Asian Journal of
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Art

e-ISSN: 3025-4507
p-ISSN: 3025-5287
Index: Harvard, Boston, Sydney University, Dimensions, Lens, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/AJSTEA.v3i6.7603

Childhood Trauma and Cognitive Functioning: A Cross-Sectional Study of In-School Adolescents in Gwagwalada, Nigeria

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Oct 6, 2025	Oct 28, 2025	Nov 10, 2025	Nov 15, 2025

Abstract

Childhood trauma is a well-established risk factor for cognitive impairments; however, its impact on Nigerian adolescents remains underexplored. This study examined the relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada, Nigeria. Employing a cross-sectional design, 240 students (120 males, 120 females; $M = 14.5$ years, $SD = 1.47$) were randomly selected from four secondary schools. Trauma exposure was measured using the *Childhood Trauma Questionnaire* (CTQ-28), while cognitive functioning—specifically memory, attention, and executive function—was assessed using the *PROMIS Pediatric Item Bank v1.0*. Results revealed that 75% of participants reported experiencing at least one form of trauma, with emotional abuse being the most prevalent (45%). Correlation and regression analyses showed a significant negative association between trauma exposure and cognitive functioning ($r = –0.42$, $p < 0.01$), with emotional abuse emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = –0.35$, $p < 0.01$). ANOVA results confirmed significant group differences, indicating that emotional abuse predicted the most severe cognitive deficits ($F(4, 235) = 9.12$, $p < 0.01$). Gender emerged as a moderating variable, with female adolescents exhibiting heightened vulnerability to trauma-related cognitive impairments. These findings underscore the critical need for trauma-informed educational and clinical interventions tailored to adolescent populations in Nigeria.

The study recommends further research into the neurobiological pathways of trauma and the development of culturally responsive support systems for affected youth.

Keywords: Childhood Trauma; Cognitive Functioning; Adolescents; Emotional Abuse; Gender Differences; Gwagwalada

INTRODUCTION

Childhood trauma, encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, along with neglect, is widely acknowledged as a crucial determinant of cognitive development. Studies demonstrate that early life stress can result in enduring changes in brain structure and function, subsequently influencing cognitive processes including memory, attention, and executive functioning (Smith & Pollak et al., 2020; Wade et al., 2022). Cognitive impairments may persist into adolescence and adulthood, affecting academic achievement, social interactions, and general quality of life (Downey & Crummy, 2021; Iverson et al., 2024; Burke, 2024).

The prevalence of childhood trauma in Nigeria is alarming, since numerous children endure different types of abuse and neglect (Ojo et al., 2025). Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of research especially investigating the cognitive effects of such stress on adolescents in local communities such as Gwagwalada, Abuja. Comprehending these effects is essential for formulating specific solutions and support mechanisms to assist impacted individuals.

Significance of the Study

This research holds considerable significance for multiple reasons. It contributes to the expanding knowledge on the long-term effects of childhood trauma. It offers essential data for the development and implementation of effective interventions and support systems for adolescents in Gwagwalada. Policymakers and practitioners can utilize these findings to develop customized programs that cater to the specific requirements of this population, thereby enhancing the well-being and cognitive outcomes of impacted persons.

Childhood Trauma and Cognitive Functioning

Studies have consistently demonstrated that childhood trauma can negatively impact cognitive performance. Global studies have shown that trauma can result in deficits in memory, attention, and executive functioning (Green & Black, 2021; Kelder et al., 2021;

Fan & Kang, 2025). Cognitive deficiencies are frequently ascribed to neurobiological alterations in the brain induced by chronic stress, which can modify the shape and function of essential brain regions, including the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex (Smith & Pollak, 2020; Hakamata et al., 2022; Tomoda et al., 2024). Neuroimaging research indicates that trauma can induce structural alterations in the brain, especially in regions associated with memory and executive function, such as the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, leading to challenges in attention, problem-solving, and emotional regulation (Blithikioti et al., 2022; Gerin et al., 2023; Samson et al., 2023).

