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Caregivers' Behaviour and Preschoolers' Delinquency in Public Early Childhood Education Centres Rivers State

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Abstract

Preschoolers often exhibit behaviour that can be classified as delinquent, including self-injury, aggression, disruptive actions, noncompliance with classroom rules, finger or tongue sucking, crying, and nail biting. Given that a child's environment significantly influences their behaviour, it is plausible that caregivers' treatment may contribute to these delinquencies. To explore this, the study examined the relationship between caregivers' behaviour and preschoolers' delinquency in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State. The study was guided by six objectives, six research questions, and six null hypotheses, and anchored on two theoretical frameworks: Protection Motivation Theory (R. W. Rogers, 1975) and Rational Emotive Theory (Albert Ellis, 1962). Employing a correlational research design, the population consisted of 16,021 preschoolers across 682 centres, with a sample of 1,602 respondents (approximately 10%) selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a 30-item Caregivers' Behaviour Questionnaire (CUBQ) and a 30-item Preschoolers' Delinquency Observation Inventory (PDOI). Reliability indices determined via test-retest were 0.64 and 0.71, respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse data at a 0.05 significance level. Findings indicated a significant positive relationship between caregivers' fairness and preschoolers' delinquency. Consequently, it was recommended that caregivers apply a balanced approach of fairness and firmness in managing preschoolers to foster appropriate discipline.

Keywords: Caregivers' Behaviour, Preschoolers' Delinquency Early Childhood Education

Introduction

The child in the early childhood education centre is kept under the care of preschool caregivers to cater for the overall development of the child. The way the caregiver handles the child under his/her watch can tell to a great extent whether such a child will attain desired development or not. In the same vein, the personality of preschoolers could be formed based on the way the caregiver handles them. Certain behaviour which could be detrimental to the classroom norms and values can be formed by preschoolers. In this work, these behaviour are referred to as preschoolers' delinquency. It is called juvenile behaviour since preschoolers who are actually minors, in their innocence and ignorance may not know the moral implication of such actions except they are told over time by an adult. The absence of logical awareness of the moral implication of such actions makes preschoolers carry out these actions without a rethink, especially when they are triggered to do so by their environment.

Preschoolers' delinquencies are behaviour that is a function of preschoolers' mindset, mentality of level of understanding; such that, if an adult exhibits such behaviour, such adult will be queried in the society. As maintained by Vernon (2021), preschoolers' delinquency is seen as behaviour that varies remarkably from the norms acceptable to the society, and cannot be considered a function of sane-mindedness. These behaviour manifests as self-injurious behaviour, destructive behaviour, aggression or tantrums, noncompliance to classroom rules, sucking (fingers, tongues), crying, nail biting, and fidgeting.

Self-injurious behaviour is an act carried out by preschoolers that are directed at causing harm to them. These behaviours seem to occur when the individual is depressed or seriously traumatized. It is however correct that preschoolers may not be able to express their level of trauma when such trauma arises verbally, but through self-injurious behaviour, one can tell that such a child is in a serious psychological state of trauma (Banks, 2022). The behaviour manifest as the child hits himself/herself, scratch his/ her body in annoyance amongst others. The behaviour is directed at themselves and such behaviour could also be traced to post traumatic disorder (PTD).

Another preschoolers' behaviour exhibited is disruptive behaviour. While the self-injurious behaviour was directed toward self, the destructive behaviour is directed towards persons or objects. These include but not limited to; throwing of objects, scattering of chairs when offended amongst others. These majorly happen when a child is hurt or denied privileges.

Amongst preschoolers' delinquency is the issue of aggression. This manifests in hitting others, screaming, scratching, biting, punching and kicking. Sucking of fingers cannot be ruled out as behaviour exhibited by preschoolers at home and at school. Some preschoolers are fond of sucking their fingers, and tongue. In fact for some, their thumb has become flat due to incessant sucking. Some preschoolers even suck their fingers into late childhood stage. All these exhibitions could be influenced by some factors around the child.

In addition to sucking is the issue of crying, preschoolers are known for crying especially when they feel unhappy. The major way preschoolers announce annoyance is by crying. Some preschoolers can commence crying for a long period of time. This could really make the classroom unconducive for learning; if the caregivers do not know how to handle such a situation. Nail biting

is another major issue as it relates to preschoolers' delinquency. Preschoolers have been observed to have bitten their finger nails often times; such that some of them are now addicted to it.

