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Exploring the Practices of Mindfulness for Sexually Abused Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

Sexual abuse has far-reaching problems, such as the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other long-term battles, such as depression and suicidal ideation. Over the years, mindfulness-based therapies have demonstrated their effectiveness in addressing a wide range of psychological and physical challenges of sexual abuse. This study investigated how the victims (tertiary school students) of sexual abuse navigate thoughts and emotionally regulate themselves through mindfulness. This study employed a survey research design and was underpinned by the Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Self-Transcendence (S-ART) framework. The study's population consisted of 259 undergraduates enrolled in degree programmes at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti in Nigeria. The data were collected using a Google Form-hosted tool tagged the "Sexually Abused Victims' Practices of Mindfulness Questionnaire (SAVPM). The study's data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation at a 5% significance level through SPSS V29 software. Findings indicate a significant positive correlation ($r = .141$, $p = .023$) between the experiences of sexual abuse victims and mindfulness practices. The study concludes that sexually abused students engage in mindfulness practices such as self-awareness therapy to overcome their trauma. The study recommends incorporating more mindfulness practices to promote awareness in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Sexual Abuse, Mindfulness Practices, Undergraduates, Students, Nigeria.

Introduction

Sexual abuse remains a pervasive issue in society, profoundly impacting the physical, mental, emotional, and sexual well-being of victims (Mullen et al., 1996). The traumatic experience often leads to severe and long-lasting consequences, which include mental health disorders, substance abuse, transactional sex, and being infected with sexually transmitted diseases (Alves et al., 2024; Dworkin, 2020). Reflecting the gravity of this issue, the World Health Organization noted sexual abuse to be a global health concern as it impacts people's well-being and living

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(Meinck et al., 2016). Sexual abuse is broadly defined as any sexual act imposed upon another individual without their consent, often using force, violence, or threats (Collin-Vezina et al., 2013).

The acts include touching intimate body parts or forcibly penetrating genital areas (Sobsey & Doe, 1991). It may also occur in situations where the victim is asleep, unconscious, or otherwise incapacitated, rendering them unable to resist or flee. Differentiating "sexual abuse" and "sexual violence" has caused great contention. This is because "sexual violence" or "sexualized violence" includes intimidation and pressure, which would counter the belief that sexual violence only surrounds violent attacks (Alves et al., 2024; National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2010). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024) reveals that sexual violence comprises forceful sexual deeds, unsolicited statements, and approaches to engage in sex, irrespective of the background or connection between both parties. In relation to "sexual abuse", this phrase includes physical and non-physical traits of abuse (Giardino & Giardino, 2008).

Physical sexual abuse involves rape, sexual assault, or any unwarranted touch (Joleby et al., 2020). Non-physical sexual abuse surrounds behaviours such as the exposure of genitals or baring one's body, pressing someone into online sexual activities, or even forcing them to engage in sex with another person (Collin-Vezina et al., 2013; Jonsson et al., 2019). Therefore, sexual abuse reveals a complex body that requires necessary treatment, lessons about its occurrences, and addressing the widespread phenomenon. The outcomes are often profound, making recovery difficult (Mathoma et al., 2006). Those who overcome sexual abuse are exposed to ongoing stress, persistent fear, and cognitive abilities that are sometimes compromised, leading to the development of harmful coping techniques (Hébert et al., 2014; Florentino, 2015). This is why the ability to reconcile with past occurrences is the initial step a person can take to heal from the traumatic event. The agreement to reconcile has been found to enable personal development, foster more positive relationships, and improve quality of life (Edwards, 2015).

