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Positive mental health as an antidote to negative social adjustment of in-school adolescents: a review

**Chiaka Patience Denwigwe¹, Christian Obasi Akpa², Augustine Nchua Edward¹,
Jennifer Uzoamaka Duruamaku-Dim^{1*}**

¹ Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Calabar, Nigeria

² Department of Community Medicine, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Teaching Hospital, Abakiliki, Nigeria

*E-mail address: macshizzles09@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This review investigated positive mental health as an antidote to social adjustment among adolescents in educational environments. Based on a comprehensive analysis of current research, the review emphasized the significance of fostering favourable or positive mental well-being to reduce the adverse consequences of social adjustment difficulties experienced by adolescents. This study examined the influence of positive mental health on the social adjustment of adolescents. It delved into factors of positive mental health such as resilience, emotional well-being, and social support. It also investigated how these factors affect adolescents' capacity to manage the social complexities of school environments. In addition, the analysis highlights the importance of implementing comprehensive mental health programs, providing peer support and networks, training educators, and offering counselling services to promote favourable mental health outcomes among adolescents attending school. Through the implementation of mental health initiatives in educational settings, schools may empower adolescents to cultivate the essential skills and resilience needed to flourish socially and intellectually at this crucial stage of development.

Keywords: Adolescents, Antidote, In-school, Positive mental health, Negative Social Adjustment, Review.

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of negative social adjustment in adolescents cannot be overstated, as it is linked to numerous issues that are prevalent among this age group. It can manifest in various forms, including peer rejection, bullying, difficulty in maintaining friendships, social retreat, and involvement in dangerous behaviours such as delinquency, substance abuse, or engaging in premarital sex. These issues may serve as early indicators of loneliness, sadness, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which can harm academic achievement and overall well-being. Adverse social adjustment can lead to unfavourable outcomes, such as poor social and intellectual achievements. Adolescents who have negative social adjustment frequently encounter challenges in their academic performance. They find it arduous to engage and cooperate with both their peers and teachers, resulting in poor marks and a lack of enthusiasm for school activities.

Poor social adjustment may also lead to mental health difficulties. According to Conyers [1], negative social adjustment can lead to various negative consequences, including isolation, loneliness, compromised mental health, reduced opportunities, increased stress, adoption of negative coping methods, adverse impacts on physical health, and diminished quality of life. Isolation and loneliness pertain to the act of withdrawing from social interactions or lacking a social bond, which can lead to feelings of despair and depression. Inadequate mental well-being, encompassing conditions such as melancholy, diminished self-worth, and various mood disorders, can be attributed to a dearth of social assistance and fulfilment, ultimately leading to psychological anguish and disorders.

There may be a scarcity of opportunities in the realms of education, work, and social relationships. Individuals who have poor social adjustment may fail to seize several possibilities in life. Persistent stress resulting from unfavourable social adaptation takes a toll on both physical and mental well-being. Maladaptive coping strategies offer short-term resolutions but ultimately lead to several more complications. Diminished quality of life hampers emotional well-being, impairs social functioning, and diminishes total life pleasure. Immediate action must be taken to address the issue of negative social adjustment as it is detrimental to everyone.

Various efforts have been made by altruistic individuals to enhance social adjustment in adolescents, but they have not yielded significant advancements. At the community level, religious activities, sporting events, and competitions in academics, arts and crafts, and music are organized by both government and non-governmental organizations. This prompts the researcher to inquire whether any deficiencies remain in the effort to prevent bad social adjustment in teenagers. The researcher believes that fostering positive mental health could provide a solution.

Mental health according to the World health Organization refers to a state of well-being in which individuals can achieve their full potential, effectively manage everyday stressors, maintain productivity, and make meaningful contributions to their communities[2]. Based on this definition of mental health, it can be inferred that positive mental health is associated with a range of qualities and actions, including emotional stability, logical reasoning, adaptability, a positive self-perception, resilience, a sense of purpose and significance in life. These factors contribute to individuals' overall well-being and facilitate positive interpersonal connections. Currently, it is necessary to clarify these sub-variables that indicate enhanced mental well-being.

