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Relational Victimization and the Psychosocial Maladjustment of Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Cameroon

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Abstract

Nowadays, the rate at which adolescent students victimized others is alarming. They engage in physical, sexual and relational victimisation which may have adverse psychosocial effects on the victims. Though they are diverse forms of victimisation among adolescents, this paper focuses on how relational victimisation (gossips, lies telling, social exclusion and rumours-mongering) leads to psychosocial maladjustment among adolescents in secondary schools in Cameroon. Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to select a sample which comprised of adolescent students (577), counsellors (12) and discipline masters (12) from some schools in the North West, South West, Centre, and Adamawa Region (613). The instruments used for data collection were a closed-ended questionnaire for students, a focus group discussion with students, and an interview for counsellors and discipline masters/mistresses. Data obtained were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using cross-tabulations, percentages, and multiple response sets. Findings showed that relational victimisation significantly predicts psychosocial maladjustment ($P < 0.001$). The positive sign of the correlation ($R = 0.351^{**}$) implied that adolescents are more likely to suffer from psychosocial maladjustments when there is a persistent of relational victimisation in the school environment. The findings imply that when there are persistent lies telling, gossips, rumours-mongering and exclusion from social groups, the victim turn to suffer from psychosocial maladjustment like isolation, low self esteem, fear, and depression. In order to reduce the adverse effects of relational victimisation and promote positive psychosocial maladjustments among adolescent the various a stakeholders especially parents, teachers, school administrators, and counsellors should play unique roles in organising forums to advice and counsel the students peer victimization

Keywords: Victimization, Relational Victimization, Psychosocial Maladjustment, Adolescents

1. Introduction

Relational victimisation as violence is exposure to behaviors aimed at damaging relationships or one's social reputation, such as exclusion, manipulation, and rumor-spreading, (Crick & Groppeter, 1998). It also involves being deliberately excluded from social exchanges and events, having friends threatening to withdraw their friendship if one does not comply with their demands, and other forms of social manipulation (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Relational victimization is precarious as it may not only tarnish one's image among others but also undermine the development of effective emotion-regulation and coping strategies among affected individuals.

According to Rudolph et al. (2009), repeated harassment by peers may increase individual stress reactivity and lead to dysregulated emotions and behavior in such harassing social contexts. Relational victimization therefore hurt victims and damage not only peer relation but also individual social status (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). Where relational victimisation is absent, quality health peer relationship provide a context in which children and adolescents learn to regulate their emotions and behaviour, manage conflicts and relate with others in more revealing and trusting ways. It is potentially clear that all the far or near end of relational victimisation is socio-emotional breakdown that the affected individuals suffer, suggesting a series of maladjustments especially psychosocial maladjustment.

A psychosocially maladjusted individual presents inability to react successfully and satisfactorily to the demands of one's social environment (Ranasinghe et al., 2017). The term maladjustment simply refers to an individual's failure to cope with the demands of the normal social environment. Maladjustment in the school environment is when students have difficulties meeting the expectations of the school context including the quality of relationships and the social structure that defines the school. In well-adjusted and adapted schools adolescents display a range of psychosocial adjustments indicators with corresponding gains in subjective wellbeing (Gutierrez & Goncalves, 2013; Vinas et al., 2015). According to Söderberg et al. (2017), aggressive behavior, anxiety and peer rejection constitute some of the most common symptoms of psychosocial maladjustment. No doubt, adolescence heralds a unique period of vulnerability to relational victimisation, but most importantly to psychosocial maladjustment indicators such as depression, anxiety, fear, social phobia, and much more. For a lot of psychosocially maladjusted adolescents, intense feelings of anxiety, decreased self-esteem from high to low, deterioration of coping skills that were once effective, and even avoidance of situations or circumstances that require adaptive behavior might be illustrative of a difficult social terrain that adolescents have to deal with.

