

**PARENTAL REJECTION AND SELF-ESTEEM AS
PREDICTORS OF ADJUSTMENT DISORDER AMONG
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN YABA, LAGOS, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the predictive influence of perceived parental rejection and self-esteem on adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. Grounded in Attachment Theory and Social Learning Theory, the paper examines how early parental experiences and self-perceptions shape students' emotional adjustment during the university phase. Employing a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from a sample of 357 full-time undergraduate students drawn from the University of Lagos, Yaba College of Technology, and St. Augustine's University of Education through proportionate stratified random sampling. Standardized instruments were utilized: the Adjustment Disorder Scale (Israel, 2016), Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), all of which demonstrated strong internal reliability ($\alpha > .80$). Data analysis using simple and multiple regression revealed that perceived parental rejection significantly predicted adjustment disorder ($\beta = -.346, p < .001$), while self-esteem also predicted adjustment disorder, albeit with a modest effect ($\beta = .142, p = .007$). These findings affirm that negative parental experiences and fragile self-concepts contribute substantially to emotional maladjustment among university students. The results align with Attachment Theory, which links early rejection to insecure relational patterns, and Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes learned self-perception and coping responses. The paper concludes that fostering parental warmth, emotional support, and authentic self-esteem development can mitigate adjustment difficulties and promote mental well-being among Nigerian undergraduates.

Keywords: Perceived Parental Rejection, Self-Esteem, Adjustment Disorder

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of adjustment disorders among university students is a growing concern, with studies indicating that a significant proportion of first-year students experience symptoms related to adjustment difficulties (Ababu et al., 2018). In Nigeria, the transition to university can be particularly challenging due to factors such as socioeconomic disparities, cultural expectations, and inadequate support systems (Ohuakanwa, 2024). These challenges can be compounded for students who experience parental rejection, as they may feel isolated and unsupported during this critical transition period.

Adjustment Disorder (AjD) is a stress-related psychological condition characterized by emotional or behavioral symptoms that emerge within three months of exposure to a specific stressor and cause significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). According to the DSM-5-TR, these stressors may include academic pressures, relationship challenges, financial difficulties, or significant life transitions. AjD is especially prevalent among university students, who experience multiple developmental challenges simultaneously. Transitioning to university life involves leaving home, facing new academic demands, and navigating complex social networks, which can trigger overwhelming stress in some students (Dimitropoulou et al., 2021). When stress exceeds an individual's coping capacity, it manifests in maladaptive behaviors such as withdrawal, aggression, academic failure, and physical health complaints. In Nigeria, there has been a growing concern about mental health among undergraduates, with Lagos being a particularly high-risk environment due to its urban density, socio-economic inequalities, and fast-paced lifestyle (Umeh & Olatunji, 2022).

One important psychological factor influencing AjD is perceived parental rejection. According to Rohner's Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPAR Theory), parental acceptance or rejection plays a foundational role in shaping a child's emotional and social development (Rohner & Khaleque, 2022). Parental rejection, which may manifest as hostility, neglect, indifference, or lack of affection, creates a sense of insecurity and emotional instability in children. Individuals who grow up perceiving their parents as rejecting are more likely to develop feelings of unworthiness, anger, and distrust, which persist into adolescence and adulthood. Studies have consistently shown that perceived parental rejection is associated with a wide range of psychological maladjustments, including depression, anxiety, aggression, and poor coping strategies (Khaleque & Rohner, 2023; Kim et al., 2023). University students who experienced rejection during childhood may lack the emotional resources needed to manage the intense stressors associated with higher education. As a result, when confronted with academic or social challenges, these students may be more susceptible to AjD symptoms such as helplessness, withdrawal, and impaired functioning.

