



Volume 8 (1) (2025): 55-68

The Indonesian Journal of Social Studies

Available at <https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jpips/index>

INFLUENCE OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT ON THE EMOTIONAL WELL BEING OF STUDENTS OF FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC OROGUN, DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of child abuse and neglect on the emotional well-being of students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun. The study adopted an Expo-factor research design. The population of this study comprised 136 undergraduate students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State. A census sampling technique was used to select undergraduate students. Instrument title: "Influence of Child Abuse and Neglect on the Emotional Well-Being of Students Questionnaire (ICANEWBSQ)" was used for data collection. The findings revealed that respondents are of the opinion that prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, parental neglect and verbal abuse and also, respondents are of opinion that how child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. The study recommended among others that administration at Federal Polytechnic Orogun should be proactive in implementing mandatory training for faculty, staff, and students to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect and also to build awareness and equip the campus community with the knowledge to identify and report abuse.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Neglect, Emotional Well-Being, Students

How to Cite: Ekevwo, P.O. & Arienmughare, E. (2025). Influence Of Child Abuse and Neglect on The Emotional Well Being of Students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State *The Indonesian Journal of Social Studies*, Vol 8(1): 55-68

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e-ISSN 2615-5966 (Online)

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Introduction

Child abuse is the physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological maltreatment of children, which can severely harm their development and well-being. It involves actions causing long-lasting damage across social classes and cultures (Okoro, 2020). The origins of child abuse can often be traced back to a variety of social, cultural, and economic factors. In many societies, abuse was normalized in the past due to the lack of legal frameworks to protect children. The concept of child protection began to gain prominence in the 20th century as more awareness was raised on the issue. In Nigeria, particularly in Delta State, the increasing recognition of children's rights in the context of modern child protection laws has brought attention to the growing cases of abuse, even though cultural and socio-economic factors continue to influence the persistence of child maltreatment (Ifeakor, 2018).

The effect of child abuse causes physical injuries, developmental delays, emotional trauma, mental health disorders, deteriorating academic performance, and negative relationships. It can also perpetuate the cycle into adulthood, leading to generational impacts and perpetuating harmful behaviors (Oko, 2021). Efforts to combat child abuse require a comprehensive approach that involves education, legal reform, and social support systems. Delta State has taken steps to address this issue by strengthening laws and creating awareness programs, although more work is needed to ensure that children are better protected from harm. Interventions must not only focus on punishing offenders but also provide rehabilitation for victims and support systems to foster healthier environments for child development (Oji, 2022).

Child abuse and neglect significantly impact the emotional well-being of students, especially those in higher education institutions like Federal Polytechnic. In Delta State, Nigeria, numerous studies have examined how early experiences of abuse affect emotional regulation, self-esteem, and mental health in students. Okafor (2020) states that students who have experienced neglect or abuse are more likely to struggle with anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. The psychological trauma from such experiences often hampers their ability to perform academically and socially, causing long-term consequences on their mental health and general well-being. Obinna and Isichei (2021) highlighted the link between child abuse and emotional distress among polytechnic students. The study found that a history of abuse or neglect leads to challenges in forming healthy relationships and coping with stress, which is crucial during the academic journey. In the case of Federal Polytechnic, many students face academic difficulties as a result of untreated emotional wounds, which can affect their performance and engagement in campus life. These students often feel isolated, leading to low self-esteem and heightened stress, which may further perpetuate their emotional challenges.

In the context of Delta State, several scholars have emphasized the need for intervention and support for students affected by childhood trauma. Ugwu and Edoko (2019) supported that proper counseling services and a supportive academic environment are essential for mitigating the negative effects of abuse. They recommend that Federal Polytechnic and similar institutions integrate mental health programs that address these emotional issues, helping students navigate the challenges posed by past