Emotional stability refers to the proficient regulation and mastery of one's emotions. Despite the difficulties of everyday life, it is still possible to maintain a state of emotional equilibrium. Rational thinking entails the process of logical and critical thinking, leading to evidence-based decision-making and sound reasoning that is free from biases or emotions. Adaptability refers to the ability to effectively handle and adjust to unfamiliar circumstances. Being flexible and open-minded allows one to adapt to challenging circumstances [3]. A positive self-image entails having a favourable perception of oneself. It signifies that they possess self-assurance and can accurately evaluate their abilities and limitations. Resilience refers to the capacity to endure and withstand stress. To clarify, it means maintaining strength and concentration while confronted with difficulties. To possess a feeling of purpose and meaning in life is to thoroughly grasp one's values, objectives, and the factors that give life significance. Considering this context, the researcher has chosen to examine whether positive mental health can act as a remedy for negative social adjustment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wealth of research available on the topics of mental health and social adjustment. An examination of several of those studies is essential to lend credibility to this study. In a 2014 study conducted by Oberle et al.[4], it was discovered that high school students who exhibited positive mental health, as measured by optimism and self-esteem, had improved peer interactions and experienced reduced social isolation. In other words, they experienced a greater number of favourable interactions with their peers. Bjornsen et al.[5] examined the correlation between positive mental health and teenage well-being with the physical and social contexts in school settings. A favourable correlation was discovered between positive mental health in teenagers and school-level physical environment variables such as cleanliness, safety, and green space. In contrast, a negative correlation was discovered between positive mental health in adolescents and bad social characteristics such as bullying and exclusion. This study indicates that the school environment plays a crucial role in enhancing the good mental health and well-being of teenagers.

Man et al.[6] discovered that adolescents who exhibited positive mental health, as measured by self-esteem and well-being, demonstrated lower levels of negative social behaviours, including aggression and bullying. Khan [7] conducted a study on the correlation between positive mental health and academic performance among college students. The findings of their research indicated a positive association between positive mental health and academic performance in college students. They assert that there is a correlation between healthy mental health and improved academic performance, as well as increased involvement in academic pursuits. Harkins et al. [8] examined the role of interpersonal mindfulness in mediating the relationship between positive mental health and problem behaviour in adolescents. They found that interpersonal mindfulness partially mediated the association between positive mental health and problem behaviour. This study suggests that practising interpersonal mindfulness may enhance healthy social adjustment in adolescents.

Font et al. [9] conducted an intervention study to examine the impact of positive mental health on enhancing life satisfaction, pain acceptance, and adjustment to chronic pain among individuals with fibromyalgia. The findings of this study indicate that having a happy mental state greatly improves the level of contentment with life, the ability to accept pain, and the ability to adapt to chronic pain in people with fibromyalgia. This indicates the necessity of addressing mental health factors when managing chronic pain disorders.

Preliminary evaluations have shown that adolescents with elevated levels of positive mental health exhibit improved social relationships and engage in more constructive interactions with their peers. In addition, they

exhibit superior academic achievement and school attendance, leading to enhanced social outcomes. For example, these adolescents enthusiastically pursue further education and enjoy more professional prospects. They exhibit enhanced resilience in the face of challenging circumstances, resulting in improved long-term social results. They exhibit improved social habits such as actively participating in community service, demonstrating a genuine interest in community affairs, and helping when needed.

Although there is evidence suggesting a link between positive mental health and positive social adjustment, there is a lack of studies investigating the cause-and-effect relationship between the two. Consequently, establishing a straight connection between the two notions is challenging. Furthermore, while many studies have examined the relationship between positive mental health and its ability to prevent negative social adjustment, research is scarce on how positive mental health contributes to positive social adjustment and the development of resilience in adolescents. It is important to emphasize that there is a shortage of studies on positive health and social adjustment in developing nations, where ideas and values around mental health differ greatly from those in the Western world. Longitudinal studies that examine the development of positive mental health and its impact on social adjustment over time are clearly lacking. It is challenging to understand how favourable mental health changes are sustained during adolescence. Research has been conducted to investigate the impact of family and school-related factors on enhancing the mental well-being and social adaptation of teenagers. No comprehensive research has been conducted to examine the efficacy of therapies that address both positive mental health and negative social adjustment in teenagers. Therefore, it is challenging to ascertain which option is the most superior.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was supported by the following theories:

1. The idea of resilience was proposed by Norman Garmezy in 1983.

The notion of resilience was initially formulated by Norman Garmezy in 1983 and then developed by scholars such as Emmy Werner and Smith in 1992. The theory posits that positive mental health is a prerequisite for resilience, which is the capacity to adjust and manage adverse circumstances and emerge stronger. Individuals who possess a positive state of mental well-being can utilize their attributes and social support systems to effectively adjust and bounce back from the adverse effects of inadequate social adaptation. The belief is that resilience is a dynamic process that encompasses the interplay between individual and environmental elements. This interaction serves to mitigate the negative effects of stressors and facilitate adaptive coping. The implication of this theory to this work suggests that a state of positive mental health can assist adolescents in managing negative or inadequate social adaptation and adjusting to adverse circumstances. Adolescents who have positive mental health are more equipped to deal with the adverse effects of poor social adjustment, such as anxiety or depression, and can develop healthier strategies for coping. Put simply, fostering favourable mental health in adolescents can enhance their ability to cope with social difficulties and achieve success.

