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FROM PARENTING TO CALLOUSNESS: THE ROLE OF PEER INFLUENCE

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Abstract

This study investigated factors responsible for the increased maladaptive behaviours among undergraduates; such characterized by recklessness, devoid of empathy. Hence, necessitating the need to examine the relationship between parenting styles, peer influence, and callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates. A total of 493 undergraduates that were selected, using multi-stage sampling method from five different departments in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka participated in this study. This study was a correlational study that used the Parental Authority Questionnaire, Peer Influence Scale, and Inventory of Callous-unemotional Traits for data collection; while moderated regression statistics was adopted for data analyses. The results revealed that a negative relationship existed between authoritative parenting style and callous-unemotional traits at β= -.56, t=-2.765, p<.001. But a positive relationship was found between authoritarian parenting style and callous-unemotional traits, and between permissive parenting styles and callous-unemotional traits at β=.48, t=2.417, p<.001, and β=.29, t=3.159, p<.001, respectively. Furthermore, a positive relationship was also found between peers influence and callous-unemotional traits at β=.39, t=3.734, p<.001. More so, peers influence positively moderated the relationship between authoritarian, and permissive parenting on callous-unemotional traits at β=.28, t=2.198, p<.001, and β=.40, t=4.446, p<.001, respectively. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended among others, that school managements should ensure that there is a functional counselling unit in every institution for timely identification and treatment of undergraduates with callous-unemotional traits

Keywords: parenting styles, callous-unemotional traits, peers' influence

Introduction

Among undergraduates, evidence of maladaptive behaviours have been on the increase. Such maladaptive behaviours include: risky sexual behaviour (Onuoha, Obi-Nwosu et al. 2025), bulling, and cybercriminality (Okafor et al. 2024; Okeke et al. 2024). It is no doubt that their involvement in these maladaptive behaviour could be the resultant of their poor adherence to directives and social norms; which sometimes could manifest with callousness, and such callousness seems to be common among individuals that are high on callus-unemotional traits (Onuoha, Ugwu et al. 2025). Callous-unemotional traits places undergraduates at risk of severe, and persistent conduct problems as well as antisocial behavior that often manifest with truancy, poor academic grades, poor social interaction; and can have a concomitant mental health implication, resulting from recklessness, substance abuse, and other addictive behaviour like gambling. According to De Brito et al. (2021), maladaptive behaviours associated with callous-unemotional traits are relatively persistent in absent of adequate psychological support, and can linger through adulthood. Thus, individuals that are high on callous-unemotional traits could experience numerous problems, ranging from: legal issues, addictive behaviours, homelessness, risky sexual behaviors, as well as untimely death that could result from recklessness.

The forgoing on the risks associated with callous-unemotional traits, and its' concomitant self-destructive behaviours among undergraduates necessitated the need to investigate likely psychological factors (parenting styles) that are linked with callous-unemotional traits, and possible factor(s) (peer influence) that seems to fuels the development, or exhibition of callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates. Since Tobih et al. (2024), Onuoha, Umeobi, et al. (2024), and Okeke et al. (2024) observed that one's mode of parenting is an important factor in the development of their personality; as well as behaviour, this observation necessitated the

rationale for investigating the role of parental style in the development of callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates. More so, the need for belongingness among this study population (undergraduates) places them at risk of peer influence (Onuoha, Ugwu, et al. 2025). Thus, the rationale for assessing the role of peer influence in the development of callous-unemotional trait

According to De Brito et al. (2021) and Wilkinson et al. (2015), callous-unemotional traits is among the factors that leads to affective disorder in adulthood. Thus, adolescents with such traits could be at risk of developing psychopathy, and seems to have high tendency of violent crime in adulthood. Frick et al. (2014) opined that callous-unemotional trait is characterized by reduced sense of guilt or remorse, lack of empathy, and serious disregard for adequacy in social, or interpersonal commitment. They seems to be aggressive, and are usually insensitive to punishment cues.