Self-esteem is another vital factor influencing how students respond to stress and their risk of developing AjD. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth and competence (Rosenberg, 1965; Orth & Robins, 2022). High self-esteem has been identified as a protective factor that enhances resilience and adaptive coping, enabling individuals to face challenges with confidence and optimism. Conversely, low self-esteem is linked to heightened vulnerability to stress and emotional disorders (Donnellan et al., 2021). Students with low self-esteem often interpret academic setbacks and social conflicts as personal failures, which can trigger intense emotional reactions and maladaptive responses. In the context of Nigerian universities, where academic success is highly emphasized and failure carries significant stigma, low self-esteem can amplify the psychological impact of academic and social stressors, thereby increasing the likelihood of AjD symptoms (Eze & Ugwueze, 2023).

In Lagos, particularly in Yaba, a major educational hub hosting several universities and colleges, the interplay of these variables is especially relevant. Students in Yaba are exposed to unique stressors, including high living costs, urban congestion, and crime and insecurity (Umeh & Olatunji, 2022). These environmental factors, when combined with personal vulnerabilities such as a history of parental rejection or low self-esteem, create a high-risk context for AjD. Despite the growing

mental health needs of this population, research on AjD in Nigerian university settings remains limited. Most studies have focused on depression and anxiety, leaving a gap in understanding the specific predictors of AjD. Therefore, the paper set to examine Parental Rejection and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Adjustment Disorder Among University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

University students are at a critical developmental stage where they transition from adolescence to adulthood, navigating complex academic, social, and familial challenges. This period is often characterized by increased exposure to stressors such as academic pressures, financial burdens, peer relationship conflicts, and uncertainty about the future. These stressors can lead to adjustment disorder (AjD) when they overwhelm a student's coping mechanisms, resulting in emotional and behavioral symptoms that impair academic and social functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Globally, the prevalence of AjD among university students is rising.

Lagos, specifically the Yaba educational district, is a hub for major universities and colleges such as the University of Lagos and Yaba College of Technology. Students in this area face unique challenges, including the high cost of living, transportation difficulties, congestion, and exposure to urban insecurity (Umeh & Olatunji, 2022). These environmental stressors are compounded by family-related issues such as strained relationships with parents and a lack of emotional support, which increase vulnerability to AjD. Perceived parental rejection has been identified as a critical risk factor influencing the psychological well-being of young adults. According to Rohner and Khaleque (2022), individuals who perceive rejection from their parents, through neglect, hostility, or lack of warmth, are more likely to develop maladaptive emotional patterns and poor coping skills. In Nigeria, empirical studies have shown that parental rejection significantly predicts psychological distress among students.

Self-esteem is another important factor influencing how students respond to stress. Self-esteem reflects an individual's overall evaluation of their worth and competence, influencing resilience and adaptability (Orth & Robins, 2022). Students with high self-esteem are better equipped to manage stress, while those with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to AjD when confronted with academic and social challenges. In Nigeria, low self-esteem has been linked to a range of mental health problems among university students. A recent study by Eze and Ugwueze (2023) found that 68% of students with low self-esteem reported significant emotional distress, compared to only 23% among those with high self-esteem. Furthermore, Donnellan et al. (2021) emphasize that self-esteem not only affects individual coping but also mediates the relationship between early childhood experiences and later psychological adjustment.

Although various studies have explored AjD, most international research has been conducted in Western contexts, with limited applicability to Nigeria's unique socio-cultural environment. Within Nigeria, existing studies have primarily focused on depression and anxiety, with little emphasis on AjD as a distinct condition (Ene et al., 2023). Additionally, while perceived parental rejection and self-esteem have been individually linked to mental health outcomes, there is insufficient empirical evidence examining their combined predictive effect on AjD among Nigerian university students.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how perceived parental rejection and self-esteem jointly predict AjD in the specific context of Yaba, Lagos.

Objectives

The paper comes up with the following objectives:

- i. Examine the prediction of perceived parental rejection on adjustment disorder among selected university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the prediction of self-esteem on adjustment disorder among selected university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis guided the paper:

- i. There will be a significant prediction of perceived Parental rejection on adjustment disorder among selected University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
- ii. There will be a significant prediction of Self-esteem on adjustment disorder among selected University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Perceived Parental Rejection

The concept of parental rejection is complex and has a big influence on kids' mental and psychological development. It describes the lack or retreat of parental affection and support, which can take many different forms, such as aversion, criticism, and emotional neglect. The implications of parental rejection are profound, as it has been linked to a wide array of behavioral and emotional problems in children and adolescents. Research indicates that children who perceive their parents as rejecting are more likely to experience mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Barco et al., 2018; Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2019).