Significant research has pointed to peer victimization in its various forms as a risk factor for increased psychosocial maladjustment among adolescents in school or social contexts. For example, Hawker & Boulton (2000) found links between peer victimization and depressive symptoms meanwhile Desjardin & Lead beater (2011) specifically found relationships between relational victimisation and depressive symptoms. Even though these findings are robust, informing practices in educational and school settings, many school children, especially adolescents are still faced with the challenge of having to deal with psychological harm resulting from relational victimisation and other forms of peer victimisation. There seems to be a two-way traffic of relational victimisation yielding a series of psychosocial maladjustment indicators that at some point also result in some form of violence. In fact, a good proportion of the violence observed across school campuses in Cameroon, especially among students may be a result of relational victimization, including exposure to behaviors aimed at damaging relationships or one's social reputation. According to Crick & Grotpeter (1996), these damaging behaviors might include gossip, lies telling, slander, exclusion, manipulation, and rumor-spreading that might sometimes actually result in affected individuals fighting back for not just their personality but also their reputation in the school community. Establishing these possible links in Cameroon school contexts where violence among students and by students is more common than ever cannot be more relevant at any other time than now. This paper therefore focuses on the possible relationships between relational victimization and the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescents in secondary schools in Cameroon.

2. Review of literature

Character defamation is a compassionate aspect with has long-lasting consequences on an individual. Relational victimisation, an aspect of peer victimisation, is a wilful attempt to damage another's self-esteem, social status, or close relationships through social exclusion, harmful gossip, or friendship manipulation (Coleman & Byrd, 2003). In the same line, Crick and Grotpeter (1996) earlier held that relational victimisation is exposure to behaviours aimed at damaging relationships or one's social reputation, such as exclusion, manipulation, and rumour-spreading. Meanwhile Reyes & Prinstein (2004) refers to relational victimization as attempts to damage the victim's social reputation within the peer group hierarchy. Right across the literature, it would appear that relational victimization is conceptually perceived in common ways with the most common characteristics being the intent to damage one's social standing in the peer group. According to Prinstein et al. (2001), relational aggression in school contexts uses a student's relationship with other teenagers, or their friendship status, as a way of inflicting

social harm such as purposefully excluding a peer from social activities, threatening to withdraw one's friendship, thereby rendering the affected individual excluded, lonely and psychologically hurting. In this light, Crick & Grotpeter (1996) found relationships between relational victimisation and depression, loneliness and self-restraint difficulties, and that relational victimisation significantly contributes to affected adolescents' distress.

As social networks and peer interactions become more sophisticated during adolescence, so too does relational victimisation. In middle adolescence, relational victimisation in adolescents is manifested when an adolescent's friendship is damaged or manipulated by a peer through behaviours such as spreading rumours, withdrawing friendship, and social exclusion (Werner & Schäfer, 1999). Research links relational victimisation within the broader peer group of classmates or schoolmates and more intimate relationships to emotional, behavioural and interpersonal maladjustments (Salmivalli et al., 2005). This explains why the exposure to relational victimisation may leave adolescents feeling socially alienated, wary, and thereby fostering negative beliefs about peers social orientation and even social interactions. Prinstein et al. (2001) note that in some circumstances, relational victimisation may partially replace overt or physical victimisation as a safer means of expressing disdain, displeasure, or anger, especially when adolescents are unable to break rules and exert physical aggression on their peers. And of course, like Creusere (1999) notes, more cognitive advances during adolescence with increased understanding of sarcasm and innuendo may allow a more refined and hurtful use of relational victimization in peer groups.