According to Barry and Sacco (2016), and Waller et al. (2020), high level of callous-unemotional traits manifest with antisocial behavior; with likelihood of impulsivity. By implication, such individual could have issues complying with social norms; and could be a risk factor in substance use disorder. More so, American Psychiatric Association (2013) asserted that callous-unemotional traits are associated with psychopathy, and are serious predictors of antisocial behavior. The close association between callous-unemotional traits and maladaptive behaviours have been integrated as among the indicators of conduct disorder in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013); and could be impacted by poor parental approach.

Parental styles as among the factors that could impact on one's behaviour was defined according to Baumrind (1991) as a consistent pattern in which parents interacts with their children, and manifest through their demandingness, and, or responsiveness. Singh and Behmani (2021) defined parenting style as those approaches that parents adapt in aiding their children's survival; both in

terms of growth and healthy development. While Tobih et al (2024), Onuoha, Umeobi, et al. (2024), and Okeke et al. (2024) sees parenting style as those skills and abilities that parents utilizes in molding their children's responses, and reaction to their environment. Thus, parenting entail the creation of a person's social, emotional and psychological outlook; which directly reflects the person's perception, expectation, and behaviours (Onuoha, Umeobi, et al., 2024).

Baumrind (1991) stated that there are two key characteristics of parenting; which are demandingness, and responsiveness. Demandingness according to Baumrind (1991) means the extent in which parents impose their rules, and expectation upon their children; thus, showing the extent of their attentiveness, and commitment in creating the image they expects their children to reflect. More so, Mills-Koonce et al., (2016) opined that demandingness have to do with the level or extent at which parents imposes their views and expectations on their children; while responsiveness on the other hand means the extent parents give room for open, and reciprocal interaction with their children. Responsiveness could also be seen as the extent to which parents support their children's independency, and self-regulation. This means that responsive parent freely approves their children's demands and expectation; with insignificant amount of alteration. It is no doubt that as these two approaches (demandingness and responsiveness) utilizes different mode of interaction, their outcome, or impact of the children's personality formation, and emotional development will differ.

Baumrind (1991) further conceptualized parenting style, using three different types of parenting, which are: Authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. Authoritative approach to parenting are those parents that are somewhat responsive and demanding in their interaction with their children (Baumrind, 1991). This type of parents are known for their cultivation of positive emotion and adaptive behaviour in their children (Pinquart, 2017). Authoritarian parenting on the other hand

are highly demanding, with limited responsiveness in their approach to parenting. This mode of parenting have been found to be associated with maladaptive behaviours (Pinquart, 2017). While permissive approach involves hyper responsiveness, with very limited demandingness (Tobih et al., 2024). They are parents that are usually uninvolved in the affairs of their children. Since they are not so involved in the affair of their children, their children a left to circumvent life situations on their own, with little or poor level of parental attachment (Okeke et al., 2024). Thus, could result to the development of negative emotions, and behaviour; while seeking attachment, and validation outside their home; giving room to peer influence.

Peer influence can be seen as the direct or indirect alterations in behaviour due to group membership, and is the resultant of compliance to the group norms, and expectations. According to Telzer et al. (2018), peer influence means the process change in thoughts, feelings, and actions of one, resulting from the influence of another or group. According to Nsofor (2013), one's association with one peer group or another could determine to a large extent, the social codes they imitate or model. By implication, undergraduates that mostly associate with antisocial groups, or are friends with people with criminal tendency, could easily develop or pick callus trait from such association in their desire to adapt to the group norms. Carlson (2010) opined that each group have their uniqueness resulting from their culture, ritual, or sanctions that all members of the groups are socialized into. Thus, none compliance with those culture, and ritual could lead to being ostracized by other members.

Peer influence could be said to have occurred when a person internalizes the contextually salient group norms; thus, influencing their attitude, self-definition, and behavioral regulation (Hogg & Reid, 2006). As such, peer influence could either have a positive or negative impact on an

individual and such impact is dependent on the group the individual associate with. One's association with peer group that have positive norms and value, would lead to socialization into a positive values; thus, resulting to the development of positive and adaptive behaviour. However, in most context, peer influence is associated with negative attitude, and maladaptive behaviours; and is the resultant of socialization into maladaptive norms and values. According to Dishion and Tipsord (2011), association with criminally minded group increases the likelihood of developing deviant behaviour through social reinforcement (reinforcement of the group values, and norms).

