



## EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING ON SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OWERRI MUNICIPAL IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract:

This study examined the effect of assertiveness training on social withdrawal among adolescents in secondary schools in Owerri Municipal of Imo State. A quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test and control group method was adopted for this study. Two research questions were used, and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The population of this study comprised 2892 (1638 males and 1254 females) SS2 students from 10 public secondary schools in Owerri Municipal council of Imo State, Nigeria. The sample for the study was 32 social withdrawal students who were selected through purposive sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection, namely; student's social withdrawal identification scales (SSWIS) and student's social withdrawal tendency scales (SSWTS). The items in the instruments were validated by experts in measurement and evaluation as well as Guidance and Counseling, and the reliability of the research instruments were established using Cronbach alpha statistic with indices of 0.81 and 0.83 respectively. Data collected from the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypothesis. The results obtained from the study showed that assertiveness training was effective in reducing social withdrawal behaviour among adolescents at post test. The results equally indicated

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that assertiveness training technique was significant. Moreso, the results of the study showed that the effect of assertiveness training was slightly more effective on male students than the female students, but the difference in the effectiveness was not significant based on gender. The researcher recommended among others, that counselors and other therapists should adopt assertiveness therapy as an effective counseling technique in controlling social withdrawal among adolescents in secondary schools so as to enhance their social and academic performances.

**Keywords:** assertiveness training, social withdrawal, gender, adolescents

## 1. Introduction

Children naturally appreciate associating and negotiating relationship with their peers. This behavioural disposition impacts positively on the quality of lives of children. However, it impacts on children negatively when they find it difficult to associate with their peers probably, due to the problem of social withdrawal (Salami, Kil Han, & Okoie, 2013). Social withdrawal is defined as an internal state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging in social relationships leading to exclusion and inability to meet their social goals in the company of their peers (Chen, 2006). Social withdrawal is the tendency to feel awkward, worried or tense during social encounters, especially with unfamiliar people (American Psychological Association (APA), 2012).

Contextually, social withdrawal refers to consistent display of solitary behaviours in the presence of peers. More specifically socially withdrawn children remove themselves from peer interactions because of underlying social fear and anxiety that inhibits social approach motivations.

According to Chen (2006), this is more likely to have direct experience of peer neglect and rejection than their more sociable age-mates. In one's life, one needs to interact with others. The ability to interact with others and to be competent in doing so has been ranked as one of the most important skills one can have. It is through one's interactions with others that one's experiences become richer, more significant, and through it one learns, engages, reflects and becomes socially competent.

Social withdrawn students often are unable to function adequately with peers and significant others. In view of this, they are at risk for several forms of concurrent and subsequent maladjustment such as poor social relationship at childhood and adulthood. Thus, the impact of social withdrawal on the developmental life span of children according to Coplan, Hughes, Bosacki and Rose-Krasnor (2011) is quite terrifying and wholesomely painful as the experience of social withdrawal among children appears to be highly handicapping and creates maladjustment in most aspects of their life such as social, intellectual, personality, language development and academic achievement. Therefore, the negative effect of social withdrawal on mental development and academic performance of children in school cannot be over-emphasized. On this basis therefore,

this study intends to treat socially withdrawn students with assertiveness training in Owerri Municipal of Imo State of Nigeria.

Assertiveness training is a behavioural therapy technique developed by Andrew Salter in 1961 and popularized by Wolpe. This technique prepares an individual to stand up for himself or herself to know and achieve his or her rights, and also take cognizance of the need to strike a balance between assertiveness and aggressiveness.

According to Uba and Idieune (2016), being assertive is not only about being confident, it is also understanding oneself and other members of the family and the empathy that you give as well as expressing your opinion on any matter. According to Corey (2013) assertive technique is a specialized form of social skills training which consist of teaching people how to be self-confident in a variety of social situations. The basic assumption underlying assertiveness technique is that people have right (but not obligation) to express themselves. One goal of assertive technique is to increase people's behavioural repertoire so that they can make choice of whether to behave assertively in certain situations. This approach is not panacea, but it can be an effective treatment for clients who have social skill deficits in their interpersonal relationship (Miltenberger, 2012).

Assertiveness or assertive training programme is designed to improve an individual's assertive beliefs and behaviours, which can help the individual, change how they view themselves and establish self-confidence and social anxiety. Basically, assertiveness training is about raising an individual's self-confidence so as to increase their level of self-esteem and resilience.

With consideration to gender in this study, gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of female and male that is created in families, societies and cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of both female and male (femininity and masculinity) (Vasa & Pine, 2006). Also, Bomstein (2008) viewed gender as the social attributes and opportunities associated in been male or female. Gender in its narrowest sense means socially constructed sex roles of female or male. Consequently, there might be differences in male and female behaviours, this is partly as a product or outcome of gender roles orientation in social construction of particular environment in which they belong to.

