EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION AMONG UPPER BASIC STUDENTS IN KWARA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State, adopting a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study comprised all upper basic students in Kwara State. There are 21,780 upper basic students in Kwara State (Kwara State Ministry of Education 2023). The target population comprised all upper basic students in public schools in Kwara State. There are 13, 673 students in public upper basic schools in Kwara State (Kwara State Ministry of Education 2023).

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 271 upper basic school students as respondents of the study. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Psychological Impact of Social Exclusion and Isolation (QPISEI)" was used to collect data. The findings of the study revealed that the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State include anxiety, loneliness, rejection feeling, concentration issues, Feeling disconnected, unhappiness mood, sadness, and low self-esteem.

The study found no significant gender difference on the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State. The study recommended that Kwara State government should establish accessible and confidential psychological support services within schools to assist students dealing with the emotional repercussions of social exclusion. Trained counselors or mental health professionals can offer guidance, coping strategies, and a safe space for students to address their feelings of loneliness, rejection, and diminished self-esteem.

Keywords: Social Exclusion, Isolation, Psychological Impact, Social Needs Theory

INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion and isolation are pervasive phenomena that significantly impact individuals' psychological well-being across various age groups and societal settings (Zavaleta et al., 2014). Among the most vulnerable are upper basic students, whose formative years are profoundly shaped by social interactions and peer relationships. As adolescence marks a pivotal stage in social identity formation, the experience of being excluded or isolated within this cohort can

significantly impact emotional well-being, cognitive development, and overall mental health. As such, Kwara State's unique cultural context and educational landscape offer a compelling backdrop to explore the multifaceted effects of social exclusion and isolation.

Social exclusion and isolation represent complex and multidimensional phenomena within the realm of psychology and social sciences. At its core, these experiences involve the marginalization, detachment, or alienation of individuals or groups from social networks, leading to their disconnection from meaningful interactions and communal participation (Madanipour, 2015). According to Baumeister & Leary (2017), social exclusion refers to the deliberate or inadvertent act of preventing an individual from accessing social interactions, acceptance, or inclusion within a group or community. This exclusionary experience, DeWall (2013) stated that, it can result in feelings of ostracism, leading to a lack of belongingness and affiliation, and ultimately impacting the individual's self-esteem, emotional well-being, and cognitive processes. Twenge and Spitzberg (2020) noted that social isolation encompasses the state of being disconnected or separated from meaningful social relationships or networks.

It involves a subjective feeling of loneliness or perceived social disconnectedness, regardless of the actual quantity of social interactions. Socially isolated individuals, as highlighted by D'Hombres et al. (2021), may experience increased vulnerability to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, due to the absence of supportive social connections and interactions.

Cacioppo et al. (2013) reiterated that social isolation is the objective lack of social contacts or infrequent social participation. This state often leads to subjective feelings of loneliness, which can significantly impact an individual's emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, and physical health (Bendersky et al., 2021). It involves a perceived discrepancy between desired and actual social connections and may result in detrimental effects on psychological well-being. Wang et al., (2017) asserted that social exclusion is a deliberate or inadvertent process of alienating an individual from social relationships, leading to feelings of being unwanted or ignored within social contexts.

This exclusionary experience, according to Peace and Mohammed (2015), can trigger emotional distress and impair an individual's ability to form meaningful interpersonal connections, influencing their psychological adjustment and mental health outcomes, particularly during crucial developmental stages, such as adolescence.

Mulvey et al. (2017) stated that the repercussions of social exclusion and isolation span across various domains, exerting profound effects on individuals' psychological, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Psychologically, the impact of these phenomena can be deeply distressing. Studies consistently demonstrate that prolonged exposure to social exclusion or isolation can trigger feelings of loneliness (Allen et al., 2020), depression (Niu et al., 2022), and anxiety (Lincoln et al., 2021). These emotional responses are rooted in the fundamental human need for social connection and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). Kiat et al. (2018) stated that when these needs are unmet due to exclusionary experiences, individuals may develop maladaptive coping strategies or heightened sensitivity to social cues, further perpetuating a cycle of isolation.

The psychological toll of such experiences is especially pronounced in vulnerable populations, such as adolescents, the elderly, or marginalized communities, where social support networks play a pivotal role in identity formation and mental health.