Statement of the Problem

Undergraduates that developed callous-unemotional traits are likely to exhibit, and persist in maladaptive behaviours; which could include cybercrime, bulling, and lack of empathy. As a result, they may experience poor academic performance, truancy, and difficulty forming positive relationships with none maladaptive peers, teachers, as well as family members; resulting from their maladaptive pattern of behaviours that could be characterized by poor emotional intelligence, selfish desire, and lack of empathy. The forgoing implies that callous-unemotional traits seems to be associated with altered brain activity during emotion processing. Particularly, in areas related to empathy, and emotional regulation. It could be associated with drug abuse, and other addictive behaviours; with detrimental health implications that could result from their recklessness (Onuoha, Ugwu, et al., 2025).

Studies have indicated an association between callous-unemotional traits and the experience of psychopathologies like: anxiety, trauma, substance abuse, suicide, social isolation, and loneliness (Farrington, 2005; Frick et al., 2005; Figueiredo et al., 2024). Among Nigerian populations, several studies have found an association between some psychological factors that are associated to maladaptive behaviours. Such factors include: peer pressure (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021; Nwafor et

al., 2021), personality traits (Nnadozie et al., 2022), emotional regulation (Nweke et al., 2023), parental styles (Tobih et al., 2024; Onuoha et al., 2024 & Okeke et al., 2024), self-esteem (Onuoha, 2024 & Onuoha, Ifenna, et al., 2024), impulsivity (Nweke et al., 2024), social interaction (Ugwu, 2024), emotional intelligence (Emekpo et al., 2024), abuse (Azuh et al., 2024), social media exposure (Onuoha, Obi-Nwosu, Chukwu, et al., 2025, and bereavement (Anene et al., 2025). However, none among these studies examined the role of these psychological factors on callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates within South Eastern Nigeria. Hence, necessitated the need for this study that examined the role of parenting styles and peer influence on callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates; aimed at filling the observed gap in knowledge, as well as adding novel literature, and empirical evidence to the body of knowledge, in respect to the study variables

Theoretical Framework/Empirical Review

This study was theoretically anchored on Social learning Theory because, the theory can be used to explain the relationship among the variables of interest (parental styles, peer influence, and callous-unemotional traits). According to Bandura (1977), human beings learn through interacting and imitating others. Since the family serves as the first agent of socialization, children learn social norms from their family; which is overseen by their parents. Thus, undergraduates could learn, and copy adaptive, or maladaptive behaviour from their interactions with their parents. Social learning theory can also be used to explain peer influence since peers association involves peers interaction, an undergraduate can learn callousness from their interaction with peers that are known for callus and antisocial behaviour as a result of their need to be part of, or to maintain their friendship with such peers.

Empirically, there are some studies that have attempted to provided evidence on the study variables parenting styles; though, with mixed findings, making the relationship between parenting style and callous-unemotional trait a complex one. Studies such as: Smith (2019) examined the relationships between parenting styles and empathy, as well as parenting styles and callous-unemotional traits in college students and found that authoritative parenting is positively related to empathy, while authoritarian parenting is negatively related to callous-unemotional traits. Zhong et al. (2020), explored the mediation role of parenting styles (i.e., authoritative and authoritarian) in the relationship between maternal psychopathic traits and child callous-unemotional traits; and found that maternal psychopathic traits influences child callous-unemotional traits through authoritarian parenting style. Zhang et al. (2021), investigated the pathways from parenting style to callous-unemotional traits, and found that the higher the authoritarian parenting, the higher the child's exhibition of callous unemotional traits. While authoritative parenting showed relatively lower level of callous-unemotional traits. Goagoses and Schipper (2021), examined the association between parental warmth/coercion and aggression/rule-breaking behavior, and to determine whether these associations are mediated by callous-unemotional traits dimensions. They found that parental coercion had a positive association with un-emotionality. Tomlinson et al. (2022), examined the role of parenting in moderating the etiology of callous-unemotional traits in middle childhood, and their finding indicated that as parental warmth increases, callous-unemotional traits decreased. Prasetiani and Mahanani (2024), evaluated the tendency of callous-unemotional traits in early adolescents, based on their perception of their parents' parenting styles and found that democratic parenting style leads to lower callous-unemotional traits. Furthermore, Zhu et al. (2024) examined an association between maternal parenting style and callous-unemotional trait

and found an association among maternal physical coercion, verbal hostility, non-reasoning, and callous-unemotional traits.