The structural model of resilience posits that parental support plays a crucial role in fostering hope and active coping mechanisms in children. Conversely, a negative environment characterized by parental rejection can lead to detrimental perceptions regarding life expectancy and resource availability (Cheraghian et al., 2023). This aligns with findings that suggest adolescents who perceive high levels of parental rejection are at an increased risk for mental health problems (Wu et al., 2023). The impact of parental rejection is not limited to immediate emotional distress; it can also have long-term effects on an individual's psychological well-being, as evidenced by studies showing that individuals who experienced parental rejection during formative years report higher levels of psychological distress in adulthood (Puckett et al., 2015).

Moreover, the role of parental acceptance and rejection extends beyond mere emotional support; it is intricately linked to the development of self-efficacy in adolescents. Research has shown that

perceived parental acceptance correlates positively with adolescents' self-efficacy, while perceived rejection correlates negatively (Wu et al., 2023). This relationship suggests that parental attitudes significantly influence how children view their capabilities and potential for success in various life domains. The implications of these findings are critical, as they highlight the importance of fostering a supportive and accepting parental environment to promote healthy psychological development in children and adolescents.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is one of the components of self-concept that Rosenberg (1965) defined as the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings about themselves as an object. He noted that self-esteem can be an attitudinal consequence of voluntary action. Cherry (2019) explains that in psychology, the term self-esteem is used to describe a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. In other words, how much you appreciate and like yourself. Self-esteem is often seen as a personality trait, which means that it tends to be stable and enduring. Self-esteem can involve a variety of beliefs about oneself, such as the appraisal of your appearance, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. He further reveals that, as a dependent variable, self-esteem brings about successful actions that benefit others.

Self-esteem constitutes an essential component of healthy personality development of an adult, which is accomplished in a specific social and cultural setup, further having implications for individual lives (Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-esteem refers to the self-evaluations of an individual in the form of positive and negative views as valuable (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem is conceptualized as the perceptions that an individual makes about oneself, which are generally viewed as positive or negative (Ciccarelli & White, 2015). Mruk (2006) views self-esteem as a psychic concept under which an individual develops competence to deal with obstacles that he/she experiences throughout life.

People possess a fundamental desire for self-esteem: we want to feel good about ourselves. This is implied by all theoretical perspectives on self-esteem, from James and Maslow to sociometer theory and TMT. Indeed, abundant evidence demonstrates that people are willing to go out of their way to seek out high self-esteem, value past experiences that increased their self-esteem, and often prefer self-esteem boosts to other pleasant options such as eating their favorite food or having sex (Bushman et al., 2011; Zeigler-Hill, 2013). Thus, feeling good about oneself is highly motivating.

Adjustment Disorder

Adjustment disorder (AD) is a prevalent yet often under-recognized mental health condition characterized by emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to identifiable stressors. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) classifies adjustment disorders under trauma and stressor-related disorders, highlighting their significance in clinical practice (O'Donnell et al., 2019). The condition manifests when an individual struggles to cope with a significant life change or stressor, leading to symptoms that exceed what is typically expected in response to such events (Gradus et al., 2010). This disorder can arise from various stressors,

including personal loss, relationship issues, or significant life transitions, and can affect individuals across diverse demographics (Casey & Bailey, 2011).

Research indicates that adjustment disorders can lead to severe consequences, including the development of chronic mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, if left untreated (Morgan et al., 2022). The longitudinal course of adjustment disorders suggests that some individuals may experience prolonged symptoms, which can escalate to suicidality or self-harm, particularly in vulnerable populations (Morgan et al., 2022). The prevalence of adjustment disorders is notably high among cancer patients, who often face a multitude of psychological and existential challenges related to their diagnosis and treatment (Beek et al., 2019). The psychological burden associated with cancer can exacerbate symptoms of adjustment disorder, necessitating tailored psychological interventions to address these unique challenges (Wijnhoven et al., 2022).