2. Social Cognitive theory by Albert Bandura [10]

This is a psychological framework that focuses on how individuals acquire knowledge and behaviour through observation, imitation, and cognitive processes. This theory emphasizes the impact of cognition on the process of learning and behaviour. It proposed that behaviour is influenced by the observation of others' behaviour, introspection of one's behaviour, and the consequences of behaviour. Additionally, it was mentioned that self-efficacy, which refers to the belief in

one's talents, plays a crucial role in determining behaviour. This hypothesis posits that by bolstering an adolescent's self-efficacy and self-belief, positive mental health might facilitate the development of more efficient coping mechanisms for unfavourable social adaptation.

3. Social Support theory by Cohen et al. [11]

This is a framework that examines the role of social support in individuals' lives. Cohen et al.[11] highlighted the importance of social ties in reducing stress and enhancing well-being. The hypothesis posited that social support is a multifaceted concept that encompasses emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal assistance. The principles also encompass the notion that the influence of social support on mental and physical well-being is contingent upon the calibre, kind, and timing of the support. Social support can mitigate the adverse effects of stressors and improve one's ability to cope with them. Social support can impact health-related behaviours, including engaging in health screenings, adopting health-promoting habits, and adhering to medical treatments. This idea suggests that social support can mitigate the adverse consequences of inadequate social adjustment. Adolescents who have robust social support networks are more likely to effectively deal with the difficulties of negative social adjustment by seeking help from friends, family, and other supportive individuals for emotional and practical aid. Therefore, it is possible to preserve or enhance positive mental health despite experiencing bad social adjustment.

OVERVIEW OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT IN ADOLESCENTS

Adolescents frequently experience a wide array of behavioural, emotional, and social challenges that contribute to negative social adjustment. Some of the challenges encompassed in this category are antisocial behaviour, delinquent behaviour, social isolation, and emotional distress. Antisocial behaviour refers to actions that contravene established social standards and have the potential to cause harm or encroach upon the rights of others. It encompasses behaviours such as violence, bullying, rejection of authority, deceitfulness, lack of empathy, and vandalism[12]. Delinquent behaviour refers to participation in acts that are considered illegal and are primarily carried out by underage individuals. It is demonstrated via the use of drugs, stealing, physical violence, and skipping school.

Social withdrawal refers to the behaviour of adolescents who have poor social adjustment actively avoiding social connections or removing themselves from social activities, resulting in a state of isolation. The study conducted by Mostert and Pienaar [13] found a significant correlation between social retreat and increased levels of academic burnout in adolescent students. This emphasizes the crucial role of social support in promoting healthy social adjustment. Emotional issues in teenagers are characterized by unfavourable social adjustment and the experience of rage, anxiety, and depression. A study conducted by Canas et al.[14] revealed a significant correlation between negative peer effects and lower levels of emotional intelligence as well as poorer social adjustment among teenagers. Emotional issues encompass a variety of mental health challenges that involve the management and expression of emotions. In-school adolescents may experience negative social adjustment, which can show in diverse manners and be influenced by multiple factors, including family dynamics, peer interactions, school environment, and individual traits. Here is a breakdown of some of the factors:

- Poor peer relationships: Feelings of isolation and exclusion may arise due to challenges in establishing and sustaining positive peer connections. Subsequently, this can result in emotional turmoil and maladaptive methods of dealing with stress, such as substance misuse or engaging in delinquent activities.