Mindfulness has emerged as a valuable tool that can address the impact of sexual abuse (Dussault et al., 2024). By promoting increased acceptance of trauma-related experiences, as well as reducing negative emotional responses/avoidance behaviours, mindfulness has been noted to help people cope more effectively with the psychological aftermath of the traumatic occurrence (Call et al., 2013; Schoorl et al., 2015). Mindfulness helps individuals process intrusive memories and reduce symptoms of emotional numbing by encouraging them to stay grounded in the present moment (Baer et al., 2006). These are the same traits that promote accepting and making peace with a past event (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

The principle of non-passive acceptance encourages individuals to redirect their attention to the present moment whenever the mind begins to dwell on trauma-

related stimuli (Dussault et al., 2020). This redirection fosters greater self-awareness and emotional resilience. Evidence suggests that individuals who regularly practice mindfulness report increased self-esteem, improved relationship satisfaction, and greater fulfilment in their personal life (Hanley et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2020). This achievement is often attained by enhancing emotional and stress regulation, improving attentional focus, and cultivating a non-judgmental stance toward one's experiences. Therefore, mindfulness emerges as a guideline that can help survivors heal from traumatic events, as well as face the emotional constraints, all while being mindful of the effects the event has on their bodies (Call et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2021; Wen et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The proposed framework to understand mindfulness surrounds studying the Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Self-Transcendence (S-ART) framework (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This is because the S-ART framework emphasizes the importance of attaining 1) self-awareness to understand one's emotions and behaviour, 2) self-regulation to manage those emotions to achieve desired outcomes, as well as 3) self-transcendence to rise above traumatic events (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Osborne (2020:44) notes that "those who experience sexual assault have increased chances of developing PTSD, more so than those who experience a different kind of traumatic event". Therefore, applying the S-ART framework could help reduce distorted perception and emotions related to everyday experiences. Vago and Silbersweig (2012) highlight that these biases are influenced by dispositional factors that can range from non-pathological to pathological spectrum without necessarily indicating clear psychopathology.

Within this framework, mindfulness is identified to mitigate sexual abuse experiences using mental training. The cognitive training develops consciousness (self-awareness), which enhances the ability to manage or modify uncomfortable responses and impulses (self-regulation), therefore cultivating a positive relationship between the self and others to promote prosocial characteristics (self-transcendence). Six neurocognitive mechanisms are proposed to modulate self-awareness and reduce bias. These mechanisms include intention and motivation; attention and emotion regulation; extinction and reconsolidation; non-attachment, as well as decentring (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022). Instead of simplifying mindfulness into a single entity, the S-ART framework presents it as a multidimensional construct that encompasses perceptual, physiological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022). This holistic approach outlines the complex nature of mindfulness and its potential to moderate self-processing using intentional mental practices.

Research Objectives

1. Explore tertiary students' sexual abuse experiences
2. Explore their practices of mindfulness
3. Assist to stabilise sexually abused victims using mindfulness techniques

Research Questions

1. What are the victims' experiences of sexual abuse and the circumstances?
2. How do the victims respond emotionally to sexual Abuse experience?
3. How do victims of sexual abuse understand and practice mindfulness?

Problem Statement and Research Gap

The aftermath of sexual abuse is deemed complex, often leading to issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ouhmad et al., 2023). Other long-term struggles include chronic suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, and acute stress disorder (Esper & Gherardi-Donato, 2019; Park et al., 2018). These psychological issues are accompanied by various physical and behavioural concerns such as sleep and eating disorders, panic attacks, as well as chronic emotional problems like fear, depression, and distress (Randa et al., 2023). This growing awareness of survivors' needs and gaps in mental health support is fuelling research to devise effective psychological treatment frameworks (Ouhmad et al., 2023). Secondly, there is a growing consensus in the field advocating for never using a solely medicinal approach. The focus instead is shifting towards integrated mental health programmes along with social solutions (Ouhmad et al., 2023). This type of approach provides an opportunity to build a holistic system of support, using strategies that already exist.