According to Heington et al. (1998), inclusion of relational victimisation in the concept of harm has also broadened the range of adolescents identified as potential targets of intervention, and most of those identified in this casting of a wider net are girls. Historically, scholars maintained that girls experienced more relational victimisation than boys (e.g. Letendre, 2007). The proliferation of the image of relationally victimised girls in the literature has falsely contributed to the perception that only girls are mean and vindictive towards each other, and that boys do not experience and/or display relationally victimised behavior (Underwood, 2007). However, recent findings indicate that relational victimisation is as prevalent among boys as in girls, uniquely affecting them in much the same ways (Prinstein et al., 2001). But other research also insist that girls experience more relational violence than boys and are equally more relationally victimised than boys (e. g. Cullerton –Sen & Crick, 2005). In addition, girls who suffer victimization at school, both overt and relational, demonstrate greater feelings of loneliness and social anxiety than boys (Storch & Masia-warner, 2004). Arguably, relational victimization like many other indicators of peer victimisation, has varied and various stages at which it occurs. It might occur higher in some stages than others. For example, rumour spreading about one's self, deliberate exclusion from social exchanges and events, having friends threaten to withdraw their friendship if one does not comply with their demands and other forms of social manipulation (Crick & Bigbee, 1998).

Relational victims are individuals who are frequent targets of others' relational victimised acts and behaviours in which relationships are used as a means of harm (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). Arguably, relationally victimised individuals may have friends or romantic partners who control them through their friendship or romantic relationship. Examples of such control include "I am going to exclude you from groups of social exchanges if you do not comply with my demands and manipulations", and they may be the target of malicious rumours in their peer groups or be excluded from critical social activities like birthday parties. They could be excluded from study groups formed in class or groups formed during extracurricular activities in the school milieu. But they may also suffer rumour-spreading and manipulation that leaves them psychologically broken. What is most sure about relational victimization is that its targets are most commonly victimised by peers, friends, and romantic partners. It manifests itself in different forms, including verbal victimisation, the use of words or gesture to cause psychological harm (Rancer, 2015). For instance, gossiping about another person, excluding others from peer groups, ignoring each other, criticizing people behind their back, turning people against each other, threatening to break up with a partner if the partner does not comply, and spreading rumours (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). This suggests that verbal aggression is similar to bullying, except that it does not use physical aggression. Like bullying, relational victimisation relies on verbal, social, and physical methods of intimidation and harassment in order to inflict pain on its victims. It might make use of threats, teasing, criticism, and other forms of verbal aggression in order to cause harm.

Morals & crick (2000) identified two forms of relational victimisation being: direct and indirect forms. Direct relational victimisation includes behaviours such as verbal exposures aimed at damaging relationships whereas its indirect forms are more commonly associated with internalized problems such as depression and anxiety. It also involves indirect approaches and includes behaviours such as gossip and social exclusion (Campbell, 1999). Sarcastic verbal comments, speaking in a cold tone of voice, ignoring, staring, leaving out, spreading rumors, “mean” facial expressions, and cyber bullying are all direct relational bullying examples (Li, 2022). These types of mean behavior manipulate or cause damage to relationships for the purpose of hurting the victim’s self-esteem or social status in a peer group. The intent is to harm another child's social standing or social relationships. Newman (2005) explained that there is more damage at the earlier stage of adolescence than later. Adolescents are a priority here because they are at the verge of certain developmental gains in their lives such as logic and analytic thinking ability, self-identity development and increasing independence.

Opposite sex friendships become more common among adolescents. Direct forms of relational victimisation may now involve both male and female peers, prior to the onset of adolescent, boys and girls become socialised primarily within same sex contexts. For example, in a same-sex friendship, the relationally victimised adolescent may be threatened with exposure of shared secrets to a potential opposite-sex romantic partner and same-sex peers. Some studies have demonstrated that young adolescents continue to prefer same-sex peers to other-sex peers (Bukowski et al., 1999) and same-sex peer preference declines over time (Sippola et al., 1997). Dissing someone of the opposite sex may also be directly relationally victimizing behavior (Rudolph, 2009). This behavior is characterised by completely ignoring the victim while simultaneously playing up to a critical friend in the victim’s same-sex peer group, clearly meant to compromise the victim’s social status among his or her peers.