On the impacts of peers influence in the development of callous-unemotional traits Libisch et al. (2002) examined the role of peer pressure in adolescents' risky behaviors, and found that adolescents that associate with stable peer groups are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Sattar and Malik (2022) investigated the predictive role of peer pressure on delinquent behavior and their findings indicated a positive relationship between peer pressure and delinquency. Furthermore, Perhamus and Ostrov (2024) examined the socialization processes of peers in the development of callous-unemotional traits. Their study revealed that a positive relationship existed between irritability and callous-unemotional traits. Onuoha, Ugwu et al. (2025) examined peer pressure as risk factor of callous-unemotional traits, and found an association between peer pressure and callous-unemotional traits

Hypotheses

Six hypotheses were postulated to guide this study, they included:

1. Authoritative parenting style would negatively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates.
2. Authoritarian parenting style would positively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates.
3. Permissive parenting style would positively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates.
4. Peer influence would positively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates.

5. Peer influence would positively and significantly moderate the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and callous-unemotional traits
6. Peer influence would positively and significantly moderate the relationship between permissive parenting style and callous unemotional traits

This study aimed at understanding the role of peer influence in the relationship between parental styles (authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive) on callous-unemotional traits. This research is expected to show the association between each of the parental styles and callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates as well as the role of peer influence in moderating such relationship. Hence, the empirical findings will show psychological factors that when adequately controlled, would lead to the reduction of the development, and exhibition of callous-unemotional traits, among undergraduate.

Method

Participants

In this study, 493 undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka that were selected from five different Departments (Department of Economics, Business Administration, Computer Sciences, Civil Engineering, and Adult Education) served as participants. They were selected using multi-stage sampling method. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, with a mean age of 22.2 and standard deviation of 2.5. Among the participants, males were 211, while females were 282. Christians among them were 418, Muslim were 72, while the other 3 did not specify their religious affiliation.

Instruments

For data collection, three instruments were used; which are the Parental Authority Questionnaire, Peer Influence Scale, and Inventory of Callous-unemotional Traits.

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)

Parental Authority Questionnaire was developed by Buri (1991) to measure mode of parenting from the view point of the children. It contained a 30 items, with 3 sub-dimensions. This scale is rated on a 5 point likert scale format, ranging from l=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Validity and Reliability

Buri (1991), reported an alpha coefficient of 0.77, and a test reliability of 0.72. Also, Nwafor (2008) reported a Cronbach alpha value of the dimensions of the scale among Nigerian populations as: 0.71, 0.70, and 0.79 for authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive respectively; while 0.90 was reported for the total scale. More so, Onuoha, Umeobi et al. (2024) reported a reliability coefficient of .72, .76, and .76 for authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting style respectively; while .87 was reported for the total value of the scale.

Peer Influence Scale

Peer Influence scale (PIS) was developed by Rigby and Slee (1993). It is a 10 items statement that elicits the extent to which one is influenced by their peers. These 10 items are rated on a 5-point likert-scale format, ranging from 1= (Strongly Disagree) to 5= SA (Strongly Agree). Sample items include: “Pressure to follow the rules”, “Pressure to skip important duties” and “Pressure in bulling someone”.

Validity and Reliability

Rigby and Slee (1993) reported an internal consistency of .88 for PIS. They further reported the Guttman Split half coefficient of .78; an equal length Spearman Brown of .73, and an unequal length of 0.71. Onuoha, Ugwu, et al. (2025) reported a reliability coefficient of .83 for PIS, among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

Inventory of Callous-Unemotional Traits (ICU)

Inventory of Callous-Unemotional traits was originally developed by Frick (2004) to measure lack of empathy, and originally contained 24 item. Later in 2006, it was validated Essau; who retained 22 items (Essau, 2006). The items in this inventory were rated on a four 4-point Likert scale format; ranging from 0= (not at all true) to 3= (definitely true. Some items of the scale were direct scored, while some were scored in a reverse format. The reversed scored items include: items number 1,2,4,7,11,13,14,15, 17,21,22. The scale has three factors that included: uncaring, callousness, and unemotional.