Over the years, mindfulness-based therapies have been successfully applied to diverse populations, demonstrating their effectiveness in addressing a wide range of psychological and physical challenges (Howarth et al., 2019). For survivors of sexual abuse, mindfulness offers a promising therapeutic approach to address common difficulties, including emotional dysregulation, psychological distress, intimacy challenges, disconnection from their bodies, and various physical health problems (Dussault et al., 2024). By exploring mindfulness practices, this approach seeks to provide survivors with tools to better cope with the enduring impacts of sexual abuse (Howarth et al., 2019). This study, therefore, investigates how victims (tertiary school students) of sexual abuse navigate thoughts and emotionally regulate themselves through mindfulness. This study seeks to contribute to growing knowledge that can support the healing of sexually abused people.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several merits, but it also has certain drawbacks that could restrict how broadly the results can be applied. For example, the sample size is presumably small and does not accurately reflect the population of the group being sampled. Additionally, there are some drawbacks to using self-report questionnaires as the primary method of gathering data because of problems with self-reporting bias. Future research could adopt a more robust sample size and research methods, such as mixed methods, to pursue a similar research focus. It would also be interesting to explore the experiences, impact, and struggles of utilising cognitive therapies, particularly the direct approaches that surround providing therapeutic processes for victims of sexual abuse.

Review of the Literature

(i) Experiences and Circumstances of Sexual Abuse

According to Collin-Vezina (2013:2), sexual abuse occurs in situations involving “an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, where the activity is being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person". In such cases, power dynamics play a key role as the abuser seeks to gratify sexual desires and pleasure. Morris et al. (2019) emphasize that the abuse can be perpetuated by trusted individuals or strangers. Some perpetrators may have also experienced sexual abuse themselves, contributing to the cycle of harm. Vulnerable women and neglected children are among the most affected groups (Guedes et al., 2016), especially those exposed to violence, maltreatment, parental absence, poverty, adversity, substance abuse, and mental illness (Cant et al., 2019).

Pusch et al. (2021) highlight the prevalence of sexual abuse within intra-familial contexts, which consist of sibling child sexual abuse. The true extent of this form of abuse is difficult to determine due to the stigma surrounding the subject and the silencing of victims, which often leads to underreporting of the case. This is partly because the abused victims are less likely to report the abuse by a sibling, as compared to abuse done by an adult family member (Ballantine, 2012). According to Reed et al. (2019), the victims of abuse who are experiencing the abuse run away from home. The long-term effects may surround "life-long emotional problems and dysfunctional behavioural patterns that are difficult to repair" (Ballantine, 2012:56).

Social factors also play a role in sexual assault risk. Freeman and Temple (2010), for example, found that adolescents living in non-traditional households—such as with one parent or grandparents—were more likely to report experiences of rape compared to those living with both parents. Similarly, Cant et al. (2019) observed a link between overcrowded living conditions and higher reports of sexual abuse. In the

most crowded homes, the risk of sexual abuse cases was found to be 40% greater, highlighting how environmental stressors can increase vulnerability. In other cases, individuals may be coerced into believing the abuse is normal or part of a game, showing no immediate signs of distress (Morales & Raghavan, 2024). It is only later in their adult life that the victim experiences significant distress and trauma after understanding the experience from an adult perspective (Ballantine, 2012). Tidefors et al. (2010) conclude by outlining how acts of victimisation, such as bullying, emotional or physical abuse, as well as attachment disruptions, may cultivate experiences of sexual abusive behaviour.

(ii) Emotional and Psychological Response to Sexual Abuse

Victims of sexual abuse frequently rely on maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (Ouhmad et al., 2023). These strategies include self-blame, rumination, and dramatization, all of which positively correlate with having executive deficits. Such deficits manifest through difficulty self-regulating emotions, impulses, and behaviours, which often lead towards having anger outbursts, defying rules, and getting into altercations (Florentino, 2015). Cognitively, the victims experience challenges with planning and organizing daily tasks since traumatic experiences undermine the ability to operate successfully (Rosiana et al., 2023). The working memory is also affected, mostly due to efforts to suppress distressing memories or confront the experience, which hampers the ability to recollect or separate memories effectively (Amedee et al., 2024). Sexually abused victims exhibit poorer performance in verbal and behavioural inhibition, as well as cognitive flexibility, which results in fewer means to automatically respond in social interactions, as well as adapt to environmental changes (Amedee et al., 2024).