Furthermore, social exclusion and isolation have cognitive implications that extend beyond emotional distress. Research suggests that individuals subjected to prolonged social exclusion or isolation may exhibit cognitive deficits in areas such as attention (Sethi et al., 2013), decision-making (Mudra Rakshasa & Tong, 2020), and problem-solving (Timeo et al., 2019). This cognitive impact stems from the neurobiological responses associated with stress and feelings of social disconnection. Heightened stress levels, often accompanying these experiences, can impair cognitive functioning, leading to difficulties in concentration and information processing (Murison, 2016). Consequently, the cognitive consequences of social exclusion and isolation can hinder academic performance, exacerbate existing mental health conditions, and impede adaptive social behaviors.

Additionally, the social and societal implications of social exclusion and isolation cannot be overlooked. Beyond the individual level, widespread social exclusion and isolation contribute to societal fragmentation (Andersen, 2019), hindering social cohesion (Mohanty, 2014) and fostering inequality (Vandekinderen et al., 2018). Communities that fail to address these issues risk perpetuating cycles of exclusion, widening disparities, and limiting opportunities for collective progress. Additionally, Petri (2022) highlighted the advent of technology and its pervasive influence on social interactions introduces new dimensions to social exclusion and isolation, with cyberbullying, online ostracism, and digital

disconnection posing unique challenges to psychological well-being.

One of the most comprehensive and influential psychological theories that conceptualizes social exclusion and isolation is the Social Needs Theory, derived from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory posits that humans have fundamental social needs for belongingness, acceptance, and social connection, which are essential for psychological well-being and fulfillment (Cao et al., 2013). Trivedi and Mehta (2019) highlighted when these needs are unmet or threatened due to social exclusion or isolation, it triggers profound psychological consequences. At its core, the Social Needs Theory emphasizes the critical role of social interactions and relationships in fulfilling basic human needs.

According to Maslow's hierarchy, social needs come after physiological and safety needs, highlighting their significance in the hierarchy of human motivation. These needs encompass belongingness, love, and esteem—factors that are deeply intertwined with social inclusion and connectedness (see Fig 1). Margalit (2010) noted that when individuals experience social exclusion or isolation, it directly challenges the fulfillment of these fundamental social needs, the absence of supportive social networks or the perception of being excluded triggers feelings of loneliness, rejection, and alienation. These emotional responses arise from the innate human desire for social belongingness and connection, highlighting the psychological impact of failing to meet these social needs (see figure 1).

Additionally, the Social Needs Theory explains the psychological mechanisms behind social exclusion and isolation. It suggests that these experiences threaten an individual's sense of identity, self-worth, and belongingness, leading to emotional distress and cognitive responses aimed at restoring social connections (Navy, 2020). Romeo (2013) noted that this distress can activate stress responses in the brain, affecting neural pathways associated with emotions and social cognition, further amplifying the psychological toll of exclusionary experiences. In essence, the Social Needs Theory offers a robust framework for comprehending the psychological underpinnings of social exclusion and isolation.

However, while the Social Needs Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological implications of social exclusion and isolation. Kumar (2021) argued that the theory seemingly oversimplify the complexities of individual differences in coping with social exclusion. It does not fully account for cultural variations, personality factors, or the dynamic nature of social relationships that

influence the impact of exclusionary experiences on individuals (Ogut & Attar, 2015).

Research has consistently shown that social exclusion and isolation have a significant negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of students. Arslan, (2018) found that social support from family, peers, and school can mediate and moderate the relationship between social exclusion and psychological wellbeing. Ray et al. (2019) identified factors such as lack of support, non-native English speaking, caregiving responsibilities, and loneliness as being associated with social isolation among health science students. Li et al. (2021) further highlighted the mediating role of psychological capital and the moderating role of implicit theories in the relationship between social exclusion and depression among college students.

Also, A range of studies have explored the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among students in Nigeria context. For instance, Ishaku et al. (2018) found that Nigerian students reported higher levels of loneliness compared to their Japanese counterparts. Oni (2010) further emphasized the influence of peer group pressure on social adjustment, with gender differences also playing a role.

Finally, Hall-Lande et al. (2007) underscored the association between social isolation and increased risk for depressive symptoms, suicide attempts, and low self-esteem, with protective factors such as family and school connectedness playing a mitigating role. These studies collectively highlight the significant impact of social exclusion and isolation on the psychological wellbeing of students in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The psychological ramifications of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State represent a critical area of inquiry. Anecdotal evidence and observations conducted by the researcher suggests the prevalence of social exclusion and isolation phenomena among upper basic students in Kwara State. For instance, engaging with educators, parents, and some students themselves has revealed instances of exclusionary behavior, cliques forming, and certain individuals being left out of social circles.