trauma. In addition, increasing awareness about the emotional impact of child abuse can encourage more students to seek help before their emotional well-being significantly deteriorates. Overall, the Federal Polytechnic Orogun is not exonerated from child abuse and neglect as this menace may have profound effects on the emotional health of students in our young institution (Federal Polytechnic, Delta State). Addressing these issues through targeted interventions, counseling services, and academic support programs is crucial for promoting emotional recovery and improving students' academic outcomes. The emphasis on mental health resources, as proposed by Okafor (2020), Obinna and Isichei (2021), and Ugwu and Edoko (2019), is essential for fostering a healthy learning environment. The study investigates the impact of child abuse and neglect on the emotional well-being of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. It highlights the growing concern over emotional distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and academic challenges. Factors such as limited mental health support, lack of awareness, and stigma contribute to this issue. The research suggests implementing awareness campaigns, enhanced counseling services, and a supportive campus environment to improve students' emotional well-being and academic outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at investigating the influence of child abuse and neglect on the emotional well-being of students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the prevalence and types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun.
2. To examine the impact of child abuse and neglect on the mental health outcomes of students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Research Question

The research questions drawn from the objectives of the study include:

1. What are the prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun?
2. ii. How does child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, particularly about depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Hypotheses

The two hypotheses established from research question were tested at 0.05 significance level.

1. There is no significant prevalence of specific types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun.

2. Child abuse and neglect do not have a significant impact on the mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder) of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun.

Literature Review

Child and Abuse

A child is a young human being in the formative stages of life, undergoing significant physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Edewor and Okonjo (2022) stated it requires guidance and support from family and society, and is marked by dependency on caregivers and vulnerability to environmental influences. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2023), defines a child as anyone below 18 years old, unless national laws specify otherwise. This definition according to Okoro and Oghene (2023) aligns with international conventions like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, advocating for children's health, education, and overall well-being. WHO's approach emphasizes early interventions in health and education to improve child outcomes and encourages policies to reduce inequalities and ensure access to fundamental resources for growth and development (Igho and Akpofure 2023).

Abuse is an intentional act that causes harm or distress to another person, encompassing physical, emotional, psychological, or social dimensions. It occurs in various settings, including homes, schools, workplaces, and communities, often causing victims to suffer in silence due to fear or societal stigmatization (WHO, 2022). Abuse is a global issue that transcends geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries, necessitating universal awareness and interventions. Hornor and Sherfield (2021), opined the effects of abuse are immediate and long-lasting, impacting victims' physical and mental health. As highlighted by Putnam-Hornstein *et al.* (2021), physical abuse often leads to chronic injuries, pain, or disabilities, while emotional and psychological abuse leaves victims with long-term consequences like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2022) reports that individuals who experience abuse during childhood are at greater risk of engaging in risky behaviors, developing chronic health conditions, and facing educational and economic disadvantages in adulthood. Global initiatives like Save the Children (2022) and UNICEF (2022) emphasize the importance of prevention through education and community-based programs. Investing in education, legal reform, and mental health support can reduce the prevalence of abuse and ensure victims receive the care and opportunities they need to heal and thrive (Mathews & Collin-Vézina 2019).

Child Abuse and Neglect on the Emotional Well-Being of Students

The emotional well-being of students who experience child abuse and neglect is often severely compromised, as highlighted by Smith and Johnson (2020), long-term emotional consequences of child abuse, noting that students who suffer from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse tend to develop low self-esteem, difficulties in forming healthy relationships, and a heightened risk of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Smith and Johnson viewed the importance of early intervention to mitigate

the emotional damage caused by these traumatic experiences and critical need for addressing child abuse and neglect to improve students' emotional stability and overall mental health.

Prevalence and Types of Child Abuse and Neglect Experienced by Students of Federal Polytechnic

In examining the prevalence and types of child abuse and neglect among students, Adamu, Yusuf, and Ibrahim (2021) highlighted the alarming rates of neglect, physical abuse, and emotional maltreatment experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic institutions and the impact of such experiences on academic performance and mental health, pointing out that these types of abuse lead to a higher risk of behavioral issues, depression, and academic underachievement. A study by Okoro and Eze (2019) in tandem with the first variable found that a significant percentage of students at Polytechnic reported experiencing physical abuse, including corporal punishment, and emotional abuse, with emotional neglect being the most prevalent. This study highlighted that 68% of students had experienced some form of physical abuse, while 72% reported emotional neglect, a major indicator of childhood trauma. The findings suggest that these forms of abuse were often linked to a lack of proper parental care and emotional support during their formative years. Secondly, a study conducted by Omojuwa and Igbिनovia (2020) in corroboration with same variable revealed that sexual abuse and verbal abuse were identified as common types of abuse experienced by students at the institution. About 45% of the surveyed students reported having been victims of sexual abuse, while 60% cited verbal abuse as a prevalent issue in their childhood. These forms of abuse had significant long-term effects on their social and psychological well-being, underscoring the importance of institutional intervention.