Gender Differences in the Impact of Childhood Trauma

Numerous studies have documented gender disparities in the effects of childhood trauma on cognitive performance. Johnson and Lee (2020) discovered that female adolescents are more prone to cognitive abnormalities after experiencing trauma than their male counterparts. This disparity may arise from differences in the processing and response to traumatic experiences between males and females, with females perhaps exhibiting greater susceptibility to the cognitive effects of trauma (Johnson & Lee, 2020). Matte-Landry et al. (2023) observed that gender may influence the association between trauma and cognitive results, indicating the necessity for gender-specific therapies.

Gender disparities in the effects of childhood trauma on cognitive functioning have been noted in Nigeria. Afolabi et al. (2017) discovered that female adolescents were more prone to cognitive abnormalities after stress than their male counterparts. This discovery corresponds with international studies indicating that females may be more susceptible to the cognitive effects of trauma (Afolabi et al., 2017; Johnson & Lee, 2020).

Types of Childhood Trauma and Their Effects

Diverse forms of childhood trauma can exert disparate influences on cognitive performance. Emotional abuse has been associated with considerable deficits in cognitive functioning, especially for emotional regulation and social cognition (Smith et al., 2021). Conversely, physical neglect has been linked to impairments in executive function and attention (Brown et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2024).

Arogbofa (2024) in a review emphasized that physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, along with neglect, are the most detrimental forms of childhood trauma, elaborating on their catastrophic immediate and long-term effects on various aspects of physical health, emotional and behavioral health, as well as biological and neurological well-being

(Arogbofa, 2024). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) asserts that complex trauma, characterized by multiple or recurrent traumatic events, can exert more profound and widespread impacts on cognitive development, attachment and relationships, physical and emotional health, and self-perception (Peterson, 2018).

In Nigeria, emotional abuse and neglect are notably widespread and have been associated with considerable cognitive deficits. Research conducted by Okafor et al. (2018) indicated that emotional neglect correlated with lower performance on cognitive assessments evaluating memory and attention. This substantiates the idea that emotional trauma can significantly impact cognitive development (Okafor et al., 2018).

Gaps in the Literature

Notwithstanding the comprehensive study, numerous gaps persist. There is a necessity for additional localized research that takes into account the cultural and socio-economic elements distinctive to particular communities, such as Gwagwalada. Furthermore, longitudinal research are necessary to comprehend the enduring cognitive effects of childhood trauma and the efficacy of diverse rehabilitation modalities. The current literature emphasizes the substantial influence of childhood trauma on cognitive function, indicating the necessity for focused research in particular circumstances such as Gwagwalada. By correcting these deficiencies, subsequent research can yield a more thorough comprehension of the impact of trauma on cognitive development and guide the formulation of effective support systems for afflicted adolescents.

Problem Statement

Although the impact of childhood trauma on cognitive function is well-documented, there is a paucity of studies concerning Nigerian adolescents, especially in the Gwagwalada region. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the correlation between childhood trauma and cognitive performance within this particular cohort. It aims to offer insights that can guide local policies and actions to alleviate the detrimental impacts of trauma.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada.

- To determine the differences in cognitive functioning between adolescents with high and low levels of reported childhood trauma.
- To explore gender differences in the impact of childhood trauma on cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents.
- To identify which types of childhood trauma (e.g., emotional abuse, physical neglect) have the most significant effects on cognitive functioning.

Research Questions

- Is there a significant relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada?
- Do adolescents who report higher levels of the different types of childhood trauma have lower cognitive functioning scores compared to those who report lower levels of childhood trauma?
- Are there gender differences in the relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents?
- Which types of childhood trauma (e.g., emotional abuse, physical neglect) have the most significant impact on cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) among in-school adolescents?

Hypotheses

- Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada.

Secondary Hypotheses:

- H2: Adolescents who report higher level scores and greater severity of different types of childhood trauma will have lower scores in cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) compared to those who report lower levels of the different types of childhood trauma.
- H3: The relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning will differ between male and female adolescents.

- H4: Specific types of childhood trauma (e.g., emotional abuse, physical neglect) will have a more pronounced effect on cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) than others.

METHODS

Study Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional research design. The study investigated the effects of childhood trauma on the cognitive functions of in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada, FCT; Nigeria.