These encounters hint at potential psychological distress, affecting self-esteem, emotional well-being, and academic performance. However, this preliminary understanding lacks empirical validation and systematic investigation, prompting the need for a comprehensive study to address this pressing concern.

Despite the anecdotal accounts and perceived prevalence of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State observed by the researcher, empirical studies addressing this specific context remain noticeably scarce. Existing research in broader settings or age groups often lacks granularity regarding the psychological intricacies of social exclusion experienced by students in this region. While studies globally acknowledge the detrimental impact of social exclusion and isolation on psychological well-being, academic performance, and social development (Arslan, 2018; Ray et al. 20;19. Li et al. 2021; Ishaku et al. 2018; Oni 2010 and Hall-Lande et al. 2007), there's a distinct lack of localized research exploring these phenomena within the educational landscape of Kwara State.

The dearth of empirical investigations focusing on upper basic students in this specific geographical and cultural context underscores the need for a thorough examination to elucidate the nuances, prevalence, and psychological implications of social exclusion and isolation among this demographic. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State. Specifically, attempts to answer the g question.;

i. What are the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among male upper basic students in Kwara State?

ii. What are the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among female upper basic students in Kwara State?

iii. Is there a significant gender difference on the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State?

HYPOTHESIS

Ho$_1$: There is no significant gender difference of the psychological impact of social exclusion   and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State.

METHODOLOGY

This research embraced a descriptive approach akin to a survey expedition. The territory of interest encompassed the entirety of upper basic students in the captivating land of Kwara State, a bustling community boasting a population of 21,780 such students, as documented by the Kwara State Ministry of Education in the year 2023.

Within this educational expanse, the focal point zoomed in on the public school domain, homing in on a specific population of 13,673 students in the upper basic tier, according to the published records of the Kwara State Ministry of Education in the year 2023. To capture the essence of this scholastic panorama, a strategic maneuver unfolded in the form of a simple random sampling technique, meticulously cherry-picking 271 upper basic school students who stood as the respondents for this insightful study.

A researcher-design questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Psychological Impact of Social Exclusion and Isolation (QPISEI)" was used to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into two sections – A & B. Section "A"; was used to elicit the demographic response of the respondents this include gender. Section B was used to elicit information on Impact of Social Exclusion and Isolation. 4-point Likert scale method of 4=Very True of Me, 3= True of Me, 2= Rarely True of Me, 1= Not True of Me was used as the scale of response.

Face and content validity was conducted under the supervision of two educational psychologists and two research measurement experts in the Department of Social Sciences of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin.

After which the instrument was administered to a set of 50 students, who are not part of the targeted population of the study but with similar characteristics, to test for reliability. After the instrument was received, Cronbach Alpha was used to check the reliability coefficient to determine if the instrument is reliable or not using split-half reliability method. Questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.83, which makes the questionnaire reliable for use.

The researcher administered the questionnaire to the students following all research ethics procedures. The researcher sought the permission of the school management before administering the questionnaire assuring them of confidentiality and animosity. Furthermore, no respondents was compelled to give response to the instrument; the distribution of the instrument was determined by the willingness of the respondents. Also, in the administration of the questionnaire as regard to this study, the right of the respondents was put into utmost consideration and was not be infringed upon. The students were asked to make a tick (√) where necessary. The questionnaires were filled and collected immediately to forestall any attrition.

Item-by-Item mean analysis was used to answer research question 1 and 2. Research question 3 was converted into hypothesis and

the hypothesis was tested using independent T-test at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 unveils the participants, with a total of 271 respondents, all upper basic students, weaving into the fabric of this study. Among them, 145 individuals (53.5%) emerged as male, while the remaining 126 (46.5%) were female. This representation of data hints at a notable inclination, showcasing a higher involvement of male upper basic students compared to their female counterparts in this research exploration.