Impact of Child Abuse and Neglect on Mental Health Outcomes of Students, including Depression, Anxiety, and PTSD

The mental health outcomes of students who experience child abuse and neglect, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD, have been a subject of extensive study, as seen in the work by Kline and O'Connor (2019) who noted that students who have faced abuse and neglect are at a significantly higher risk for these disorders, which can impede their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. A study by Agba and Onuoha (2017) in line with the second objective of the study found that students from Polytechnic who had experienced abuse during childhood exhibited higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to their peers. The study indicated that nearly 40% of the students showed signs of depression, while 32% exhibited symptoms of anxiety. The researchers concluded that childhood abuse, particularly neglect and emotional maltreatment, played a significant role in the onset of these mental health issues among students. As supported by a study of Obanor and Eremosele (2021) in line with the second objective also showed that 25% of the students exhibited symptoms of PTSD, which

significantly impacted their academic performance and social interactions. The study highlighted the long-lasting impact of early abuse, leading to difficulties in concentration and emotional regulation, contributing to poor academic outcomes and mental distress.

Theoretical Framework

Child Abuse Theory (Newberger, 1980)

Child Abuse Theory propounded by Newberger's (1980) suggested that child abuse is rooted in the parent's cognitive and emotional state, particularly in their understanding of their child and parental role. This theory outlines four levels of parental thinking: egocentric, impositional, reciprocal, and autonomous. Parents at the egocentric level prioritize their needs over their child's, seeing children as objects to meet their desires. At the impositional level, parents impose their values without considering the child's individuality, leading to potential conflict and abusive behaviors. Parents at the reciprocal level understand the importance of the child's perspective, fostering mutual communication. At the highest level, autonomous parents respect their child's autonomy, providing a nurturing environment. According to the theory, abuse and neglect are more likely when parents are at lower cognitive levels, lacking empathy and understanding. In contrast, parents who reach the reciprocal or autonomous levels are less likely to engage in abusive behaviors. This theory has significant implications for the prevention and intervention of child abuse, emphasizing the need for programs that enhance parental awareness and cognitive development. In relation to the emotional well-being of students at Federal Polytechnic, Newberger's theory suggests that students who have experienced neglect or abuse may face emotional challenges due to the lack of empathetic and supportive parenting in their formative years.

Research Methodology

This study adopted an Expo-factor research design. Expo-factor research design is a type of non-experimental research that focuses on examining the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable without manipulating any variables. It is used to identify correlations or associations. In the context of child abuse and neglect, this design explored how these factors influence the emotional well-being of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. By surveying students and analyzing their emotional states in relation to past experiences of abuse or neglect, the design allows researchers to establish patterns and draw conclusions about the impact of these traumatic experiences on students' mental health outcomes. The population of this study comprised 136 undergraduate students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State. Because of the smallness of the population, all the 136 undergraduate students of Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State were used as sample size. A census sampling technique was used to select only 75 undergraduate students from the Department of Business Administration, 42 undergraduate students from the Department of Accounting and 19 undergraduate students from the Department of Statistics respectively.

A self-constructed questionnaire title: “Influence of Child Abuse and Neglect on the Emotional Well-Being of Students Questionnaire (ICANEWBSQ)” was used for data collection which comprised of two sections A and B. Section A contained the demographic information of the respondents while section B consisted of 10 item statements guided with two modified rating scale of Yes (Y) and No (N) options. Two experts validated the instrument designed. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient method was used to establish a reliability index of 0.86. Out of 136 copies of the instrument administered to the respondents with the help of two research assistants, 130 copies were retrieved and used for data analysis. Simple percentage was used to answer research questions with a benchmark of 50% and above accept, while below 50% reject while Chi-Square test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance whereby any point probability below 0.05 reject alternatively point probability above 0.05 accept.