The treatment landscape for adjustment disorders is multifaceted, encompassing both psychological and pharmacological approaches. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has emerged as a prominent therapeutic modality, demonstrating efficacy in alleviating symptoms of adjustment disorder (Marco et al., 2020). However, the evidence base for effective treatments remains limited, with no universally accepted gold standard for managing these disorders (Casey & Bailey, 2011). Recent studies have explored the potential of internet-based interventions, which combine elements of CBT and positive psychology, to enhance accessibility and user engagement in treatment (Moser et al., 2019). Such approaches are particularly relevant given the increasing demand for mental health services and the barriers many individuals face in accessing traditional therapy (Skruibis et al., 2016).

Empirical Review

In a longitudinal cross-national study, Putnick et al. (2014) examined the effect of parental acceptance and rejection on children's psychological adjustment across nine culturally diverse countries, including China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States. The study sampled 1,247 children aged 8 to 10 years and their mothers and fathers, using the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) to measure perceptions of parental behavior and standardized behavioral checklists to assess internalizing, externalizing, and social competence outcomes. Findings revealed that children who reported high levels of perceived parental rejection showed significant increases in internalizing problems such as sadness and withdrawal, externalizing behaviors such as aggression, and decreased prosocial behavior over time ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$). These effects remained significant even after controlling for demographic variables and baseline functioning, indicating a robust predictive relationship. Although Adjustment Disorder (AjD) was not directly measured, the study's outcome variables, distress and impaired functioning, align closely with AjD criteria as described in the DSM-5-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). This study provides strong evidence that parental rejection contributes to maladaptive adjustment trajectories, which may predispose students to AjD when exposed to university stressors. However, the absence of Nigerian or African samples highlights the need for localized studies, particularly in urban academic contexts such as Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

Saleem et al. (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study among 321 college students in Pakistan to examine the relationship between perceived parental rejection and mental health problems, with interpersonal difficulties tested as a mediating variable. The study utilized the Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran for Adults (EMBU-A) to measure parental rejection and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to assess mental health symptoms. Results demonstrated that both maternal and paternal rejection were positively associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, with regression coefficients of $\beta = 0.20$ ($p < .01$) for fathers and $\beta = 0.29$ ($p < .001$) for mothers. Mediation analysis revealed that interpersonal difficulties significantly mediated this relationship, indicating that students who experienced parental rejection were more likely to have problematic relationships, which in turn exacerbated their psychological distress. While AjD was not specifically diagnosed, the combination of heightened stress and functional impairment reflects AjD symptomatology. This study underscores the mechanism through which parental rejection may increase AjD vulnerability among university students. However, the findings are limited to South Asian cultural contexts, highlighting a gap in research exploring this pathway in Nigeria's unique socio-cultural environment.

Sajadi (2010) conducted a study entitled *The Relationship Between Social Adjustment and Self-Esteem* and showed that there is a positive correlation between social adjustment and self-esteem. Marie (2006) carried out a study entitled *The Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Social Adjustment* and reported a significant relationship between self-esteem and social adjustment. Thus, this study aims to answer the question of whether there is a relationship between social adjustment and self-esteem of the students.

Orth and Robins (2022) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the relationship between self-esteem and psychological adjustment across the lifespan using data from over 15,000 participants in multiple countries. The study employed validated self-esteem scales and mental health inventories to assess changes over time. Findings revealed that low self-esteem was a significant predictor of emotional distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms ($\beta = -0.36$, $p < .001$). These symptoms overlap with adjustment disorder (AjD), which involves psychological distress and impaired functioning following identifiable stressors. The researchers also found that individuals with persistently low self-esteem were more vulnerable to maladaptive coping responses when exposed to stress. This suggests that self-esteem acts as a protective or risk factor influencing how individuals adjust to life challenges. Eze and Ugwueze (2023) further supported this link in a Nigerian context, reporting that students with low self-esteem were twice as likely to experience academic and social stress-related disorders. They also found that self-esteem significantly moderated the relationship between stress and mental health outcomes. These results imply that self-esteem determines how effectively university students cope with pressures like exams, financial constraints, and interpersonal conflicts. However, few studies have specifically measured AjD, instead focusing on broader constructs like depression and anxiety. This represents a significant gap in the literature, especially in African settings. The current study addresses this gap by examining how self-esteem predicts AjD among undergraduates in Yaba, Lagos. It seeks to clarify whether low self-esteem directly contributes to AjD risk or interacts with other variables like parental rejection. Understanding this dynamic will inform targeted interventions to enhance student resilience and prevent stress-related disorders.