To address research question 1 and 2, the responses of male and female upper basic students on psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation were subjected to item-by-item mean rating. The determination of the impact hinged upon a benchmark score of 2.50. This benchmark was derived by calculating the average of the measurement scale (4+3+2+1)/4. Consequently, psychological impact of social exclusion with a mean rating exceeding 2.50 were categorized as psychological impact, while those with a mean below 2.50 were considered as not psychological impact

Research Question 1: *What are the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among male upper basic students in Kwara State?*

Result in Table 2 shows psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among male upper basic students in Kwara State. As shown in the table, all the psychological impact had mean greater than the benchmark value 2.50, which included Anxiety from social isolation (3.42), Loneliness due to lack of companionship (3.19), Concerns about rejection in social settings (3.04), Impact on concentration due to exclusion. (3.04) Feeling disconnected from peers. (2.65), Influence on mood and happiness (2.85), Difficulty engaging with peers (2.85), Left out from school social activities (2.54), Sadness when socially isolated (2.53) and Impact on self-esteem from exclusion (2.53). This means that the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among male upper basic students in Kwara State include Anxiety, Loneliness, rejection feeling, concentration issues, Feeling disconnected, unhappiness mood, sadness, and low self-esteem.

Research Question 2: *What are the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among female upper basic students in Kwara State?*

Result in Table 3 shows the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among female upper basic students in Kwara State. As shown in the table, all the psychological impact had mean greater than the benchmark value 2.50, which included concerns about rejection in social settings

(3.59), Difficulty engaging with peers (3.49), Loneliness due to lack of companionship (3.34), Feeling disconnected from peers (3.34), Impact on concentration due to exclusion (2.95), Anxiety from social isolation (2.95), Sadness when socially isolated (2.75), Influence on mood and happiness (2.64), Impact on self-esteem from exclusion (2.63) and Left out from school social activities (2.62). This implies that the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among female upper basic students in Kwara State include rejection feelings, loneliness, disconnected feelings, concentration issues, anxiety, Sadness, unhappiness mood and low self-esteem from exclusion.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Ho$_1$: There is no significant gender difference on the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State.

Results in Table 4 show a calculated t-value of 1.70 and p-value of 0.98 in which the p-value is greater than 0.05 (0.98 > 0.05). Since 0.98 is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means there is no significant gender difference on the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State.

The first finding of the study revealed that the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among male upper basic students in Kwara State include anxiety, loneliness, rejection feeling, concentration issues, Feeling disconnected, unhappiness mood, sadness, and low self-esteem. This comprehensive finding underscores the multifaceted psychological toll experienced by male upper basic students in Kwara State due to social exclusion and isolation.

The presence of anxiety, loneliness, feelings of rejection, concentration difficulties, disconnection from peers, unhappiness, sadness, and diminished self-esteem paints a complex picture of the profound repercussions of exclusionary experiences within this demographic. This aligns with a study conducted by Will et al. (2016), which highlighted similar psychological ramifications among adolescents subjected to social exclusion. The interplay of these psychological impacts, from heightened anxiety and loneliness to the erosion of self-esteem and a pervasive sense of disconnect, signifies the intricate and interconnected nature of the challenges faced by male upper basic students in Kwara State due to social exclusion. Addressing these multifaceted psychological consequences requires tailored interventions and supportive frameworks acknowledging the diverse range of emotional and social difficulties experienced by these students.

The second finding demonstrated that the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among female upper basic students in Kwara State include rejection feelings, loneliness, disconnected feelings, concentration issues, anxiety, Sadness, unhappiness mood and low self-esteem from exclusion. This finding underscores the intricate psychological repercussions of social exclusion and isolation experienced by female upper basic students in Kwara State, reflecting a complex array of emotional challenges. The prevalence of rejection feelings, loneliness, disconnectedness, concentration issues, anxiety, sadness, unhappiness, and diminished self-esteem signifies the multifaceted nature of the psychological distress arising from exclusionary experiences within this demographic.

This aligns with a study by Matthews et al. (2016), which identified similar psychological impacts among individuals subjected to social exclusion. The convergence of these emotional consequences among female upper basic students in Kwara State highlights the profound and interrelated nature of the psychological distress triggered by social exclusion.

Finally, the third finding of the study revealed that there is no significant gender difference on the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State. This finding of non-significant gender differences in the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State challenges conventional assumptions about gender-specific responses to exclusionary experiences. It suggests a universality in the psychological repercussions of social exclusion across genders within this demographic. This aligns with a study by Eisenberger and Lieberman (2013) which also found no discernible gender differences in the neural responses associated with social exclusion. The absence of distinct gender variations in the psychological impact, encompassing feelings of loneliness, rejection, decreased self-esteem, and emotional distress, emphasizes the commonality of these experiences regardless of gender among upper basic students in Kwara State.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The exploration of the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State illuminates the profound and multifaceted consequences of these experiences within this demographic. Regardless of gender, both male and female students face comparable psychological challenges stemming from social exclusion, encompassing feelings of loneliness, rejection, decreased self-esteem, anxiety, and unhappiness. This finding underscores the urgency of implementing

inclusive interventions and support systems within educational environments to address the diverse emotional needs of students affected by social exclusion. Moreover, the absence of significant gender differences in the psychological ramifications emphasizes the universality of these experiences across genders, necessitating a holistic approach to mitigate the detrimental effects and foster a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape for upper basic students in Kwara State.

