instructions on how to fill the questionnaires and it took an average of 30 minutes for all of them to be completed and all the questionnaire forms were collected immediately for scoring.

Design/Statistics
A cross sectional survey design was adopted while multiple regression analysis was used for the statistical package.

Result
The analysis of data was done using multiple regression analysis and the result shown in table 1 below is thus:

Table 1: Correlation table of parental style and Alexithymia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Style</th>
<th>DDF</th>
<th>DIF</th>
<th>EOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.20 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissive</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>.22 *</td>
<td>.19 *</td>
<td>-.16 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DDF = Difficulty Describing Feeling;
DIF= Difficulty Identifying Feeling;
EOT= Externally Oriented Thinking;
* = P < .05.

The correlation result showed that authoritarian parenting style was positively mildly correlated with the subscales of alexithymia, except for externally oriented thinking with which it has negative correlation. Further analyzes using enter method of the multiple regression were conducted to show the beta coefficients of parenting styles predicting alexithymia. For Difficulty Describing Feeling a significant model (F3, 190) = 2.85; P< .05; adjusted r square = 0.5, for Difficulty Identifying Feeling (f3, 190) = 2.82; P<.05;
adjusted r square = .04; for External Oriented Thinking (F3, 190) = 3.63; P < .05; adjusted r square = .04. The beta coefficient tables are shown in the table below:

Table 2: The beta coefficient for parental style and Alexithymia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>DDF</th>
<th>DIF</th>
<th>EOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissive</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DDF = Difficulty Describing Feelings;
DIF = Difficulty identifying Feeling;
EOT = Externally Oriented Thinking;
* = P < .05.

Summary of Result
1. Authoritative style is negatively correlated with externally oriented thinking, implying that the authoritative parents are, the lower the externally oriented thinking individual may be. Also authoritative parenting predicted significantly externally oriented thinking. However, it does not correlate or predict significantly any other subscale.
2. Permissive style does not correlates significantly or predict significantly any of the substances of alexithymia.
3. Authoritarian style correlated positively with DDF and DIF and negatively with EOT but predicted significantly DDF and DIF only.
4. Preliminary analysis did not show any gender difference in parenting style and alexithymia.

Decision
The result of the regression analysis shows that significant models existed for a subtypes of parental style (Authoritarian parental style), which predicted difficulty describing feeling and difficulty feeling. This was further supported by the correlation expressing in table 1. Also as shown in table 2, authoritative parenting significantly predicted external oriented thinking. This finding can be compared with previous studies that stresses the importance of family and parenting on psychopathology. The study further agree with the research of Giovanna Gianesine (2014) which posited that correlating between parental style and alexithymia were all significant except for emotional coach. Also, the finding of this study were supported by the work of Max Karukivi (2011), where alexithymia was found to be associated with the higher parental overprotection (as to authoritarian
parenting in finding of the present study) in both male and females, and not associated with alexithymia to the extent as over protection. Supporting this finding also is the work of Lumey (1996), who found that there is a correlation between alexithymia and family measure. The finding of this present research agrees with Cary Anne (2007) research on parental style in family of origin, that style in family expressiveness will be significantly positively associated with alexithymia while dysfunction in family origin moderates the association between positive family expressiveness and alexithymia. The findings of Yelsima et. al (2000) that children who have experienced emotional expressiveness family atmosphere (as to permissive parenting) tend to be less alexithymia than those raised in unexpressed family atmosphere (as to authoritarian) from the study the impact of effective expressiveness within family is in concordance with present finding. According to the social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1977), which says that people learn their behaviour through observation and modeling is implicated in this study. Those models include parent etc. These models provide examples of behaviour through their parental style which the adolescents observe and imitate, including ability to identify feeling, describe feeling and external oriented thinking. The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains the relationship between environment and parents, and the conflict between family values and the peer’s value. Thus the experience the adolescent get from this system as related to parental style form their experience outcome that determine the ability feeling and external oriented thinking. This theory is in concordance with the present findings.

Accordingly, the socio – cultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) explain that social and cultural interaction as to parents play a fundamental role in development of cognition, which is the interaction that is integrated into the mental structure (cognition) as associated to ability to describe, identify feeling and external oriented thinking. This theory also agrees with the present findings. In Contrast authoritative parental style, permissive parental style and authoritarian parental style play a vital role in predicting alexithymia among adolescents.

In the present study, parental style shows a significant relationship in predicting alexithymia among adolescence. The result of this present study maybe implicated in the management of emotional problem such as difficulty in identifying feeling, difficulty describing feeling and externally oriented thinking among adolescence. Which may affect their future life or behaviour in one way or the other. Drawing from the result, the type of parental style an adolescent get from his/her family environment influence the way the person describe, identify feeling and external oriented thinking, adolescence with poor ability to describe, identify their feeling and external oriented thinking need more positive expressive family atmosphere where their ideas and opinion will be incorporated and accepted in the family system. Thus, by implication parental styles is important
emotional development because the type of practices parents give their children at home weigh more influence on their behaviour and emotion.

References