Validity and Reliability

Essau (2006), reported the internal consistency of the total scale as .81. More so, .81, .80 and .53 were reported for uncaring, callousness and unemotional respectively. Nwafor (2013), validated the inventory among Nigerian's populations, and reported a Cronbach alpha of .75 for ICU 22. For the three sub dimensions, he reported a Cronbach alpha of .71, .71, and .56 for uncaring, callousness and unemotional respectively. Furthermore, Onuoha, Ugwu, et al. (2025) reported a reliability coefficient of .72, .74 and .54 for uncaring, callousness and unemotional respectively; and .76 for the total inventory.

Procedure

The researcher selected five faculties from the nine faculties that are in Awka Campus of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, using simple random sampling method. After that, convenient sampling method was used to select one department from each of the selected faculties, which are, Department of Economics, Business Administration, Computer Sciences, Civil Engineering, and Adult Education. After the researcher had selected the departments to be part of the study, the researcher sort for an introduction letter from the Head of Department of Psychology to serve as a

formal of introducing the researcher to the selected Departments and undergraduates in the departments. After the introduction letter have be obtained, the researcher went to the HODs of the selected Departments for a formal introduction before going to their lecture halls to assess, and administer the copies of the research questionnaires to the undergraduates.

Those that agreed to be part of the study by signing a consent form were administered the copies of the questionnaires. Each of the selected departments were administered 100 copies of the questionnaire, making it 500 administered copies in all. However, 497 copies of the questionnaires were returned. The 497 returned copies were scanned, and 493 copies that were properly filled were selected, and coded in the SPSS for analyses.

Design and Statistics

This study utilized a correlational research design, and moderated regression statistics was adopted as the statistical tool for data analyses and testing of the six postulated hypotheses, using SPSS 25.0.

Results

Table 1: ***Pearson's correlation coefficients of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and peers influence on callous-unemotional traits (CUT) among undergraduates***

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authoritative	-				
2. Authoritarian	-.59**	-			
3. Permissive	-.61**	.45**	-		
4. Peers Influ	-.67**	.47**	.48**	-	
5. Callus-UT	-.52**	.54**	.49**	.15**	-

Note, p<.01, and peers influ means peers influence

From Table 1 above, it could be seen that a negative relationship existed between authoritative parenting style and callous- unemotional traits at r = -.52, p<.01. Table 1 also revealed that a negative relation existed between authoritative and authoritarian parenting style at r = -.59, p<.01. However, there was a positive relationship between authoritarian parenting style and callous-

unemotional traits at *r* = .54, p<.01. A negative relationship was also revealed from Table 1, to exist between permissive parental style and authoritative parenting at *r* = -.61. Though, there was a positive relationship between permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting at *r* = .45, p<.01, and with callous-unemotional traits at *r* = .49, p<.01. Furthermore, it can be seen from Table 1 that a negative relationship existed between peers influence and authoritative parenting at r = -.61, p<.01; but a positive relationship was found to exist between peers influence and authoritarian parenting at r = .47, p<.01. Also, between peers influence and permissive parenting style at r = .48, p<.01. More so, a positive relationship was found between peers influence and callous-unemotional traits at r = .15, p<.01

Table 2: ***Summary of the moderated regression statistic for the relationship among authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and peers influence on callous-unemotional traits***

Variable	R2	D1(d2)	F	*B*	SE	T	LLCI	ULCI
Model 1	.06	3(489)	4.7321					
Authoritative				-.56	.31	-2.7650	-1.1927	.0639
Model 2	.02	3(489)	3.4815					
Authoritarian				.48	.09	2.4172	2.5580	3.2055
Authoritarian*peers Inf				.28	.07	2.1986	1.1922	2.1109
Model 3	.09	3(489)	6.0955					
Permissive				.29	.08	3.1599	.7948	1.7723
Permissive*peer Inf				.40	.06	4.4467	.2847	.5333
Model 4	.08	3(489)	7.1210					
Peers Influence				.39	.06	3.7341	.0552	.4865