Noncompliance to rules in the classroom is another way preschoolers manifest delinquency. Some preschoolers are so funny that they will rather cry throughout the school hour than comply with any rule which they do not like. Once a given activity is denied them or a switch from one lesson activity to another when the preschooler is still enjoying the former activity will warrant noncompliance-this is why it is juvenile behaviour. Wullschleger, et al., (2021), argued that preschool preschoolers fidget in course of finding their balance and composure. This happens especially when the child is tensed. The child may not be able to comport him/herself well, thereby resulting to fidgeting.

It is no news that government through Universal Basic Education Board in Rivers State has rolled out different training programmes for caregivers on how to manage preschoolers behaviour in the classroom, provided psycho-social materials that could soothe preschoolers and help to check the outburst of preschoolers' emotions. Despite these efforts, the behaviour exhibited by preschoolers remained unabated. It is sad enough that these behaviours when not checked manifest in adulthood also. When such behaviour manifest in adulthood, it leaves the individual in an embarrassing state. Many factors have been accused of stimulating these behaviours in preschool preschoolers one of these factors is caregivers' behaviour.

Caregivers' behaviours are actions of caregivers exhibited towards preschoolers which could be positive or negative to preschoolers. In the classroom, the caregiver direct instruction and interact with the preschoolers. In course of this, the caregiver is bound to exhibit certain behaviour which informs the social climate of the classroom as at that time. The behaviour exhibited by caregivers could be conceived as positive and negative behaviour (Gordon, 2022). Be this as it may, the focus of this study is not to present the component of behaviour on the basis of negative and positive, but harness the indices of both component as individual variables and not as positive and negative behaviours. On this note, the following are referred as caregivers' behaviour thus: neglect of emotional needs, scaring behaviour and verbal abuse.

Neglect of emotional needs is a strong indicator of caregivers' behaviour exhibited in the classroom. When caregivers overlook preschoolers' emotional needs, the classroom environment becomes less inclusive and less conducive to learning. For instance, a preschoolers experiencing anxiety or frustration may struggle to concentrate or participate effectively in class. Without acknowledgment or intervention from the caregivers, these emotions can escalate, leading to disengagement or behavioral issues. Research has shown that emotional neglect in the classroom is correlated with increased stress levels among preschoolers and reduced academic motivation (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

The neglect of emotional needs also weakens the bond between caregivers and preschoolers. A caregivers' lack of empathy or responsiveness can cause preschoolers to feel alienated, resulting in a loss of trust and a reluctance to seek help when needed (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This detachment creates a disconnect that not only affects the caregivers-pupil relationship but also hinders the development of a positive classroom culture. Preschoolers who feel emotionally neglected may withdraw from classroom activities,

further isolating themselves from the learning community (Garner, 2018).

Moreover, persistent emotional neglect can have lasting effects on preschoolers' mental health. Unaddressed emotional struggles can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, which may persist into adulthood. Caregivers who fail to acknowledge and address these needs inadvertently reinforce negative self-perceptions in preschoolers (Osher et al., 2020). For example, a preschooler who feels overlooked when expressing difficulty with a task may internalize a belief that their efforts and feelings are unimportant, impacting their confidence and willingness to engage in future challenges.

Verbal abuse is one of the ways caregivers' behaviour manifests on preschoolers in the classroom. As pointed by McCoy et al., (2020), preschoolers exposed to verbal abuse often endure emotional trauma. While they may not fully grasp the semantics of the words hurled at them, the anger and negativity in the tone and manner of communication are palpable. This leads to feelings of fear, anxiety, and insecurity. These preschoolers can develop a sense of powerlessness, unable to understand or control the emotional onslaught they face. Their tender and yet developing self-esteem is particularly vulnerable to such abuse.

Verbal abuse is a particularly damaging form of behaviour that significantly impact preschoolers. It involves the use of harsh words, insults, yelling, or constant criticism directed towards a child. This behaviour can have severe consequences on the child's emotional and psychological development, even though preschoolers may not fully comprehend the meanings of the words used. One of the intriguing things about this developmental stage is that, preschoolers are highly impressionable, and their emotional well-being seems to be deeply influenced by the interactions they have with their caregivers, primarily parents or guardians (Rodríguez-Valls, 2018). Verbal abuse, characterized by the hostile tone and negative language, can cause long-lasting harm to these young minds (Ryan, & Deci, 2020). Verbal abuse has the potential to impair a child's social development.