- Peer rejection: refers to the situation where teenagers face difficulties in establishing meaningful friendships, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation. These factors can be the underlying causes of low self-esteem and mental health disorders.
- Social Anxiety: Adolescents with social anxiety may struggle with social interactions and engage in avoidance behaviours. As a result, their capacity to establish relationships and engage in social events may be impacted, which might hinder their overall social adaptation.
- Family conflict: refers to disagreements or disputes that occur within the home setting. This conflict can arise from situations such as parental divorce or difficult relationships with carers. It can have a significant impact on an adolescent's ability to adapt and interact socially. It could impact their capacity to have faith in others, successfully communicate, and cultivate good interpersonal abilities.
- Academic struggles: When teenagers have difficulties in their studies, it might impact their social adaptation due to feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment regarding their subpar performance. This can lead to their withdrawal from social activities and a feeling of isolation from their peers.

An integrated approach that encompasses collaboration among educators, carers, and mental health experts will be beneficial in resolving maladaptive social adaptation among teenagers attending school. Cultivating affirmative connections, nurturing a conducive educational milieu, and advocating for socio-emotional development can contribute to enhanced social adjustment and overall welfare.

A GLANCE AT THE MEANING OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AS AGAINST NEGATIVE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

It is important to briefly examine the definition of social adjustment to gain a better comprehension of negative social adjustment. Social adjustment refers to the capacity to form and maintain positive relationships with classmates and important individuals such as parents, older relatives, teachers, and principals. According to Vaz et al. [15] social adjustment refers to the extent to which individuals fulfil social role expectations, maintain favourable connections, and effectively handle the demands and strains of daily life. McKenzie et al.[16] defined social connectedness as the extent to which an individual's interactions and relationships with others are suitable, fulfilling, and beneficial to their own well-being and overall effectiveness. Positive social adjustment fosters holistic growth and overall welfare. Based on the definition of social adjustment provided, it can be inferred that negative social adjustment is a departure from the norm and presents many difficulties.

KEY COMPONENTS OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

The following elements are the components of positive mental health that have a substantial impact on overall well-being. The items encompass:

1. Emotional well-being refers to the capacity to comprehend and regulate emotions proficiently, encompassing the ability to experience a variety of emotions and properly cope with stress.
2. Psychological well-being: As defined by Cable et al.[17] it refers to a condition of optimal mental health in which individuals are aware of their capabilities, effectively manage everyday pressures, maintain productivity and efficiency, and actively contribute to their community.

3. Social well-being: This encompasses the level of interpersonal interactions and social ties that an individual possesses, as well as their feeling of inclusion, assistance, and involvement within their community or society. It encompasses emotions related to interpersonal connection, reliance, and inclusion with others, as well as the capacity to sustain positive and satisfying relationships [18] Social well-being encompasses social support networks, engagement in social activities, and a feeling of belonging to a community or group [19], [20], [21].

4. Physical well-being: This refers to the act of taking care of one's body by engaging in regular exercise, maintaining a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and avoiding substances that can be harmful [22].

5. Cognitive well-being: This refers to the state of having a good mindset, the ability to concentrate and focus, and retaining mental agility through activities such as learning and problem-solving. Optimal cognitive functioning and mental clarity refer to a state where attention, memory, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities are at their best. Cognitive flexibility encompasses the capacity to efficiently handle information, adjust to novel circumstances, and sustain mental dexterity during one's lifespan.

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND ITS ROLE IN DEALING WITH NEGATIVE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT IN ADOLESCENTS

Positive mental health plays a significant role in effectively dealing with unfavourable social adaptation. Its primary approach is prevention and intervention. It acts as a protective factor that mitigates the susceptibility of teenagers to unfavourable social adjustment by enhancing their coping skills, self-esteem, and social skills. Adolescents who possess positive mental health are less inclined to partake in undesirable social behaviours such as violence, bullying, or substance addiction. They will also less likely exhibit prostitution tendency [23]. A study conducted by Brailoskavia et al.[24] found that those with positive mental health were less likely to engage in conduct problems and drug use, particularly when coupled with social competence. Carruthers [25]discovered that social support had a protective impact, resulting in a decrease in substance use and an improvement in positive mental health. A study conducted by Barnes [26] showed that positive mental health, self-control, and empathy work as protective factors against teenage misbehaviour, and can be utilized in prevention campaigns [27].

Positive mental health interventions facilitate the development of effective coping mechanisms, stress management skills, and enhanced social functioning in adolescents. According to Cairncross[28], mindfulness-based therapies focusing on mental health were effective in enhancing emotional and behavioural outcomes in adolescents with emotional and behavioural issues. Positive mental health demonstrates its significance through various means, such as emotional regulation, social connectivity, self-efficacy, resilience, prosocial behaviour, and mental health awareness. Enhancing one's mental well-being fosters stronger social bonds and a heightened sense of inclusion, so providing adolescents with increased support and recognition from their peers. As individuals become more socially connected, their capacity to resist peer pressure and steer clear of detrimental social conduct also increases.