Another significant consequence of sexual abuse is the battle to evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses, often stemming from pervasive self-blame and negative self-perception (Hanson & Wallis, 2018). Vineetha and Velayudhan (2021) emphasized that the challenges victims encounter is largely due to diminished self-efficacy – the belief in managing situations effectively. As a result, they struggle to recognise their skills and capacity to improve their lifestyles or achieve aspirations. The feelings of shame and guilt often instilled by perpetrators through manipulation exacerbate maladaptive reactions and perpetuate self-blame, rumination, and dramatization (Manukrishnan & Bhagabati, 2023; Trickett et al., 2011). These factors contribute to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, which impair executive functioning skills (Amedee et al., 2024).

Cognitive deficits of sexual abuse have been found to interfere with psychological trauma recovery, a process that necessitates re-learning and adaptation (Stein & Nofziger, 2008). There is also a great probability of developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) based on repeatedly experiencing the past event (Cruz et al., 2021). Linde-Krieger et al. (2020) found that the victims depend on compensatory regulatory

strategies such as dissociation. Although they provide short-term relief, they often hinder the victim in the long run. The victims also exhibit traits of over-regulation, which places them at high risk of internalizing behavioural problems (Amedee et al., 2024). These cumulative adverse effects can impede successful adaptation, which leads to various challenges such as distress, emotion dysregulation, and reactive anger (Poirson et al., 2023).

(iii) Understanding Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as a state of awareness that arises by paying attention to the present moment with acceptance and without judgment (Call et al., 2013). The term refers to a range of capabilities such as being in the present moment and adopting a non-judgmental attitude toward oneself and the experience (Dussault et al., 2024). A lower level of its disposition is often associated with difficulty in forming connections with oneself, as well as with others during relational interactions. These challenges are the result of avoiding uncomfortable feelings to mitigate distress, further perpetuating more suffering by hindering the healing process of past traumas. Although the approach can be challenging—as it involves accepting unpleasant moments rather than attempting to control or suppress them—it offers trauma survivors an opportunity to acknowledge and release their past and present pain (Call et al., 2013).

Mindfulness combines therapeutic approaches such as conceding, admitting, and facing what transpired in a non-aggressive way, as a way to support trauma recovery (Howarth et al., 2019). The term operates differently from traditional therapeutic techniques, where the victims had to detail what exactly happened in their experience with violence; mindfulness concentrates on developing consciousness of the current day (Esper & Gherardi-Donato, 2019). Victims are guided to note how they think, feel, and respond at the present moment, all whilst being open and accepting the event that occurred (Creswell, 2017). Mindfulness seeks to purposefully give thought to an event so that victims can recognise and receive information (whether helpful or painful to hear), without concluding (Keng et al., 2011). The idea of fostering awareness and acceptance has been found to assist people in releasing burden, embarrassment, and guilt, substituting these emotions with acknowledgement and tolerance (Call et al., 2013). The mediation is referred to as Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs).

MBIs move away from self-condemnation and instead attain knowledge about their feelings about the event (Goldberg et al., 2018). The intervention has been found to stimulate positive results like the reduction of stress, apprehension, and sadness, but at the same time increase emotion regulation, mental well-being, and kindness towards oneself (Goldberg et al., 2018). Research reveals that people who had better lifestyles after attending mindfulness training revealed less stress, negative emotions, and greater positive feelings towards their welfare (Keng et al., 2011). This is why fostering a connection to the present moment can encourage people to engage with their current experiences—thoughts, emotions, actions, and senses—in a holistic, non-judgmental

way (Vineetha & Velayudhan, 2021). MBIs are valuable in addressing the physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms that come from experiencing trauma. It offers a comprehensive and effective approach to help heal from the traumatic event (Vineetha & Velayudhan, 2021).