The variables were categorized as follows:

- Independent Variable: Childhood Trauma
- Dependent Variables: Cognitive Functioning: (Memory, Attention, and Executive Function)
- Moderating Variables: Gender
- Control Variables: Age, Socioeconomic Status (SES), School Environment, Type of Trauma (emotional, physical, sexual abuse, and neglect).

Study Location

This study was carried out in Gwagwalada, the administrative center of Gwagwalada Local Government Area (LGA) within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria. Gwagwalada is one of the six area councils in the Federal Capital Territory and functions as a prominent urban hub with a heterogeneous population. The town is strategically situated along the Abuja-Lokoja route, rendering it an accessible and vibrant center within the region.

Gwagwalada is recognized for its educational establishments, comprising both public and private secondary schools that serve the academic requirements of the local community. Data indicates that Gwagwalada has a total of 76 secondary schools, consisting of 19 public and 59 private institutions (Magaji, 2016). These institutions offer a wide range of educational possibilities and settings, rendering Gwagwalada an optimal site for examining the impact of childhood trauma on cognitive functioning in adolescents.

The choice of Gwagwalada for this study is particularly pertinent because of its varied demographic and socio-economic attributes, which can offer an in-depth

understanding of the effects of childhood trauma among different segments of the teenage population in Nigeria. The research included participants from four secondary schools in Gwagwalada, guaranteeing a representative sample of the adolescent population within the schools in the region. This study concentrates on Gwagwalada to provide significant insights into the cognitive repercussions of childhood trauma within a Nigerian framework, potentially guiding local educational and psychological solutions.

Participants

This study conducted between July - August 2025 involved a total of 240 adolescents from four secondary schools in Gwagwalada town. The schools included two public institutions, which are: Government Day Secondary School and Government Secondary School Hajj-Camp, and two private institutions: Toddler's Haven Secondary School and Christ the King College. Each school contributed 60 participants, with an equal distribution of 30 boys and 30 girls. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique (balloting method) to ensure a representative sample (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

Inclusion criteria

- Students must be in Senior Secondary School classes 1 to 3 (SSS1 to SSS3)
- Students must be between the age of 1218 years
- Students must currently be enrolled in one of the selected schools.
- Students must indicate a willingness to participate in the study.
- Students must be able to communicate in English.

Materials

Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires designed to assess childhood trauma exposure and cognitive function. The cognitive tests measured various domains such as memory, attention, and executive functioning. The trauma exposure questionnaire included items related to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect. Socio-demographic data were also collected, including age, gender, and socio-economic status.

The questionnaire comprised of three sections:

Section A: Demographic Variables

This section consists of demographic variables such as Age, Sex, Student class level, and Socio-economic status of parents (Parent's occupation and educational level).

Section B: Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28)

The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ-28), developed by Bernstein and Fink, is a 28-item self-report inventory designed to assess experiences of childhood trauma. The CTQ measures five types of maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Never True" to "Very Often True." The CTQ has demonstrated good reliability and validity across various populations and is widely used in both clinical and research settings to identify and quantify childhood trauma (Bernstein & Fink, 1998).

Section C: PROMIS Pediatric Item Bank v1.0

The PROMIS Pediatric Item Bank v1.0 Cognitive Function Assessment Tool is used to measure cognitive functioning in children and adolescents. This self-report tool assesses various domains of cognitive function, including memory, attention, and executive function. The Pediatric Cognitive Function short form includes items that are rated on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from "Never" to "Always." The PROMIS measures are designed to be flexible and can be administered via computer-assisted testing or in short forms, making them suitable for diverse research and clinical applications. The tool has been validated for use in pediatric populations and provides reliable and comprehensive assessments of cognitive function (PROMIS Health Organization, 2018).

These instruments were chosen for their robust psychometric properties and their ability to provide detailed and reliable assessments of childhood trauma and cognitive functioning among adolescents.

Procedure

The data collection process was conducted with the assistance of two additional research assistants. The instruments were distributed equally among the four selected schools. The research team visited each school to administer the tests and questionnaires in a controlled environment, ensuring consistency across all locations. The principal and staff of each school were written and consulted prior to researchers' visit to the schools, and permission and consent were sought from the schools' authorities and granted.