Additionally, it takes into consideration an elevated level of self-efficacy, leading to several favourable outcomes such as increased goal attainment, enhanced resilience, improved adaptability, greater emotional well-being, and healthier habits. Positive mental health assists adolescents in regulating their emotions. By effectively managing their emotions, individuals can effectively navigate difficult social circumstances and prevent themselves from engaging in harmful actions. Lyyra [29] discovered that positive mental health is a strong indicator of one's ability to control anger in the self-aggression model. They also found that emotional regulation plays a crucial role in

positive mental health. Adolescents who possess effective anger management skills are less likely to exhibit aggression or violence when prompted. Enhancing one's mental well-being can foster resilience, enabling adolescents to effectively manage challenging circumstances.

Adolescents who have positive mental health demonstrate prosocial activity, which enhances their sense of connection to their society and fosters stronger interpersonal relationships. Prosocial behaviour includes activities such as engaging in volunteer work, helping others in many ways, and actively advocating for positive transformations within their communities. Wan[30] discovered that having a happy mental state was linked to improved academic performance during early adolescence. This association was influenced by factors such as self-confidence and social relationships. Another function of good mental health is to foster understanding and acceptance of mental health, enabling teenagers to advocate for mental health services and diminish the stigma associated with mental health problems. The embrace of mental health leads to a more robust society where individuals readily seek assistance when necessary.

EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

Several methodologies have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing social adaptation. Here are a few examples:

- 1. Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT is a highly effective approach for addressing negative cognitive patterns and maladaptive behaviours that hinder social relationships. It aims to replace these patterns and behaviours with more positive and adaptive alternatives [31], [32].
- 2. Group therapy:** It provides a supportive setting where individuals can engage in social skill practice, receive feedback, and learn from others[33], [34]
- 3. Social Skills Training** involves instructing individuals in the development of social skills such as effective communication, assertiveness, and conflict resolution, to enhance their ability to adapt and interact socially.
- 4. Community Integration Programmes:** It aims to facilitate social connections and develop a sense of belonging among individuals by engaging them in specific activities and events [35].
- 5. Exposure therapy:** This involves systematically and gradually exposing individuals to social situations that provoke anxiety, to enhance their self-assurance and diminish their dread [36].
- 6. Family Therapy:** This refers to addressing family dynamics that can influence social adaptation and promote more positive interactions. Family dynamics encompass the mechanisms via which family members impact each other's cognition, emotions, and actions, resulting in alterations in family relationships[37].

CONCLUSION

Promoting positive mental health among in-school adolescents acts as a powerful remedy for negative social adjustment. This study highlighted the need for therapies that attempt to enhance resilience, emotional well-being, and social support to reduce the negative impact of social problems during adolescence. By giving priority to mental health activities in school settings, we may empower adolescents to effectively handle social difficulties with confidence and resilience, thereby promoting healthier developmental outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

1. According to the results of this review, the following suggestions are proposed:
2. Educational institutions should include extensive mental health initiatives in their curriculum, with a specific emphasis on developing coping mechanisms, emotional control, and resilience.
3. Promote the establishment of peer support networks in schools to create a secure environment for adolescents to exchange experiences, seek guidance, and provide mutual assistance.
4. Offer comprehensive training to educators and school workers on identifying indicators of mental distress and implementing effective strategies to assist adolescents requiring support.
5. Establish a conducive atmosphere where teenagers can openly and confidently engage in conversations about mental health concerns, free from the fear of being stigmatised or judged.
6. Ensure the provision of easily accessible counselling services to students, either by employing on-site counsellors or establishing collaborations with other mental health organisations.
7. Promote the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, which encompasses engaging in regular physical activity, obtaining sufficient sleep, consuming a well-balanced diet, and practising mindfulness techniques. These behaviours have a substantial influence on mental well-being.
8. Involve parents and guardians in conversations regarding mental health and offer them tools to assist them in identifying and addressing the mental health requirements of their teenagers. Engage parents and guardians in discussions about mental health and provide resources to support them in recognizing and addressing the mental health needs of their adolescents.
9. Take proactive measures to address bullying and peer pressure within the school environment, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect.

By implementing these recommendations, schools can play a crucial role in promoting positive mental health among in-school adolescents and mitigating the negative effects of social adjustment challenges.

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