Note, p<.001 level of significant, peer Inf=peers influence

From table 2, it can be seen that a negative but significant relationship existed between authoritative parenting style and callous-unemotional traits. Hence, the first hypothesis that stated that authoritative parenting style would negatively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits was accepted at (β= -.56, t=-2.765, p<.001). However, a positive and significant relationship was also found between authoritarian parenting style and callous-unemotional traits. Thus, the second hypothesis which stated that authoritarian parenting style would positively and

significantly predict callous-unemotional traits was accepted at (β=.48, t=2.417, p<.001). Also, a positive relationship was found between permissive parenting style and callous-unemotional traits. Therefore, the third hypothesis which stated that permissive parenting style would positively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits was accepted at (β=.29, t=3.159, p<.001). A positive relationship was as well found between peers influence and callous-unemotional traits. As such, the fourth hypothesis that stated that peers influence would positively and significantly predict callous-unemotional traits was accepted at (β=.39, t=3.734, p<.001). It was revealed from table 2 that peers influence positively and significantly moderated the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and callous-unemotional traits, leading to the acceptance of the fifth hypothesis at (β=.28, t=2.198, p<.001). Furthermore, peer influence positively and significantly moderated the relationship between permissive parenting style and callous-unemotional traits. Hence, the sixth hypothesis of the study was accepted (β=.40, t=4.446, p<.001).

Discussion

This study investigated the role of peer influence in the relationship between parental styles and callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. From the analyses of the study, it was revealed that authoritative parenting style negatively predicted callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates. This finding implies that children that are trained with authoritative parental approach are less likely to develop callous-unemotional trait, or exhibit callousness. As authoritative parenting involves a bit of responsiveness, and a bit of demandingness. This approach demands that children should take responsibility, while enjoying the warmth and care from parents, and caregivers. Thus, such balance could stimulate the feeling of empathy and love in them. Going with social learning theory, such children model what they learn from their parents, and exhibits such in their interaction with

others. Hence, the observed negative prediction as found in this study. This finding is empirically in line with the finding of Smith (2019) that investigated the association between parenting styles and empathy, and between parenting styles and callous-unemotional traits and found a relationship between authoritative parenting style and empathy. Zhang et al. (2021), in there study examined the pathways from parenting style to callous-unemotional traits. Their findings revealed that authoritative parenting approach resulted to deceased chances of developing callous-unemotional traits among children. Furthermore, Tomlinson et al. (2022) assessed the role of parenting in moderating the etiology of callous-unemotional traits in middle childhood, and found that parental warmth leads to decreased callous-unemotional traits in children.

It was further revealed from this study that a positive relationship existed between authoritarian parenting style and callous-unemotional traits. This finding implies that as authoritarian parenting increases, tendency for developing callous-unemotional traits increases in children. This finding is also supported, and can be explained using social learning theory that holds that human being learn and model after the behaviours of significant others in their life. That is why a certain behaviour is prevalence in one community but not in another. For children raised in autocratic and authoritarian family, they could learn to do whatever they want without considering the view and feeling of others. This second finding is also empirically in consonance with that of Zhong et al. (2020). In their study that examined the role of parenting styles in the relationship between maternal psychopathic traits and child callous-unemotional traits, their findings revealed that maternal psychopathic traits impact child callousness through authoritarian parenting. Zhang et al. (2021), in their study found that the higher the authoritarian parenting approach, the higher the children's callousness. Furthermore, Zhu et al. (2024) found that maternal physical coercion, non-reasoning, and verbal hostility correlates with callous-unemotional traits.

Permissive parenting was also found to predict callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates. This implies that the more children are left to find their own path without supervision, the more chances that they might develop, and exhibit callousness. This finding is in agreement with that of Okeke et al. (2024) that examined parental styles and moral disengagement as predictors of attitude towards cybercrime, and found permissive parenting to predict negative attitude towards cyber among undergraduates.