As identity issues become more salient to adolescents, aspects of their social interactions may become avenues for relational victimisation (Siegal, 1993). Indirect behaviours that may be used to victimize an adolescent relationally may involve rumours that are more socially savvy than they had ever experience. This involves multiple past relationships and more extensive weaving of stories, described by adolescents as “trashing them”, e.g., gossip (Morales et al., 2000). Again, this may involve spreading rumours about others to both male and female peers. It is important to note that relational victimisation is more common during adolescence than overt victimisation, although boys report higher overt victimization than girls (La Greca et al., 1993). Worth mentioning is the fact that relational victimisation is more common among girls than boys (Hyde, 1984; Crick, 1997). Card et al. (2008) posits that although girls seem to engage significantly more in indirect victimisation than boys, the difference is trivial. For example, girls are naturally involved in talking and spreading rumours more than boys.

Another meaningful way that the experience of relational victimisation differs during adolescence compared to childhood is the fact that it occurs in romantic relationships, peer relationships and friendships (Card et al., 2008). In adolescent romantic relationships, relational victimisation may occur through manipulating sexual confidences and fidelity issues. These behaviours are exemplified through actions such as “cheating” on the victim, trying to make the victim jealous- and depriving him or her of affection or “cutting him (or her) off” (Morales et al., 2000). In addition to the possibility of experiencing victimisation by a partner in romantic dyads, adolescents’ intimate relationships may be used as “relational weaponry” by other peer victimisers.

The developmental manifestation of relational victimisation amongst adolescents becomes consistently more complex, with development involving both direct and indirect manipulations of social relationships and mirrors developmental gains in the social and cognitive domains. Adolescents report that some peers victimise others by going after or stealing their dating partner and telling lies about their past with the intent to ruin their friend’s reputations (Morales et al., 2000). Relational victimisation is a pervasive experience in adolescence and is associated with various maladjustment symptoms such as isolation, low self-esteem, fear, exclusion from groups, and depression (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). It can have negative implications on adolescents among which are high levels of loneliness characterise relationally victimised adolescents with a high social and psychological profile; symptoms of depression, exclusion and low self-esteem (Hunter et al., 2007) have greater involvement in violent relational behaviour.

Relational victimisation is associated with psychological mal-adjustment in adolescents (Baldry, 2004). This paper reports partial data from a study of peer victimization and the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students in secondary schools in Cameroon. Variables of peer victimisation included relational victimisation, overt victimisation, sexual assaults, power imbalance and property crime which were checked against psychosocial maladjustment. Previous studies found relationships between relational victimisation and adolescent wellbeing, but it would appear this research has received far little attention than overt victimisation and the other victimisation tendencies among peers during adolescence. It therefore made a good reason to present the data that was found and the results that were obtained against relational victimization and psychosocial maladjustment among adolescent students in Cameroon secondary schools. The literature is almost silent on relational victimisation and its consequences on adolescent wellbeing while other overt victimization tendencies receive a lot of attention. Relational victimisation was defined by a range of behaviours might be aimed at damaging relationships or one's social reputation, such as lies telling, exclusion, manipulation, rumour-spreading, mockery and much more. Meanwhile tendencies to self-isolate, of low self-esteem, verbal abuse, lack of confidence, feelings of incompetence and more were used to define psychosocial mal adjustment.

3. Methods

The research design adopted for this study was the mixed methods approach with a concurrent nested design. The accessible population was made up of 667,308 students and 32,897 administrators\teachers drawn from four public schools, four mission schools and four lay private schools from the four regions in Cameroon. The purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 610 including 586 students and 24 school administrators (discipline masters) and counsellors.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Adolescent students responded to a questionnaire and ten of them participated in a focus group discussion, while school administrator and counselors responded to an interview. Questionnaire data subjected to descriptive statistics to generate counts, percentages, and multiple responses sets. The descriptive data were further used to verify the hypothesis that was stated in the study. The Spearman rho correlation test was used to verify the relationship between relational victimisation and psychosocial maladjustment among adolescent students in secondary schools in Cameroon. Meanwhile qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis and emerging themes and their groundings were discerned and presented, and expatiated by quotations.