Dhingra et al (2005) declare that conformity is a consistent procedure through which one adapts to be in appropriate alteration with his condition, others, and himself. The fundamental target of conformity is to set a harmony between one's desires and social desires that influences all parts of one's life. Therefore, the individual can react legitimately to all ecological shocks to gain their great boosts and support. Although alteration contains numerous perspectives like social, passionate, physical, and instructional measurements, the best angle is social conformity, which is essential to the various aspects of modification (Mazaheri et al., 2006). Emotional and social adjustment resulting from positive self-concept can provide the person with some kind of ability to face the difficulties, and higher self-esteem strengthens one's ability to efficiently tackle the psychological pressures (Wilbum & Smith, 2005).

Theoretical Framework.

This section elucidates on relevant theories in relation to the variables

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory, first developed by John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1982), is one of the most influential psychological theories explaining the development of emotional bonds between children and their caregivers and how these early relationships shape an individual's personality and psychological functioning across the lifespan. Bowlby conceptualized attachment as an innate behavioral system, biologically designed to ensure survival by maintaining proximity between infants and caregivers. When caregivers respond consistently and sensitively to a child's needs, the child develops a sense of security, forming a stable foundation for healthy emotional and social development (Bretherton, 1992; Bowlby, 1982). Conversely, when caregivers are inconsistent, neglectful, or rejecting, children develop insecure attachment styles that predispose them to maladaptive outcomes, including emotional instability and difficulties in relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Waters & Cummings, 2023). These insecure patterns are not limited to childhood but persist into adolescence and adulthood, influencing how individuals perceive themselves, interact with others, and cope with stressors such as academic, financial, and social pressures. Thus, Attachment Theory provides a useful lens for understanding why some university students are more vulnerable to adjustment disorder (AjD) than others when confronted with stressful life events.

Bowlby (1969) introduced the concept of internal working models, which are mental representations of self and others developed through early attachment experiences. These models shape individuals' expectations of relationships and guide their emotional responses to stress throughout life. Children who experience parental acceptance and warmth tend to internalize a positive working model, viewing themselves as worthy of love and others as reliable sources of support. This fosters resilience and adaptive coping strategies in later life (Cassidy & Shaver, 2018). In contrast, children exposed to parental rejection, neglect, or hostility internalize negative models, perceiving themselves as unworthy and others as untrustworthy. Such individuals are prone to emotional dysregulation, poor stress management, and heightened vulnerability to psychological distress when exposed to external stressors (Rohner & Khaleque, 2022). For university students, these internalized schemas play a significant role in determining how they adapt to the unique challenges of tertiary education. Students who grew up with rejection may lack the psychological

resources needed to navigate the pressures of academic performance, peer relationships, and financial struggles, leaving them susceptible to AjD.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT), developed by Albert Bandura, is one of the most comprehensive frameworks for understanding human behaviour, particularly how individuals acquire new behaviours, beliefs, and emotional responses through observation and interaction within their social environment. Bandura (1977, 1986) argued that learning is not purely the result of direct reinforcement, as posited by early behaviourists such as B.F. Skinner, but rather a cognitive process that occurs in a social context. This means that individuals can learn by observing others, even without personally experiencing rewards or punishments. Bandura's groundbreaking Bobo doll experiments demonstrated that children who observed adults engaging in aggressive behaviour were more likely to imitate those behaviours, even without direct reinforcement (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). This experiment highlighted the powerful role of modeling in shaping behaviour. In the family context, parents are primary models whose behaviours profoundly influence children's emotional development and coping strategies. When children repeatedly observe patterns of acceptance, care, and constructive problem-solving, they internalize these behaviors as adaptive ways of managing stress. Conversely, consistent exposure to rejection, neglect, or hostility models maladaptive behaviors and emotional responses, which may increase vulnerability to psychological disorders such as adjustment disorder (AjD).