Participants were briefed about the study's purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was assured. The questionnaires were administered in a group setting within the school premises and the entire process was supervised by the research team to provide assistance and ensure accurate data collection.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using appropriate quantitative methods to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents.

Statistical Software

The statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics was used for data analysis. SPSS was chosen for its comprehensive suite of statistical tools, user-friendly interface, and robust capabilities in handling complex data sets. It is widely used in social sciences research for its reliability and ease of use.

Quantitative Analysis Methods

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, gender, and the distribution of childhood trauma and cognitive functioning scores. Measures such as mean, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages were calculated to provide an overview of the data.

Correlation Analysis. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between childhood trauma (independent variable) and cognitive functioning (dependent variables: memory, attention, and executive function). This analysis helped to determine the strength and direction of the associations between these variables.

Independent Samples t-test. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the cognitive functioning scores between adolescents with high and low levels of reported childhood trauma. This test helped in identifying significant differences in cognitive functioning based on the level of trauma experienced.

Multiple Regression Analysis. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the predictive power of different types of childhood trauma (emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect) on cognitive functioning. This analysis helped to determine

which types of trauma have the most significant impact on memory, attention, and executive function.

Moderation Analysis. Moderation analysis was performed to examine whether gender moderates the relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning. Interaction terms were included in the regression models to test for moderation effects.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). ANOVA was used to compare cognitive functioning scores across different types of trauma and to explore any significant differences between groups.

Post-hoc Analysis. Post-hoc tests using the Tukey HSD test were conducted since significant differences were found to identify specific group differences.

RESULTS

Participant Flow and Recruitment

A total of 240 adolescents participated in the study, with an equal distribution of 60 students from each of the four selected schools: Government Day Secondary School, Government Secondary School Hajj-Camp, Toddler's Haven Secondary School, and Christ the King College. Each school contributed 30 male and 30 female students. The recruitment process involved simple random sampling (balloting method) to ensure a representative sample. All participants met the inclusion criteria, which required them to be in SSS1 to SSS3, be between the age range of 12-18 years, currently enrolled in the selected schools, willing to participate, and able to communicate in English.

Descriptive Statistics

The study included 240 in-school adolescents (120 boys and 120 girls) with a mean age of 14.5 years (± 1.47). The results indicated a mean childhood trauma score of 14.55 (± 0.38), and a mean cognitive function score of 42.83 (± 0.38). A significant 75% of the participants reported experiencing at least one form of trauma. Emotional abuse was the most commonly reported type of trauma (45%), followed by physical abuse (30%), neglect (25%), and sexual abuse (10%).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Types of Childhood Trauma

Type of Trauma	Percentage (%)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Emotional Abuse	45	17.7	± 0.56
Physical Abuse	30	12.5	± 0.22
Sexual Abuse	10	6.2	± 0.31
Emotional Neglect	25	17.3	± 0.47
Physical Neglect	25	8.7	± 0.23

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Cognitive Functioning

Cognitive Function	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Memory	45.3	± 10.2
Attention	42.7	± 9.8
Executive Functioning	40.5	± 11.1

Hypotheses One (H1): Correlation Analysis

To test the Alternative Hypothesis (H1) and analyze the relationship between childhood trauma (generally) and cognitive functioning, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. The results presented on Table 3 showed significant negative correlations between the total trauma scores and cognitive functioning scores, indicating that higher levels of reported trauma were associated with lower cognitive functioning.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis on the Relationship between Childhood Trauma and Cognitive Functioning

Cognitive Function	Correlation Coefficient ®	p-value
Memory	-0.45	< 0.01
Attention	-0.38	< 0.01
Executive Functioning	-0.42	< 0.01

The analysis supports Hypothesis One (H1), indicating significant negative relationships between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada. Higher levels of trauma are associated with lower cognitive functioning scores across memory, attention, and executive function domains.

Hypothesis two (H2): Multiple Correlation Analysis

To test Hypothesis Two (H2) and analyze the relationship between the severity of the different types of childhood trauma and cognitive functioning we computed the Pearson correlation coefficients between the mean scores of the different types of childhood trauma and the mean scores of cognitive functioning measures (memory, attention, and executive functioning).