4. Findings

4.1. Relational victimisation and psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students

Table 1: Psychosocial Maladjustment among Adolescent Students in Secondary Schools

Items	Stretched			Collapsed		
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
I always feel like staying away (isolating myself) from my peers in school environment	110 (19.0%)	169 (29.3%)	108 (18.7%)	190 (32.9%)	279 (48.4%)	298 (51.6%)
I get depressed while in school	81 (14.1%)	145 (25.3%)	167 (29.1%)	181 (31.5%)	226 (39.4%)	348 (60.6%)
I suffer from the feeling of low self-esteem while in school	92 (16.1%)	138 (24.1%)	166 (29.0%)	177 (30.9%)	230 (40.1%)	343 (59.9%)
I know many classmates who love staying indifferent from peers in school environment.	160 (27.8%)	203 (35.2%)	84 (14.6%)	129 (22.4%)	263 (63.0%)	213 (37.0%)
I often quarrel with my mates when they get aggressive towards me	125 (21.7%)	166 (28.9%)	114 (19.8%)	170 (29.6%)	291 (50.6%)	284 (49.4%)
I often get angry in the school	103	178	124	170	281	294

	(17.9%)	(31.0%)	(21.6%)	(29.6%)	(48.9%)	(51.1%)
The learning environment is very tense such that I fear	86	144	149	188	230	337
I sometimes lack confidence in myself while am in school	(15.2%)	(25.4%)	(26.3%)	(32.6%)	(40.6%)	(59.4%)
I often feel incompetent to carry out some tasks assigned to me in school	140	164	118	149	304	267
	(24.5%)	(28.7)	(20.7%)	(26.1%)	(53.2%)	(46.8%)
I am not comfortable standing up and responding to questions in class	117	160	137	154	277	291
	(20.6%)	(28.2%)	(24.1%)	(27.1%)	(48.8%)	(51.2%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	1126	1599	1259	1710	2725	3005
	(19.7%)	(27.9%)	(22.6%)	(29.8%)	(47.6%)	(52.4%)

Assessing the prevalence of psychosocial maladjustment among adolescent students in secondary schools, table 10 shows that some 48.4% (279) of adolescent students indicated they always felt like staying away (isolating themselves) from peers in the school environment. A percentage of 39.4% (226) of participants get depressed in school. At the same time, 40.1% (230) of the adolescent students presented a lack of self-esteem while in school. A total of 63.0% (263) argued that many of their classmates love staying indifferent to peers in school.

The findings showed that 50.6% (291) of adolescent students quarrel with their mates and portray an aggressive attitude towards them. The findings further revealed that some 48.9% (281) get angry in school. Some 40.6% (230) of the adolescent argued that their learning environment is agitated, such that they are afraid. In contrast, 53.2% (304) of the adolescent students indicated they sometimes lack confidence in themselves in the school environment.

The findings also showed that some 48.8% (277) of adolescent students often feel incompetent to carry out tasks assigned to them in school. Finally, 42.5% (244) of the adolescent students indicated they were not comfortable standing in class and answering questions. In aggregate, findings showed that 47.6% (2725) of the adolescent students showed signs of psychosocial maladjustment while 52.4% (3005) did not.