Over time, caregivers' behaviour can erode preschoolers' self-esteem, making them feel powerless and unworthy of love and care. Gartrell (2020) stated that the impact of scaring extends to the child's emotional development and behaviour. Constant exposure to threats and intimidation can lead to aggression or withdrawal. Some preschoolers may become aggressive in an attempt to regain a sense of control and assert their power, while others may withdraw as a defense mechanism against the emotional turmoil (Hase, et al., 2021). Both of these responses could hinder their social development and make it challenging for them to form healthy relationships with peers and adults. Caregivers' behaviour seems to be on the increase in public early childhood education centres. Based on this background, the study seeks to examine the relationship between caregivers' behaviour and preschoolers' delinquency in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Theoretical Backing

Protection Motivation Theory by R. W. Rogers (1975)

Protection motivation theory (PMT) was originally created to help understand individual human responses to fear appeals. Protection motivation theory proposes that people protect themselves based on two factors: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal assesses the severity of the situation and examines how

serious the situation is, while coping appraisal is how one responds to the situation. Threat appraisal consists of the perceived severity of a threatening event and the perceived probability of the occurrence, or vulnerability. Coping appraisal consists of perceived response efficacy, or an individual's expectation that carrying out the recommended action will remove the threat, and perceived self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to execute the recommended courses of action successfully.

This theory is relevant to the present study in the sense that it emphasizes that preschoolers tend to seek safety and protection when they feel threatened or affrighted. Therefore, preschoolers will pose certain actions to secure themselves when they feel intimidate, affrighted or devalued. Such actions may manifest as preschoolers' delinquency which should be properly managed.

Statement of the Problem

The behaviour of preschoolers manifested from their early stage of life has been observed to have influenced their entire personality. Close observation of preschoolers revealed that preschoolers sometimes exhibit certain delinquent behaviour which include; self-injurious behaviour, disruptive behaviour, aggression, noncompliance to classroom rules, sucking (fingers, tongues) habit, crying, and nail biting in the classroom. Since the environment where the child is raised no doubt influence the behaviour of such a child, it could be assumed that the way caregivers treat preschoolers warrant these delinquency. Some experts have concluded that such behaviour are exhibited by preschoolers to express their emotions or gain sanity as a resultant effect of emotions they are undergoing. If this is true, could it be that preschoolers exposed to certain caregivers' behaviour exhibit preschoolers delinquency? If so, what is the relationship between caregivers' behaviour and preschoolers' delinquent behaviour in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State? This is the problem of the study which will be investigated using the review of related literature.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between caregivers' behaviour and preschoolers' delinquency in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Investigate the relationship between caregivers' neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between caregivers' verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were stated to guide the study:

1. To what extent does neglect of emotional needs relate with preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does verbal abuse relate with preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Significant relationship does not exist between caregivers' neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggressive behaviour in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.
2. Caregivers' verbal abuse does not relate significantly with preschoolers' delinquency in terms of self-injurious behaviour crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Methodology

16,021 subjects (comprising 15339 Nursery three children and 682 caregivers) found in 682 Public Early Childhood Care Centres in Rivers State constituted the population of the study. 1,602 subjects (comprising 1533 Nursery three children and 68 caregivers) found in 68 Public Early Childhood Centers representing approximately 10% of the study population constituted the sample size for the

study using multi-stage sampling technique through stratified, systematic and simple random sampling techniques. The instruments that were used for data collection in the study are the researcher designed 30-item questionnaire titled: Caregivers' Behaviour Questionnaire (CUBQ), and 30 items observation inventory titled; Preschoolers' Delinquency Observation Inventory (PDOI). The reliability of the instruments was determined through a test-retest method which reliability index score of 0.64 and 0.71 respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to answer the research questions and to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results presentation

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State?