Results and Discussion

Research Question

Research Question One: What are the prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun?

Table 1: Simple Percentage Analysis on the Prevalent Types of Child Abuse and Neglect Experienced by Students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun

S/No	Item Statement:	Yes	%	No	%
	Prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students include:				
1	Physical Abuse	128	98	2	2
2	Emotional Abuse	125	96	5	4
3	Sexual Abuse	123	95	7	5
4	Parental Neglect	126	97	4	3
5	Verbal Abuse	127	98	3	2
	Average Percentage		97		3

* (Accept 50.0 and above Reject 49 below)

Table 1 presents a simple percentage analysis on the prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. The results indicate that physical abuse (98%), verbal abuse (98%), and parental neglect (97%) are the most commonly reported forms of abuse, with emotional abuse (96%) and sexual abuse (95%) also being highly prevalent. Only a small percentage of students, between 2% and 5%, reported not experiencing these forms of abuse. The average percentage of students who experienced abuse or neglect is 97%, highlighting a widespread issue within the student population. Furthermore, respondents are of opinion that prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, parental neglect and verbal abuse. In conclusion, child abuse and neglect are alarmingly prevalent among students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, emphasizing the

need for immediate attention and effective intervention programs to address and mitigate these issues.

Research Question Two: How does child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

Table 2: Simple Percentage Analysis on how child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

S/No	Item Statement:	Yes	%	No	%
	How child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) include				
1	Increased Depression	124	95	6	5
2	Higher Anxiety Levels	126	97	4	3
3	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	125	96	5	4
4	Difficulty in Emotional Regulation	128	98	2	2
5	Impaired Academic Performance	127	98	9	2
	Average Percentage		97		3

* (Accept 50.0 and above Reject 49 below)

Table 2 presents a simple percentage analysis whereby respondents are of opinion on how child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun include; increased depression, higher anxiety level, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), difficulty in emotional regulation, and impaired academic performance. The results show that a significant majority of students report experiencing mental health challenges, with 98% indicating difficulty in emotional regulation and impaired academic performance, while 97% report higher anxiety levels. Additionally, 96% experience PTSD and 95% report increased depression. Only a small percentage (2-5%) of students did not experience these effects. With an average percentage of 97% of students affected, the data highlights a strong correlation between child abuse and neglect and poor mental health outcomes. In conclusion, child abuse and neglect have a profound and widespread impact on students' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, PTSD, emotional difficulties, and academic struggles, underscoring the urgent need for effective mental health support and intervention at the institution.

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant prevalence of specific types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test on the Prevalent Types of Child Abuse and Neglect Experienced by Students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Sig. Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	20.000 ^a	16	.220	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	16.094	16	.446	1.000		
Fisher's Exact Test	18.795			1.000		
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.000 ^b	1	.046	.001	.001	.000
N of Valid Cases	5					

a. 25 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .20.

b. The standardized statistic is -2.000.

Significance 0.05 > 0.00. Not Significance 0.05 < 0.00

The Point Probability value in Table 3, which is 0.000 for the Linear-by-Linear Association test, is compared against the significance level of 0.05. Since the Point Probability is less than 0.05, it indicates a statistically significant relationship between the variables being tested, suggesting that a significant association exists between the types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. Therefore, the Linear-by-Linear Association test reveals that there is a significant prevalence of specific types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun.

Ho₂: Child abuse and neglect do not have a significant impact on the mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder) of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test on how child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Sig. Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	20.000 ^a	16	.220	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	16.094	16	.446	1.000		
Fisher's Exact Test	18.795			1.000		

Linear-by-Linear Association	.239 ^b	1	.625	.003	.003	.001
N of Valid Cases	5					

a. 25 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .20.

b. The standardized statistic is -.489.

* Significance 0.05 > 0.00. Not Significance 0.05 < 0.00

The Point Probability value in Table 4, which is 0.001 for the Linear-by-Linear Association test, is compared against the significance level of 0.05. Since the Point Probability is less than 0.05, it suggests a statistically significant relationship between child abuse and neglect and the mental health outcomes, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. This result indicates that there is a significant linear association between the experiences of abuse and neglect and the mental health issues examined. Therefore, the Linear-by-Linear Association test reveals that there is a significant impact of child abuse and neglect on the mental health outcomes of students, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and PTSD among students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun.