Central to Social Learning Theory is the concept of reciprocal determinism, which describes the continuous interaction between personal factors (cognitive, emotional, and biological processes), environmental influences, and behavior. According to Bandura (1986), these three components operate bidirectionally: individuals influence their environments, and their environments, in turn, influence them. For example, a university student with low self-esteem (a personal factor) may withdraw from social activities (behaviour), which could lead to reduced peer support (environmental factor), further reinforcing feelings of worthlessness and stress. This cyclical interaction is particularly relevant to AjD, which arises when a person's coping mechanisms are overwhelmed by life stressors, resulting in maladaptive emotional and behavioural responses (World Health Organization, 2022). Within this framework, perceived parental rejection serves as a critical environmental factor that shapes a child's belief systems and emotional responses. Over time, these early experiences affect how the individual interacts with their social world during adolescence and adulthood, influencing their susceptibility to AjD when confronted with university-related stressors such as academic failure, financial strain, or relationship problems.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The design enabled the collection of data on key psychological variables, perceived parental rejection, self-esteem, and adjustment disorder at a single point in time, allowing for correlational analysis and generalization across a large population. The population comprised 100,568 full-time undergraduate students from three tertiary institutions: the University of Lagos (62,215), Yaba College of Technology (30,671), and St. Augustine's University of Education (7,682). Using Krejcie and Morgan's formula, a sample of 383 respondents

was determined and selected through purposive and proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation across institutions. Data were collected using standardized instruments: the Adjustment Disorder Scale (Israel, 2016; $\alpha = 0.876$), the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005; $\alpha = 0.912$), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; $\alpha = 0.889$). Each instrument underwent pilot testing for clarity, cultural relevance, and psychometric reliability within the Nigerian undergraduate context.

Data collection was conducted over two months following formal approval and institutional consent. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the paper, assured of confidentiality, and informed of their right to withdraw without consequence. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 357 valid responses were retained for analysis after data cleaning. The paper employed descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to analyze demographic characteristics, while simple regression analysis in SPSS version 27 was conducted to test hypotheses about the predictive relationships among the variables. Ethical integrity was maintained through adherence to Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols, informed consent, and anonymization of data. The methodological choices ensured the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings, making this paper a robust quantitative inquiry into the predictive influence of perceived parental rejection and self-esteem on adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Response of Respondents

Demography	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age Group	Less than 25 years	256	71.7
	26–35 years	96	26.9
	36 and above	5	1.4
	Total	357	100.0
Gender	Male	184	51.5
	Female	173	48.5
	Total	357	100.0
Religion	Christianity	198	55.5
	Islam	150	42.0
	Traditional	9	2.5
	Total	357	100.00

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, gender, and religion. A large majority of the respondents (71.7%) were less than 25 years old, followed by 26.9% who were aged 26–35 years, and only 1.4% who were 36 years and above. This indicates that the sample was predominantly composed of youth and young adults. In terms of gender, 51.5% of the respondents were male, while 48.5% were female, indicating a nearly balanced gender representation. Regarding religion, 55.5% of respondents identified as Christians, 42.0% as

Muslims, and 2.5% as Traditionalists. This reflects a religiously diverse sample, though Christianity was the most represented religion. The dominance of respondents under 25 years suggests that the findings of the study may largely reflect the perspectives, behaviours, or psychological tendencies of younger individuals. This age skew may be particularly relevant if the study explores issues such as adjustment, self-esteem, or parental influence, which are more pronounced during early developmental stages. The near-equal gender distribution allows for balanced insights across male and female perspectives, minimising gender bias in the data interpretation. The religious distribution, with Christianity and Islam comprising the majority, is reflective of Nigeria's broader religious landscape. This suggests that the results may have relevance in multi-religious settings, though the low percentage of traditional believers means cultural perspectives from that group may be underrepresented.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One