Empirically, Uba and Idieune (2016) found that assertive technique significantly reduced pupils' shyness more than what was observed in the control group. In a similar finding, Manesh, Fallahzadeh, Panah, Koochehbiuki, Arabi and Sahami (2015) results indicated that social anxiety scores in the intervention groups decreased more than in the placebo group. Result of the study indicates the importance of assertiveness skill training on the social anxiety. Also, Ugwueze (2012) study showed that there was positive effect of assertiveness training on improvement of self-esteem on respondents. The observation has a positive outcome.

Similar to this finding, Anyamene, Nwokolo and Ezeani (2016) findings revealed that assertive training has effect on both gender of students by enhancing their self-

esteem. Also shown was that there is no significant difference in the effect of assertive training on low self-esteem of male and female students. In line with this finding, Agbakwuru and Ugwueze (2015) result shows that both the male and female was affected equally by the assertiveness training.

Social withdrawal has indeed stood in the way of learning vis-a-vis educational success of these students. The routine method of using punishment to control social withdrawal does not appear to be effective. Punishment is likely to have failed because it is externally imposed and does not mobilize the willpower and participation of the individual concerned. It is thus important to find out non-punitive measures to control social withdrawal among secondary school students. Hence, the choice of assertiveness training to allow for full participation in the teaching learning process and other extracurricular activities in the school.

The problem of this study posed as a question is: what is the effect of assertiveness training on social withdrawal among secondary school students in Owerri Municipal of Imo State? The answer to this question is the thrust of this study.

## 2. Purpose of the study

The general aim of this study is to investigate the effect of assertiveness training on social withdrawal among adolescents in secondary school in Owerri Municipal of Imo State. Specifically, the study sought to determine the effect of:

- 1) assertiveness training on social withdrawal among students in secondary schools as measured with their mean scores at pre test and post test,
- 2) assertiveness training on social withdrawal among male and female students in secondary schools as measured with their mean scores at post test,

The following research questions are posed to guide the study:

### 2.1 Research questions

**RQ1:** What are the mean scores of the students treated with AT and those in the control group at pre-test and post-test?

**RQ2:** What are the mean scores of male and female students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test?

### 2.2 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study. Each was tested at a significant level of ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test.

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test.

### 3. Method

A quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test and control group method was adopted in this study. Nworgu (2015) described quasi-experiment as an experiment where random assignment of participants to experimental and control group are not possible. The population of this study comprised 2892 (1638 males and 1254 females) SS2 students from 10 public secondary schools in Owerri Municipal council of Imo State.

The sample for this study comprised 32 SS2 students. The sample was selected through purposive sampling technique. Two instruments were used. Two instruments were used for data collection; namely: student social withdrawal identification scales (SSWIS) and Students Social Withdrawal Tendency Scale (SSWTS). The items in the instruments were subjected to content and face validation by specialist in Educational Measurement and Evaluation and two from Guidance and Counseling.

The reliability of the research instrument was established using Cronbach alpha with indices of 0.81 and 0.83 established. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) statistic at 0.05 level of significance.

The SSWIS and SSWTS used in this study comprised of two sections A and B. Section A was an introduction part that solicited for the bio-data of the respondents particularly, their gender. Each of the instruments contained 20 items prepared along the four-point scale. This rating scales for participants that showed traits on social withdrawal behaviour. Also, the four point scale type ranging from strongly agreed 4, agree 3, disagree 2 and strongly disagree 1. Students' scores that were below 20 to 49 signified students without social withdrawal behaviour. While the scores which were 50 and above were regarded as students with social withdrawal behaviour.

The students' social withdrawal identification scale (SWWIS) was used for identification of students with social withdrawal behaviour during the pre-test. The treatment lasted for six weeks using one hour per session.

The experimental group was treated with assertiveness training technique, while the control group were given placebo treatment. At the end of the treatment, the SWWIS instrument was reshuffled and re-administrated to both the experiment and control groups, which were collected and analyzed to determine the effect of assertiveness training in handling social withdrawal behaviour among adolescents. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

#### 4. Results

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** What are the mean scores of the students treated with AT and those in the control group at pre-test and post-test? and

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test.

**Table 1a:** Sample Size (n), Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), and Standard Deviation (S)

Test	n	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
		$\bar{X}$	S	$\bar{X}$	S
AT	16	68.13	2.36	30.38	2.28
Control	16	68.25	1.69	67.69	3.07

**Table 1b:** ANCOVA F-test statistics

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Post-Test					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	11146.115 <sup>a</sup>	2	5573.057	766.495	.000
Intercept	120.507	1	120.507	16.574	.000
Pre-Test	8.333	1	8.333	1.146	.293
Treatment	11145.932	1	11145.932	<b>1532.965</b>	<b>.000</b>
Error	210.854	29	7.271		
Total	88287.000	32			
Corrected Total	11356.969	31			

a. R Squared = .981 (Adjusted R Squared = .980)

It was shown in Table 1a that the socially withdrawn students experimentally treated with assertiveness training had a pre-test mean score of 68.13 and a reduced post-test mean score of 30.38. But the socially withdrawn students in the control group had pre-test mean score of 68.25 and a high post-test mean score of 67.69. This result showed that at pre-test, the students under AT and control groups had close mean scores but at post-test, the mean score was reduced for the AT group while that of control group was still high. This indicates that assertiveness training is effective in the reduction of social withdrawal behaviour of students.