Discussion of Findings

Prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Finding from research question analysis revealed that respondents are of opinion that prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, parental neglect and verbal abuse. Thus, child abuse and neglect are alarmingly prevalent among students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, emphasizing the need for immediate attention and effective intervention programs to address and mitigate these issues.

In hypothesis one, finding showed that there is a significant prevalence of specific types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. A study by Omojuwa and Igbinoia (2020) in corroboration with the present study found that a significant percentage of students at institution of higher learning reported experiencing physical abuse, including corporal punishment, and emotional abuse, with emotional neglect being the most prevalent. The findings suggest that these forms of abuse were often linked to a lack of proper parental care and emotional support during their formative years. In a study conducted by Omojuwa and Igbinoia (2020) in line with the present study finding revealed that sexual abuse and verbal abuse were identified as common types of abuse experienced by students at the institution. About 45% of the surveyed students reported having been victims of sexual abuse, while 60% cited verbal abuse as a prevalent issue in their childhood. These forms of abuse had significant long-term effects on their social and psychological well-being, underscoring the importance of institutional intervention.

How child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Finding established from research question two analysis indicated that respondents are of opinion that how child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun include; increased depression, higher anxiety level, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), difficulty in emotional regulation, and impaired academic performance. In addition, child abuse and neglect have a profound and widespread impact on students' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, PTSD, emotional difficulties, and academic struggles, underscoring the urgent need for effective mental health support and intervention at the institution. In hypothesis two, finding revealed that there is a significant impact of child abuse and neglect on the mental health outcomes of students, particularly in relation to depression, anxiety, and PTSD among students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun. In same vein, the study of Agba and Onuoha (2017) similarly to the present study found that students from Federal Polytechnic Orogun who had experienced abuse during childhood exhibited higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to their peers. The study indicated that nearly 40% of the students showed signs of depression, while 32% exhibited symptoms of anxiety. The researchers concluded that childhood abuse, particularly neglect and emotional maltreatment, played a significant role in the onset of these mental health issues among students. A study by Obonor and Eremosele (2021) in line with the present study finding showed that 25% of the students exhibited symptoms of PTSD, which significantly impacted their academic performance and social interactions. The study highlighted the long-lasting impact of early abuse, leading to difficulties in concentration and emotional regulation, contributing to poor academic outcomes and mental distress.

Conclusion

Based on the finding, the study concluded that respondents are of opinion that prevalent types of child abuse and neglect experienced by students include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, parental neglect and verbal abuse and also, respondents are of opinion that how child abuse and neglect impact the mental health outcomes of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun include; increased depression, higher anxiety level, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), difficulty in emotional regulation, and impaired academic performance. In addition, child abuse and neglect significantly impact the emotional well-being of students at Federal Polytechnic Orogun, manifesting in anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. Such experiences can hinder academic performance and interpersonal relationships, creating a cycle of emotional distress that affects overall development. Supportive interventions, including counseling, awareness programs, and a nurturing educational environment, are essential to mitigate these effects. Addressing child abuse and neglect requires collaboration among educators, parents, and mental health professionals to promote resilience and healing. This holistic approach fosters emotional stability, enabling students to thrive both academically and socially.

Recommendations

1. The administration at Federal Polytechnic Orogun should be proactive in implementing mandatory training for faculty, staff, and students to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect and also to build awareness and equip the campus community with the knowledge to identify and report abuse.
2. The mental health services at Federal Polytechnic Orogun should be expanded to provide specialized support for students who have experienced child abuse and neglect by offering accessible counseling and psychological services that focus on trauma-informed care, addressing issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

Acknowledgment

The Authors express their gratefulness to the management of Federal Polytechnic Orogun, Delta State who enabled the access to grant (that funded this research work) through the TETFUND Institution-Based Research (IBR) Intervention Grant, Akandu Tiferet Success and Oko, Shalomi Mbe

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