Mindfulness practices have the potential to alleviate trauma-related symptoms and facilitate Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to PTG theory, people normally develop a framework of assumptions and beliefs about themselves and the world, which provides meaning and guides their actions (Gibson, 2024). Sexual abuse can disrupt one's beliefs, altering the perception of self, their future, and the surrounding world; therefore, by grounding oneself in the present moment and attending to trauma-induced thoughts and feelings, survivors can gradually confront painful or unpleasant feelings (Dussault et al., 2024; Penberthy et al., 2013). Over time, this process may lead to a reduction in the intensity of these experiences. Mindfulness, in this case, enables individuals to step back and decentre themselves from their trauma (Keng et al., 2011). This detachment facilitates perspective-taking and cognitive reappraisal, ultimately fostering post-traumatic growth by helping survivors reconstruct their beliefs and find new meaning in their experiences (Dussault et al., 2024).

(iv) Mindfulness Techniques for Sexually Abused Victims

Literature highlights several practices that support mindfulness. These practices can involve indirect approaches such as meditation, progressive body awareness, contemplative walking, and gentle yoga stretching; whereas direct approaches focus on therapeutic processes embodied under Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (Jennings et al., 2013; Vroegindewey & Sabri, 2022). The techniques would assist sexual abuse victims in identifying dysfunctional thinking patterns, distressing feelings, and unproductive behaviours, to promote more adaptive thinking and behaviours to alleviate distressing emotional experiences. Key elements include restructuring the mind to challenge distorted thoughts and have a more balanced interpretation of the event (Curtiss et al., 2021). Some of these techniques include:

Therapeutic Artmaking: A creative process that encourages stress relief and personal enjoyment without necessarily addressing mental health clinically. Unlike formal art therapy, therapeutic artmaking provides a safe space for exploring and processing emotions, leading to greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence. The technique can help victims connect with their feelings in a non-judgmental, innate way (Goodarzi et al., 2020; Hinchey, 2018).

Trauma-Informed Yoga: This modified version of yoga aims to provide necessary assistance to victims who have been exposed to the trauma of sexual abuse. It uses techniques such as body postures, inhalation, and reflection when going over the traumatic event. Trauma-Informed Yoga seeks to identify the impact of the event, as

well as realise the need to create a secure, considerate, and empowering approach space when addressing the traumatic event (Richard et al., 2024; West et al., 2017).

Supportive Healing Circles: These circles also include creating secure and caring environments, where the victims are able to freely discuss their experiences, listen to each other, and encourage collective restoration. In sharing their experiences, seclusion falls away, and the victims enhance their ability to deal with challenging emotions when they gain insight after discussing the event (Murn & Schults, 2024). Literature affirms that the support system can involve family or friends during the recovery process (Murn & Schults, 2024).

To conclude, these therapeutic approaches noted above epitomise a wide range of techniques that can help sexually abused victims practice consciousness, regulate emotional challenges, develop strength, and improve their mental health. Therapists must bear in mind interventions that have been tried and tested (Underwood et al., 2007). This would involve exploring different treatments highlighted in research and practice. By considering different approaches, a robust framework can help improve mindfulness techniques in sexually abused victims.

(v) Stabilising Sexually Abused Victims using Mindfulness

Mindfulness can assist sexually abused victims by promoting psychological healing through a framework that emphasizes awareness, acceptance, and present-moment focus. The study completed by Edwards (2015) indicates that mindfulness practices help create core elements necessary for growth and change in clients. Essential healing factors emerge from the clinician's personal mindfulness practice, fostering a therapeutic environment conducive to recovery. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of therapeutic presence and environmental conditions over specific techniques, suggesting that mindfulness can offer significant support for trauma survivors (Edwards, 2015).

Similarly, Brotto noted that mindfulness may assist sexually abused victims by encouraging them to focus their moment-to-moment awareness on a greater range of stimuli during sexual activity. This redirection of attention allows individuals to let go of attachments to distracting thoughts, such as memories of sexual abuse or negative sexual interactions. It promotes acceptance of negative thoughts and feelings, allowing them to come and go without suppression (Brotto et al., 2012). Furthermore, the practice of nonjudgment helps individuals recognize experiences factually without labelling them as good or bad. These techniques can enhance awareness of pleasurable sensations and support emotional regulation, potentially leading to improved sexual functioning and distress tolerance (Brotto et al., 2012).