Peers influence was revealed in this study to be among the factors that predicts callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates. Inasmuch as peers influence could be positive, it should be noted that peers influence as was elicited in this study was negative peer influence. Hence, the more the negative peers influence, the more the likelihood of developing, and exhibition of callous-unemotional treats. So, positive peer influence would have a different impact on callous-unemotional traits. This finding could also be explained using social learning theory which is the theoretical framework of this study that holds that we learn from imitating from people we interact with in the social space. This finding validated the old saying that says “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are” and the other that says “birds of the same feather”; It was also empirically in line with the study of Libisch et al. (2002) that found that adolescents that associates with stable peers are less likely to be involved in risky behaviors. Thus, this finding implies that those that associates with unstable peers are likely to engage in risky behaviours. Sattar and Malik (2022) in their study found a positive relationship between peer pressure and delinquent behaviours. Furthermore, Onuoha, Ugwu et al. (2025) found that peer pressure predicted callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates

It was further revealed from this study that peers influence positively moderated the relationship between authoritarian parenting style, and callous-unemotional traits, and between permissive

parenting style and callous-unemotional traits. This implies that undergraduates that are raised by authoritarian and permissive parents are more at risk of developing and exhibiting callousness when exposed to negative peers. This can be inferred because, when peers influence was introduced as a moderator in the relationship between authoritarian parenting and callous-unemotional traits, and between permissive parenting and callous-unemotional traits, a positive interaction was revealed, indicating that callous-unemotional traits become strengthened in individuals that were raised by authoritarian and permissive parents when negative peer influence was introduce.

Implications of the study

This study investigated the role of peer influence in the relationship between parenting styles and callous-unemotional traits among undergraduates; with some relevant implications. Theoretically, the research findings could be used to further elaborate the theoretical framework of this study (social learning theory) that hold that human beings learn by modeling other peoples' behaviour. Hence, the observed relationship among the study variables (parenting styles and peer influence, on callous-unemotional traits. The study also provided novel literature and empirical evidence to the body of knowledge in respect to the study variables.

Practically, it implies that school psychologist should probe for undergraduates' mode of upbringing, and the kind of friends they associate with when handling cases of callousness among undergraduate.

Furthermore, school management should periodically organise seminar programmes to educate undergraduates the impact of the friends they associate with on their behaviour.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings, the researcher recommended as follows:

That psychologist and counsellors working with undergraduates should consider undergraduates' mode of upbringing, and their circle of friends when dealing with callousness.

That school managements and stakeholders should ensure that there is a functional counselling unit in every institution for timely identification and treatment of undergraduates with callous-unemotional traits

That lecturers should try as much as possible in playing, not just the role of lecturers but also, the role of mentors. So as to help in inculcating some sense of warmth and empathy in undergraduates; which should reduce their exhibition of callousness.

Limitations of the study

Despite the fact that this study provided insightful outcome, it was not without some limitations which the researcher tried to circumvent. For instance, this study utilized a self-reportage (questionnaire) mode of data collection. As such, participants might have responded in a way that would make them appear socially acceptable; thereby negatively impacting the research outcome. However, the researcher assured them of the confidentiality of their personal data that could be used to identify them, as well as their free will in participating in this study. This assurance was expected to positively influence the participants' transparency while responding to the research questionnaires. It should also be noted that the research design adopted in this study lacks the potency to establish cause-effect outcome, since it was not experimental approach. Hence,

generalization of the research finding should be made with caution, and in consideration of the demographics of the research participants.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of peers influence in the relationship between parental styles and callous-unemotional trait among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. In order to test the postulated hypotheses of the study, moderated regression statistic was adopted to analyze the data from four hundred and ninety three undergraduates that were selected using multi-stage sampling method. The outcome of the analyses implied that of the three parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive), authoritative parenting style is the best fit to be adopted in raising children that are less likely to develop, or exhibit callous-unemotional traits. However, parents that employs authoritarian or permissive approach of parenting are likely to experience callousness among their children. Furthermore, undergraduates, populations that are mainly made up of adolescents should be mindful of the circle of friends they keep, having in mind that the friends they keep, to a large extent, influences their behaviour.

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