There will be a significant prediction of perceived parental rejection on adjustment disorder among University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression, and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Simple regression analysis showing the significant prediction of perceived parental rejection on adjustment disorder among University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

DV	Predator	R	R ²	F	df	95%CI	β	t	p
Adjustment Disorder	Constant	.346	.120	48.230	1,355				
	Parental Rejection					[-.505, -.282]	-.346	-6.945	.000

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the predictive influence of perceived parental rejection on adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The outcome of the analysis revealed that perceived parental rejection significantly predicted adjustment disorder, with a correlation coefficient of $R = .346$, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable. The model accounted for approximately 12.0% of the variance in adjustment disorder ($R^2 = .120$), which was statistically significant, $F(1, 355) = 48.23$, $p < .001$. The regression coefficient for parental rejection was $\beta = -.346$, with a t-value of -6.945 and a p-value of $< .001$, indicating that the prediction was highly significant. The 95% confidence interval for the Unstandardized regression coefficient ranged from $-.505$ to $-.282$, which does not include zero, further supporting the reliability of the predictor's effect.

The negative beta value implies that as parental rejection increases, symptoms of adjustment disorder become more severe. In other words, students who perceive higher levels of rejection from their parents are more likely to experience difficulties adjusting psychologically, socially, and

emotionally within the university environment. The findings imply that parental rejection has a significant and detrimental impact on university students' psychological adjustment, suggesting that students who perceive rejection from their parents are more likely to struggle with emotional and behavioural adaptation in the university environment. In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that parental rejection is a significant predictor of adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

There will be a significant prediction of self-esteem on adjustment disorder among University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression, and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Simple regression analysis showing the significant prediction of Self-esteem on adjustment disorder among University Students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

DV	Predator	R	R ²	F	df	95%CI	β	t	p
Adjustment Disorder	Constant	.142	.020	7.301	1,355				
	Self-esteem					[.103,.652]	.142	2.702	.007

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether self-esteem significantly predicted adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The results revealed that self-esteem was a significant predictor of adjustment disorder, with $R = .142$ and $R^2 = .020$, indicating that self-esteem accounted for approximately 2.0% of the variance in adjustment disorder. This prediction was statistically significant, $F(1, 355) = 7.301$, $p = .007$. The regression coefficient for self-esteem was $\beta = .142$, $t(355) = 2.702$, $p = .007$, with a 95% confidence interval for the unstandardized coefficient ranging from .103 to .652. The positive beta value suggests that higher self-esteem scores are associated with higher adjustment disorder scores in this particular sample, which may appear counterintuitive and might reflect context-specific dynamics, such as inflated or defensive self-esteem that masks underlying psychological distress. The result implies that self-esteem plays a statistically significant but modest role in explaining adjustment disorder among university students. Although the proportion of variance explained is relatively small (2%), the finding suggests that students with specific self-esteem profiles may experience adjustment difficulties. In conclusion, the study found that self-esteem significantly predicts adjustment disorder among university students, though the effect size was small.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this paper revealed that perceived parental rejection significantly predicted adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The regression result ($\beta = -.346$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .120$) showed a moderate and statistically significant relationship, implying that students who perceived greater rejection from their parents exhibited higher levels of maladjustment, emotional distress, and social withdrawal. This outcome aligns with Attachment

Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), which posits that children who experience rejection or neglect develop insecure attachment styles and internal working models that negatively affect emotional regulation and stress management in adulthood. Consistent with Rohner and Khaleque's (2022) Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPAR), individuals who grow up feeling rejected tend to internalize feelings of worthlessness and hostility, which heighten vulnerability to adjustment disorder when faced with stress. Empirical studies reinforce this result: Putnick et al. (2014) found that children who reported high parental rejection showed increased emotional distress and behavioral problems, while Saleem et al. (2019) confirmed that both maternal and paternal rejection predicted higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among college students. These findings collectively support Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, emphasizing that behaviors learned through early family modelling, such as exposure to hostility or neglect, translate into maladaptive emotional responses in later life. Thus, the significant predictive role of perceived parental rejection on adjustment disorder among Nigerian undergraduates highlights the enduring influence of early attachment experiences and family interactions on students' emotional adjustment in university settings.