Based on the outcome of the study, the following recommendation were put forward:

1. Kwara State government should develop and implement inclusive programs within educational institutions in Kwara State that promote social integration and resilience-building strategies. These programs should focus on fostering empathy, understanding, and inclusivity among students to mitigate the adverse psychological impacts of social exclusion and isolation.

2. The government should establish accessible and confidential psychological support services within schools to assist students dealing with the emotional repercussions of social exclusion. Trained counselors or mental health professionals can offer guidance, coping strategies, and a safe space for students to address their feelings of loneliness, rejection, and diminished self-esteem.

3. School management should launch awareness campaigns and educational initiatives that promote empathy and understanding among students, teachers, and parents about the detrimental effects of social exclusion. Encouraging a culture of inclusivity and kindness can help create a supportive environment that minimizes instances of exclusionary behavior among upper basic students in Kwara State.
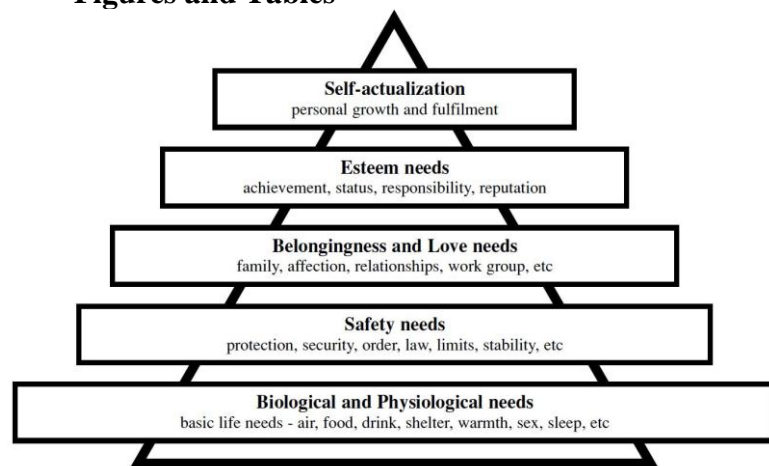
Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (Source; Özad and Uygarer, 2014)

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Male	145	53.5
Female	126	46.5
Total	**271**	**100.0**

Table 2: Mean Analysis Showing Psychological İmpact of Social Exclusion and İsolation among Male Upper Basic Students in Kwara State

S/N	Psychological İmpact	Mean
1	Anxiety from social isolation.	3.42
2	Loneliness due to lack of companionship.	3.19
3	Concerns about rejection in social settings.	3.04
4	Impact on concentration due to exclusion.	3.04
5	Feeling disconnected from peers.	2.65
6	Influence on mood and happiness.	2.85
7	Difficulty engaging with peers.	2.85
8	Left out from school social activities.	2.54
9	Sadness when socially isolated.	2.53
10	Impact on self-esteem from exclusion.	2.53

Table 3: Mean Analysis Showing Psychological İmpact of Social Exclusion and İsolation among Female Upper Basic Students in Kwara State

S/N	Psychological İmpact	Mean
1	Concerns about rejection in social settings.	3.59
2	Difficulty engaging with peers.	3.49
3	Loneliness due to lack of companionship.	3.34
4	Feeling disconnected from peers.	3.34
5	Impact on concentration due to exclusion.	2.95
6	Anxiety from social isolation.	2.95
7	Sadness when socially isolated.	2.75
8	Influence on mood and happiness.	2.64
9	Impact on self-esteem from exclusion.	2.63
10	Left out from school social activities.	2.62

Table 4: Gender Difference on the psychological impact of social exclusion and isolation among upper basic students in Kwara State

Gender	No	Mean	Std.	do	t-cal.	p-value	Remark
Male	145	59.89	6.59		1.70	0.98	
Female	126	58.18	7.19	269			**Not Significant**

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