Table 4: Correlation Analysis on the Relationship between Severity of Different Types of Childhood trauma and Cognitive Function (Memory, Attention and Executive Function)

Type of Trauma	Cognitive Function	Correlation Coefficient ®
Emotional Abuse	Memory	-0.45
Emotional Abuse	Attention	-0.42
Emotional Abuse	Executive Functioning	-0.4
Physical Abuse	Memory	-0.35
Physical Abuse	Attention	-0.33
Physical Abuse	Executive Functioning	-0.3
Sexual Abuse	Memory	-0.25
Sexual Abuse	Attention	-0.22
Sexual Abuse	Executive Functioning	-0.2
Emotional Neglect	Memory	-0.4
Emotional Neglect	Attention	-0.38
Emotional Neglect	Executive Functioning	-0.35
Physical Neglect	Memory	-0.3
Physical Neglect	Attention	-0.28
Physical Neglect	Executive Functioning	-0.25

The negative correlation coefficients presented on Table 4 indicates that higher levels of childhood trauma are associated with lower scores in cognitive functioning.

Emotional Abuse shows a moderate negative correlation with all cognitive functions, suggesting that higher emotional abuse is associated with lower memory, attention, and executive functioning scores. Physical Abuse and Emotional Neglect also

show moderate negative correlations with cognitive functions. Sexual Abuse and Physical Neglect show weaker negative correlations, but the trend is still consistent with the hypothesis.

The analysis supports Hypothesis Two (H2). Adolescents who report higher levels and severity of childhood trauma tend to have lower scores in cognitive functioning (memory, attention, and executive function) compared to those who report lower levels of childhood trauma. The strength of the correlations varies by type of trauma, with emotional abuse and neglect showing stronger associations with cognitive deficits

Hypothesis Three (H3): Moderation Analysis

To determine whether gender moderates the relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning, a moderation analysis was conducted using interaction terms between gender and each type of trauma.

Table 5: Moderation Analysis of Gender on the Relationship between Childhood Trauma and Cognitive Functioning

Interaction Term	Beta (β)	p-value
Gender* Emotional Abuse	-0.15	< 0.05
Gender* Physical Abuse	-0.12	< 0.05
Gender* Sexual Abuse	-0.10	> 0.05
Gender* Emotional Neglect	-0.14	< 0.05
Gender* Physical Neglect	-0.11	> 0.05

The significant interaction terms and the results presented on Table 5 suggest that the negative impact of emotional abuse, physical abuse, and emotional neglect on cognitive functioning is stronger for female adolescents compared to male adolescents.

Independent Samples t-test

Additionally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in cognitive functioning. The results presented on Table 6 indicated that female adolescents reported significantly lower cognitive functioning scores compared to male adolescents.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test on the Relationship between Gender Differences in Cognitive Functioning

Cognitive Function	t-value	p-value
Memory	2.34	< 0.05
Attention	2.12	< 0.05
Executive Functioning	2.45	< 0.05

The analysis supports Hypothesis Three (H3). Gender plays a significant role in the relationship between childhood trauma and cognitive functioning. Female adolescents experience a higher negative impact of childhood trauma on their cognitive functioning.

Hypothesis Four (H4): Multiple Regression Analysis

To assess the predictive power of different types of childhood trauma on cognitive functioning, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The independent variables included emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect. The dependent variable was cognitive functioning, which was measured by combining scores of memory, attention, and executive functioning.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Cognitive Functioning

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	p-value
Emotional Abuse	-0.35	< 0.01
Physical Abuse	-0.28	< 0.01
Sexual Abuse	-0.22	< 0.05
Emotional Neglect	-0.30	< 0.01
Physical Neglect	-0.25	< 0.05

The model explained a significant portion of the variance in cognitive functioning, ($R^2 = 0.42$), ($F (5, 234) = 34.56$), ($p < 0.01$). These results presented on Table 7 indicate that all types of childhood trauma significantly predict lower cognitive functioning scores, with emotional abuse having the strongest negative impact.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

An ANOVA was conducted to compare cognitive functioning scores across different types of trauma and to explore significant differences between groups. The ANOVA results presented on Table 8 indicated significant differences in cognitive functioning scores across different types of trauma, with emotional abuse leading to the most severe cognitive deficits.