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres

Variables		Neglect of Emotional Needs	Preschoolers' Delinquency in terms of aggression
Neglect of Emotional Needs	Pearson Correlation	1	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Preschoolers' Delinquency in terms of aggression	Pearson Correlation	.710**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1587	1587

*Significant $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 1 documents the summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State. The result shows a positive relationship between the two variables with a correlation coefficient value of ($r = .710$). It also indicates that there is a significant relationship between both variables as [$p = .000$] ($p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis four which states that there is no significant relationship neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in

public early childhood education centres in Rivers State was rejected and the reverse hypothesis indorsed. Therefore, there is significant relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggression in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State?

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Table 2: Summary of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres

Variables		Verbal Abuse	Preschoolers' Delinquency in terms of crying habit
Verbal Abuse	Pearson Correlation	1	.836**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Preschoolers' Delinquency in terms of crying habit	Pearson Correlation	.836**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1587	1587

*Significant $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 2 documents the summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State. The result shows a positive relationship between the two variables with a correlation coefficient value of ($r=.836$). It also indicates that there is a significant relationship between both variables as $[(p=.000) (p<0.05)]$. The null hypothesis six which states that there is no significant relationship verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State was rejected and the reverse hypothesis indorsed. Therefore, there is significant relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study were discussed under the following sub-headings:

Relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of aggressive behaviour

The study in table 1 revealed a significant relationship between neglect of emotional needs and preschoolers' delinquency. Lack of attention to emotional needs can negatively affect the caregivers-preschoolers relationship, which is crucial for effective teaching and learning. Trust and rapport may be compromised, leading to a less conducive learning environment. McCoy et. al. (2020) highlighted that positive caregivers-pupil relationships are foundational for learners' engagement and calmness. When emotional needs are neglected, these relationships suffer, resulting in reduced classroom participation and enthusiasm for learning.

Neglecting preschoolers' emotional needs in the classroom has profound educational implications that can hinder their academic success, mental health, and social development. Addressing these needs is essential for creating a supportive and effective learning environment. Neglecting preschoolers' emotional needs in the classroom has profound psychological implications, leading to increased anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties in social relationships (Cohen, et al., 2018). Addressing these emotional needs is essential for fostering a healthy psychological environment that supports preschoolers' development and well-being. Preschoolers could crave for attention when neglected.

Relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency in terms of crying habit

The result on table 3 revealed significant relationship between verbal abuse and preschoolers' delinquency. Research indicates that children who experience verbal abuse from teachers are more likely to develop mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The internalization of negative comments can severely impact a child's self-worth and motivation to learn. Verbal abuse can lead to a decline in academic performance. Children who feel unsupported or demeaned by their teachers are less likely to engage in classroom activities, leading to poorer educational outcomes. This study agreed with the finding of a research by Arnett (2020), who reveal that the repercussions of verbal abuse can extend beyond childhood. Individuals who experienced such abuse in their formative years may struggle with interpersonal relationships and have difficulty coping with stress in adulthood. A significant factor in preventing verbal abuse is proper teacher training. Programs that emphasize the importance of supportive communication and emotional intelligence can help

mitigate instances of verbal abuse in the classroom. Advocating for clear policies and training programs focused on respectful communication can create a more positive classroom environment. Schools should implement systems for reporting and addressing verbal abuse to protect preschoolers.

Conclusion

This study centred on caregivers' behaviour and preschoolers' delinquency in public early childhood education centres in Rivers State. The classroom where preschoolers learn is not devoid of misunderstanding, and expression of behaviour which could be termed unacceptable. These behaviour do not just occur. Sometimes, it is not in the character of preschoolers to exhibit such unacceptable behaviour. This research found out that caregivers' behaviour, whether positive or negative could inform the way preschoolers react in the classroom. These behaviour as enunciated in this study as self-injurious behavior, disruptive behavior, aggression, noncompliance to classroom rules, sucking and biting (fingers, nails), crying habit are observed on daily basis from children in the classroom. These behaviours are referred to as delinquent behaviour. While it is expected of preschoolers to exhibit acceptable behaviour that would help improve the learning environment, it is concluded that caregivers are to showcase good behaviour and treat preschoolers well in order to reduce the rate of tantrums exhibited by preschoolers in school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study; the following were recommended:

1. Caregivers are to treat all preschoolers the same way with love, without discriminating against anyone of them; so that preschoolers would not feel bad.
2. Caregivers should shun the use of verbal derogatory statement on preschoolers, so that preschoolers would not model such behaviours as being acceptable.

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