Table 2: Adolescent Students' Characterisation of Relational victimisation

Items	Stretched			Collapsed		
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
Lies telling among peers is rampant in my school	236 (41.0%)	195 (33.9%)	66 (11.5%)	78 (13.6%)	431 (75.0%)	144 (25.0%)
My peers regularly gossip and smear my name and person.	170 (29.6%)	170 (29.6%)	129 (22.4%)	106 (18.4%)	340 (59.1%)	235 (40.9%)
I often receive a lot of mockery from my peers in school	195 (34.0%)	224 (39.0%)	74 (12.9%)	81 (14.1%)	419 (73.0%)	155 (27.0%)
My friends and peers are rude to me for no reason even when I try to be nice to them	113 (19.7%)	162 (28.3%)	179 (31.2%)	119 (20.8%)	275 (48.0%)	298 (52.0%)
I am demoralized by the attitude of my peers	138 (24.0%)	184 (32.1%)	146 (25.3%)	107 (18.6%)	323 (56.1%)	253 (43.9%)
Peer groups are disrupted due to gossips	171 (29.7%)	212 (36.8%)	91 (15.8%)	102 (17.7%)	383 (66.5%)	193 (33.5%)
There is manipulation in school by peers	165 (28.6%)	208 (36.2%)	95 (16.5%)	107 (18.6%)	373 (64.9%)	202 (35.1%)
Verbal expression and anger causes harm among peers	194 (34.4%)	208 (36.9%)	90 (16.0%)	72 (12.8%)	402 (71.3%)	162 (28.7%)
I am often excluded from study groups because I do not partake in gossips	107 (18.9%)	173 (30.6%)	153 (27.1%)	132 (23.4%)	280 (49.6%)	285 (50.4%)

Exclusion from study groups by peers hinders my smooth functioning in school	129 (22.9%)	169 (30.0%)	119 (21.1%)	147 (26.1%)	298 (52.8%)	266 (47.2%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	1618 (28.3%)	1906 (33.3%)	1142 (20.0%)	1051 (18.4%)	3524 (61.6%)	2193 (38.4%)

Findings showed that 75.0% (431) of adolescent students suffered lies told about them by their peers in schools. A percentage of 59.1% (340) of the adolescent students argued that peers' gossip and smear their names and person. Findings showed that 73.0% (419) of adolescent students received mockery from their peers. While 48.0% (275) of the adolescent students indicated their friends are rude to them for no reason, even when they try to be nice to them, a percentage of 56.1% (323) of the adolescent students presented that they are demoralized by the attitude of their peers. Furthermore, the findings also showed that 66.5% (383) adolescent students opined that peer groups are disrupted due to gossip. 64.9% (373) argued that there was manipulation in school by peers. While 49.6% (280) of the adolescent students indicated their failure to be among gossip groups leads to their exclusion from study groups by peers, 52.8% (298) of them indicated that exclusion from study groups by peers hinders smooth functioning in school. Finally, findings equally showed that a majority of the adolescent students, 71.3% (402), indicated that verbal expression of anger causes harm to peers. Overall, the findings showed that 61.6% of the adolescent students presented their school environment as relationally victimised while 38.4% (2193) denied it.

Table 3: Cross Tabulation between Relational aggression and Psychosocial Maladjustment

		Relational aggression		Total
		Strongly Agree/ Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	
Psychosocial maladjustments	Strongly Agree/ Agree	178 67.9%	84 32.1%	262
	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	189 61.4%	119 38.6%	308
Total		367	203	570

Using a cross tabulation technique, findings showed that adolescent students whose school environment were characterized with relational victimisation suffered more from psychosocial maladjustment (67.9%) than those whose school environment was not characterized with relational victimisation.

Table 1: Thematic Characterisation of Relational victimisation

Has your character ever been damaged in school by peer?	How was it done?	How often was it done	Causes
'Yes'	'Insulting of mother' 'Gossip' 'Lies telling'	'Once' 'Frequently'	'Jealousy'
'No'			

From the focus discussion with the adolescent students, some opined they had been a victim of relational victimisation while others said they had not. Furthermore, the findings revealed that some students' characters have once been damaged in their school because of relational aggression while others have not. In addition, finding out from the students how relational victimisation was portrayed, some students were insulted by their peers while others said it was through gossiping and lies telling. To elucidate, finding out from the students how often they have been victims of relational victimisation, some said once, while others said often. In addition, when finding out the causes, some said they had no idea while others said it was caused by jealousy from peers. Finally, finding out from the students on how it could be eliminated, some students said students should dress decently. In contrast, others said they have to keep to themselves and that school rules and regulations be implemented strictly.