Table 8: ANOVA Results for Cognitive Functioning Across Different Types of Trauma

Cognitive Function	F-value	p-value
Memory	8.45	< 0.01
Attention	7.32	< 0.01
Executive Functioning	9.12	< 0.01

Post-hoc Analysis

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that adolescents who experienced emotional abuse had significantly lower cognitive functioning scores compared to those who experienced other types of trauma. Specifically, emotional abuse was associated with the lowest scores in memory, attention, and executive functioning.

The analysis supports Hypothesis Four (H4). Specific types of childhood trauma have more pronounced effect on cognitive functioning with emotional abuse and emotional neglect having higher effects on cognitive function.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the influence of childhood trauma on cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada. The results indicated that 75% of the participants reported experiencing at least one form of trauma, with emotional abuse being the most common (45%), followed by physical abuse (30%), neglect (25%), and sexual abuse (10%). Cognitive functioning was assessed through measures of memory, attention, and executive functioning, with mean scores of 45.3, 42.7, and 40.5, respectively.

Interpretation of Results

The results of this study indicate that childhood trauma is significantly associated with diminished cognitive functioning in memory, attention, and executive functioning among adolescents attending school in Gwagwalada. Emotional abuse was the most prevalent kind of trauma, with female adolescents experiencing greater detriment to cognitive functioning than their male counterparts. These findings underscore the necessity for focused interventions to assist trauma-exposed adolescents and alleviate the cognitive effects of childhood trauma.

The correlation analyses reveal a strong negative link between the degree of childhood trauma and cognitive performance in adolescents. The findings corroborate Hypotheses One and Two (H1 & H2) of this study, suggesting that adolescents with elevated levels and severity of childhood trauma generally have diminished cognitive functioning scores. The moderation analysis indicated that gender influenced the connection between certain types of trauma and cognitive performance, with female adolescents experiencing greater negative effects. This discovery corroborates Hypothesis Three (H3) of the current investigation.

The multiple regression analysis indicated that all forms of childhood trauma significantly forecasted diminished cognitive functioning scores, with emotional abuse exerting the most pronounced adverse effect. This discovery corroborates Hypothesis Four (H4) of the current investigation. The ANOVA results revealed significant disparities in cognitive functioning scores among various types of trauma, with emotional abuse resulting in the most pronounced cognitive losses. This also corroborates Hypothesis Four (H4) of the current investigation. The findings underscore the urgent necessity for focused interventions to assist trauma-exposed adolescents, especially those subjected to emotional abuse and female adolescents who may be more susceptible to the cognitive effects of trauma.

Comparison with Previous Studies

This study's findings align with those of Kim et al. (2024), which indicated that individuals with a history of childhood trauma exhibited diminished cognitive function, especially in working memory and processing speed. Green and Black (2021) indicated that children with a trauma history are more prone to attention deficiencies and have an elevated risk for ADHD. White et al. (2022) similarly discovered that children exposed to

trauma frequently exhibit abnormalities in executive functioning, which may continue until adolescence and adulthood. This study's substantial negative connections between trauma and cognitive performance further validate these findings (Kim et al., 2024; Green & Black, 2021; White et al., 2022).

Wang et al. (2024) discovered a substantial correlation between emotional abuse and physical neglect with the onset of persistent depressive episodes and diminished cognitive skills, namely in visual and working memory, as well as pattern recognition. This corresponds with the findings of the current study, indicating that emotional abuse and neglect have modest unfavorable connections with cognitive performance.

Matte-Landry et al. (2023) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis, determining that children with severe trauma demonstrate inferior cognitive outcomes relative to controls. The timing of trauma, specifically its early onset and recency, was identified as a moderating factor in this connection. This corroborates the findings of the current study, emphasizing the adverse effects of severe stress on cognitive development.

Research conducted by Barczyk et al. (2023) on mood disorders indicated that persons with a history of childhood trauma exhibited diminished cognitive performance in adulthood, characterized by impairments in memory, attention, and executive functioning. This further substantiates the findings of the current study, highlighting the enduring cognitive consequences of childhood. (Wang et al., 2024; Matte-Landry et al., 2023; Barczyk et al., 2023).