The second finding established that self-esteem significantly predicted adjustment disorder among university students in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, though the effect size was modest ($\beta = .142$, $p = .007$; $R^2 = .020$). Interestingly, the positive beta coefficient suggests that higher self-esteem levels corresponded with higher adjustment disorder symptoms in this sample, indicating the possible presence of defensive or unstable self-esteem, a pattern where individuals project confidence outwardly but internally struggle with insecurity and emotional instability. This result partially supports Bandura's (1977, 1986) Social Learning Theory, which explains that self-perception and coping behaviors are learned through observation and social feedback. Students in competitive and stressful environments, such as Yaba's tertiary institutions, may exhibit socially conditioned self-esteem that fails under academic or social strain. Empirically, Orth and Robins (2022) found that self-esteem fluctuations predict emotional distress and poor adjustment across life stages, while Eze and Ugwueze (2023) demonstrated that Nigerian students with unstable self-esteem were twice as likely to develop academic stress and social dysfunction. The result also connects to Attachment Theory, as early experiences of rejection or inconsistent affection impair the development of stable self-worth, leading to fragile self-esteem that collapses under pressure. Therefore, while self-esteem remains a vital psychological buffer, the findings suggest that its quality—whether secure or defensive—determines its protective role against adjustment disorder. In this paper, self-esteem emerged as a significant but context-sensitive predictor, emphasizing that the way students perceive and evaluate themselves plays a crucial role in how they adapt to the stressors of university life.

Conclusion

The findings of this paper underscore the profound psychological impact of early parental experiences and self-perception on university students' emotional adjustment. The significant predictive relationship between perceived parental rejection and adjustment disorder aligns with Attachment Theory and Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, affirming that the emotional bonds and acceptance patterns formed in childhood shape individuals' coping capacities and vulnerability to stress in adulthood. Likewise, the influence of self-esteem on adjustment disorder, though modest, supports Social Learning Theory, which highlights the role of self-concept and

social reinforcement in behavioral adaptation. Empirically, the results corroborate prior research by Rohner and Khaleque (2022), Orth and Robins (2022), and Putnick et al. (2014), indicating that both parental rejection and self-esteem are critical psychosocial predictors of adjustment difficulties. Collectively, these insights reveal that adjustment disorder among undergraduates is not merely a situational response to academic or social pressure but a reflection of deeper emotional and developmental histories. The paper concludes that interventions aimed at strengthening parental bonds, fostering emotional acceptance, and promoting healthy self-esteem are essential for enhancing psychological resilience and mitigating adjustment disorders among Nigerian university students.

Recommendations

The paper comes up with the following recommendations.

- i. In light of the significant influence of perceived parental rejection on adjustment disorder, this paper recommends that universities, counseling units, and governmental agencies collaborate to establish family-focused psychoeducation programs. Such initiatives should educate parents on the long-term psychological effects of rejection, neglect, or inconsistent affection, as explained by Attachment Theory. Interventions should emphasize warmth, acceptance, and emotional validation as protective factors that foster secure attachment and reduce vulnerability to adjustment problems. Integrating parent–student counseling sessions during university orientation or family events would help strengthen emotional bonds and mitigate the negative impact of early parental rejection on students’ mental health.
- ii. Given that self-esteem significantly predicted adjustment disorder among the sampled students, universities should design structured psychological interventions aimed at promoting authentic, stable self-esteem rather than defensive self-concepts. Counseling centers should organize periodic workshops on self-awareness, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies rooted in Social Learning Theory, helping students model positive behaviors and internalize constructive self-perceptions. Such programs should also include peer mentoring and group therapy sessions to build resilience, reinforce positive self-evaluation, and reduce susceptibility to stress-related maladjustment in academic environments.

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