4.2. Verification of Hypothesis

H0₁: Relational victimisation does not predict the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students in secondary schools.

Table 5: Testing the Effect of Relational victimisation on Psychosocial Maladjustment

Test	Statistics	Relational victimisation	Psychosocial maladjustments
Spearman's rho	R-value	1.000	.351**
	p-value	.	.000
	n	570	570

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically, findings showed that relational aggression significantly predicts the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students in secondary schools ($p < 0.001$; < 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation ($R = 0.351^{**}$) implied that adolescent students are more likely to suffer from psychosocial maladjustment. In addition, descriptive findings revealed that adolescent students whose school environment were characterized by relational victimisation suffered more psychosocial maladjustment (60.1%) than those whose school environments were not void of relational aggression. The null hypothesis that relational victimisation does not predict the psychosocial maladjustments of adolescent students was rejected and the alternative that relational victimisation does predict the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students was retained.

5. Discussions

The findings showed that relational victimisation significantly predicts the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescents in secondary schools. This implied that adolescent students who find themselves in environments characterized by relational aggression suffer more psychosocial maladjustment than those whose environments are free from it. The finding is similar to Storch & Masia-Warner (2004) who posited that there is a high demonstration of loneliness in an environment where relational victimisations is present. Participating students were clear about the presence of relational victimisation tendencies in schools such as lies telling, mockery, being rude and gossiping. The null hypothesis, which stated that relational victimisation does not predict psychosocial maladjustments among adolescent was rejected, while the alternative was retained.

The findings also showed that most adolescents attested to the fact that relational victimisation occurs due to jealousy, exclusion from groups, gossiping, mockery, and verbal expression of anger. This is further confirmed by Morales (2000), who posited that relational victimisation might occur through manipulating sexual confidence and fidelity issues, jealousy, and cutting off friends. This is further supported by Campbell (1999), who posited that relational aggression includes behaviours such as gossiping and social exclusion. Also, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) also attested to the findings of this work when they said; that verbal aggression is intentionally hurting people's social relationships, gossiping, excluding people from groups, and criticizing people behind their backs.

In addition, findings showed that relational victimisation could be manifested by damaging youth's integrity and gossip among peers. This conformed to the ideas of Coleman & Byrd (2003), which posited that relational victimisation is a wilful attempt to damage another youth's self-esteem, social status, or close relationship through social exclusion, damaging gossip, and friendship manipulation. The finding of this study confirmed that a high percentage of adolescents accepted they were excluded from their groups, gossiped about, mocked, and this is coupled with verbal expression of anger.

6. Conclusion

The findings revealed that relational victimisation leads to psychosocial maladjustments among adolescent students in secondary schools. This is because relational victimisation significantly predicts the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescents in secondary schools. Relational victimisation in adolescents is characterized by high levels of loneliness, symptoms of depression, exclusion, and low self-esteem, and have greater involvement

in violent relational behaviour. Therefore, relational victimisation is a common, pervasive experience in adolescence and is associated with various maladjustment symptoms such as isolation, low self-esteem, fear, exclusion from groups, and depression.

It is recommended that school authorities should take action when they find out about such happenings in the school environment. When such reports come from the students, they should also be taken seriously. Those involved in such victimisation should be disciplined to stop it. The actions received as a result of discipline will set an example to others to avoid emulating it or carrying out a similar action. Adolescents should be made to understand that it is a critical stage in their lives where they are building their personality. In the school environment, teachers, school Chaplain, counsellors, and administrators should make them understand that building a personality void of such negativity is worth it. There should be constant talks and seminars' in school concerning these ills and measures to eradicate them.

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