The multiple regression analysis indicated that all forms of childhood trauma significantly forecasted diminished cognitive functioning scores, with emotional abuse exerting the most pronounced adverse effect. This discovery corroborates earlier studies demonstrating that emotional abuse can significantly impact cognitive development (Smith et al., 2021). The moderation analysis indicated that gender influenced the connection between certain types of trauma and cognitive performance, with female adolescents experiencing greater negative effects. This aligns with the findings of Johnson and Lee (2020) that female adolescents exhibit greater susceptibility to the cognitive effects of trauma.

The ANOVA results revealed significant disparities in cognitive functioning scores among various types of trauma, with emotional abuse resulting in the most pronounced cognitive losses. This substantiates the idea that emotional abuse, owing to its pervasive

and insidious characteristics, may exert more harmful effects on cognitive processes than other forms of trauma (Johnson & Lee, 2020; Brown et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the gender disparities identified in this study align with prior research by Matte-Landry et al. (2023), which emphasized that gender may influence the association between trauma and cognitive results. The pronounced effect of emotional abuse on cognitive functioning in female adolescents indicates the need for gender-specific therapies to mitigate these differences (Matte-Landry et al., 2023).

Implications

The results of this study have important implications for educational and clinical interventions. Given the high prevalence of childhood trauma and its significant impact on cognitive functioning, schools and mental health professionals should implement trauma-informed practices to support affected adolescents.

The demonstrated cognitive vulnerabilities, particularly among female adolescents, highlight the importance of gender-sensitive interventions. Programs addressing emotional abuse and neglect should incorporate strategies tailored to the unique needs of girls, who appear more susceptible to trauma-related cognitive deficits.

Community and policy-level responses are needed. Policymakers should prioritize child protection policies, strengthen reporting mechanisms for abuse, and invest in psychosocial services within schools. Partnerships between schools, health institutions, and community leaders could create holistic support systems that reduce stigma and increase accessibility to care. Early identification and intervention can help mitigate the long-term cognitive effects of trauma and improve academic and social outcomes.

Finally, clinical practice should integrate trauma-focused therapies that address both emotional and cognitive sequelae. Interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), executive function training, and resilience-building programs may help mitigate the adverse impacts of trauma and promote academic and psychosocial recovery.

Limitations

This study has various limitations that must be recognized. The cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to establish causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are essential to determine the temporal association between childhood trauma and cognitive performance. Additionally, the dependence on self-report measures may introduce bias, as

participants might under-report or over-report their trauma experiences. Subsequent study ought to include many sources and objective assessments of trauma and cognitive performance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant negative impact of childhood trauma on cognitive functioning among in-school adolescents in Gwagwalada, Nigeria. Emotional abuse emerged as the most detrimental type of trauma, particularly for female adolescents. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to support trauma-exposed adolescents and mitigate the cognitive effects of childhood trauma.

Contribution of the Study to Scientific knowledge

This work enhances scientific knowledge by offering context-specific evidence regarding the cognitive effects of childhood trauma in Nigerian teenagers, a demographic that is underrepresented in worldwide trauma research. The study illustrates that emotional abuse and neglect are the most harmful to cognitive performance, with female adolescents being disproportionately impacted, so extending worldwide findings to a local African context. It enhances literature by incorporating gender as a moderating variable, underscoring the necessity for gender-sensitive approaches. These discoveries contribute to global theories of trauma-related cognitive impairments and practical frameworks for developing trauma-informed educational and psychosocial support systems in low- and middle-income nations.

Future Directions

Future investigations should examine the mechanisms that connect childhood trauma to cognitive functioning. Neuroimaging research and the exploration of neurobiological alterations and biomarkers may yield significant insights into the structural and functional modifications in the brain linked to trauma. Alterations in brain structure and function may elucidate the impact of trauma on cognitive development. Furthermore, evaluating the efficacy of various intervention options in alleviating the cognitive effects of trauma might guide optimal practices for assisting trauma-exposed adolescents.

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