The Table 1b also displayed the result gotten in respect of hypothesis 1. From the table, it was indicated that the F-calculated value for post test effect is 1532.965 with significance probability of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the post test effect is significant at 0.05 level of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). This also showed a significant difference between the two groups at posttest in favour of AT group. The researcher therefore rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis, which

indicates that there is significant difference between the mean scores of the students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test.

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** What are the mean scores of male and female students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test? and

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students treated with AT and those in the control group at post-test.

**Table 2a:** Sample Size (n), Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), and Standard Deviation (S)

Test: Gender	Pre-Test		Post-Test		
	n	$\bar{X}$	S	$\bar{X}$	S
<b>AT</b>					
Male	8	68.63	2.00	30.25	2.12
Female	8	67.63	2.72	30.50	2.56
<b>Control</b>					
Male	8	68.38	1.77	67.88	3.14
Female	8	68.13	1.73	67.50	3.21

**Table 2b:** ANCOVA F-test statistics

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: Post-Test					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	11146.888 <sup>a</sup>	4	2786.722	358.155	.000
Intercept	117.377	1	117.377	15.086	.001
Pre Test	8.294	1	8.294	1.066	.311
Treatment	11145.834	1	11145.834	1432.483	.000
Gender	.395	1	.395	.051	.823
Treatment * Gender	.366	1	.366	.047	.830
Error	210.081	27	7.781		
Total	88287.000	32			
Corrected Total	11356.969	31			

a. R Squared = .982 (Adjusted R Squared = .979)

Table 2a shows that not much difference exists between the male and female students from the two different groups. With particular reference to AT group, it was seen that the assertiveness training was slightly more effective on the male students than the female students as their mean scores at post-test were 30.25 and 30.50 respectively. This result shows that assertiveness training is slightly more effective on the male students than the female ones in the reduction of students' social withdrawal behaviour.

The Table 2b also displayed the result gotten in respect of hypothesis 2. From the table, the result indicated that the F-calculated value for gender post-test effect is 0.051 with significance probability of 0.823 which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the gender post-test effect is not significant at 0.05 level of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). This also

showed a no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students of AT group at post test. The researcher therefore accepted the null hypothesis and concluded that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students treated with at and those in the control group at post-test.

## **5. Discussion of Findings**

This study examined the effect of assertiveness training on social withdrawal among adolescents in secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that assertiveness training was effective in the reduction of social withdrawal behaviour of students at post test. It was further revealed that the effectiveness of assertiveness training was significant. Assertiveness is a mode of personal behaviour and communication characterized by a willingness to stand up for one's needs and interests in an open and direct way. The assertive person stands up for things that matter to him or her while at the same time respecting the things that matter to others. This finding is in line with Uba and Idieune (2016) study which indicated that assertive technique significantly reduced pupils 'shyness more than what was observed in the control group. In a similar finding, Manesh, Fallahzadeh, Panah, Koochehbiuki, Arabi and Sahami (2015) results indicated that social anxiety scores in the intervention groups decreased more than in the placebo group. Result of the study indicates the importance of assertiveness skill training on the social anxiety. The present finding corroborates with Ugwueze (2012) study which showed that there was positive effect of assertiveness training on improvement of self-esteem on respondents. The observation has a positive outcome. The similarities in the findings could be attributed to same treatment packages used in the studies. This confirms the effectiveness of the treatment package to its subjects.

It was also revealed in this study that assertiveness training is slightly more effective on the male students than the female students at post-test. This gender effectiveness was found to be insignificant. This shows that in the treatment of socially withdrawn students with assertiveness training, gender should not be given a priority although the mean score of the male students was lower than the female students. The difference could be attributed to chance factor. This means that gender does not significantly influence assertiveness training in the reduction of social withdrawal behaviour of students. This shows that the male students benefited more on the treatment than the female students. It shows that the treatment does not significantly depend on gender. This also indicates that though it is more effective among the male students, their significant difference is not felt much. Similar to this finding, Anyamene, Nwokolo and Ezeani (2016) findings revealed that assertive training has effect on both gender of students by enhancing their self-esteem. Also shown was that there is no significant difference in the effect of assertive training on low self-esteem of male and female



students. In line with this finding, Agbakwuru and Ugwueze (2015) result shows that both the male and female was affected equally by the assertiveness training.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study and the discussions, the researchers concluded that assertiveness training was effective in the reduction of social withdrawal behaviour of students at post test, and that assertiveness training was slightly more effective on the male students than the female students at post test.

### 6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Counselors should make use of assertiveness therapy in the treatment of social withdrawal behaviour of students.
- 2) The educational ministries/departments should organize and sponsor school counsellors on workshops, exhibitions, seminars, and conferences on a regular basis in order to update their knowledge, expressing and drilling them on the use of assertiveness training.

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