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are reported to be a potentially promising approach for improving mental health outcomes for adult survivors of sexual assault

(Jennings et al., 2013). These interventions can help victims manage symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as they provide tools for coping with rumination and self-blame, which are common feelings among survivors (Tilley et al., 2024). The findings from the scoping review indicate that MBIs, especially when combined with activities like yoga, art, or aerobic exercise, have shown positive outcomes, suggesting that they may enhance emotional regulation and self-awareness for the survivors (Tilley et al., 2024).

Research Methodology

This study employed a survey method as its research design. Undergraduate students at a university in the southwest region of Nigeria made up the study's population. The University was chosen using the purposive sample technique. Undergraduates from different Departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University who freely decided to participate in the study and provided their informed consent using a Google Form were the respondents. In the first section of the Form, the sampled students were informed of the study's goals and asked for their informed consent to participate. They voluntarily did so. The online survey was hosted during the first semester of the 2024–2025 school year. Males were 67 (25.9%) of the respondents, while females were 192 (74.1%). In all, a sample of three hundred and fifty-nine (259) undergraduates made up the study's sample.

Instruments

The Annals of Health Research Questionnaire (AHRQ) was adapted and used in collecting the data for this study. Items of the instrument were developed through insights from extant literature (Esper & Gherardi-Donato, 2019; Park et al., 2018; WHO, 2024; Randa et al., 2023; Ouhmad et al., 2023). The Instrument had three sections, A to C. Section A consists of the biodata of the respondents, such as gender, level, parent information, and age of respondents. Section B consists of 13 items that measure sexual abuse experiences. Section C consists of 9 items that measure mindfulness effects on sexual abuse victims. This research instrument was administered online via Google Forms and was hosted for 5 weeks to allow for more responses. The researchers and two research assistants facilitated the administration of this online survey, upon ethical approvals from the faculty officer of the sampled faculty in the University.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this research were analysed using descriptive statistics. SPSS V29 software was utilized in analysing the study's data at a 5% significance level, using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher applied for the Ethical Approval, which was obtained from a public university in the region, with ethical number FUOYE/FSS/UCRD/2025/174. The researcher also obtained approval from the officials of the selected faculty as well as other relevant bodies. The researcher also ensured that the participation of the affected students in this study was voluntary. In other words, the researcher seeks and obtains informed consent from all the participants before starting data collection. The informed consent implies that a participant agreed to be part of the study, having been adequately informed and indicating that they properly understood the aim and objectives of the research.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Variable	Category	N	%
Age	15-18 years	23	8.9
	18 years and above	236	91.1
Gender	Male	67	25.9
	Female	192	74.1
Level in the University	100L	25	9.7
	200L	27	10.4
	300L	66	25.5
	400L	91	35.1
	500L	50	19.3
Total		**259**	**100**

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 1, which explains the characteristics of the sample. The table shows that the sample was predominantly above the age of 18 years, which constituted 91.1%, while those below the age of 18 years were 8.9%. This is an indication that most of the participants are young adults who are qualified by age to engage in university education and have the right to express themselves without getting permission from anyone. Also, the gender distribution of the respondents indicates that the majority (74.1%) are females, while the remaining 25.9% are males. This broader difference could be an indication that a particular gender group is more exposed to sexual abuse than the other, or it could reflect the gender enrolment ratio in higher education. In addition, most of the respondents are either in 400L or 500L, 54.4% (35.1% or 19.3% respectively), which implies that the majority are likely to be in their final year. This suggests that the sample is composed mainly of undergraduates nearing graduation, potentially gaining insight from more mature students with mature perspectives who are willing to share insightful opinions.

1. Victims' Sexual Abuse Experience

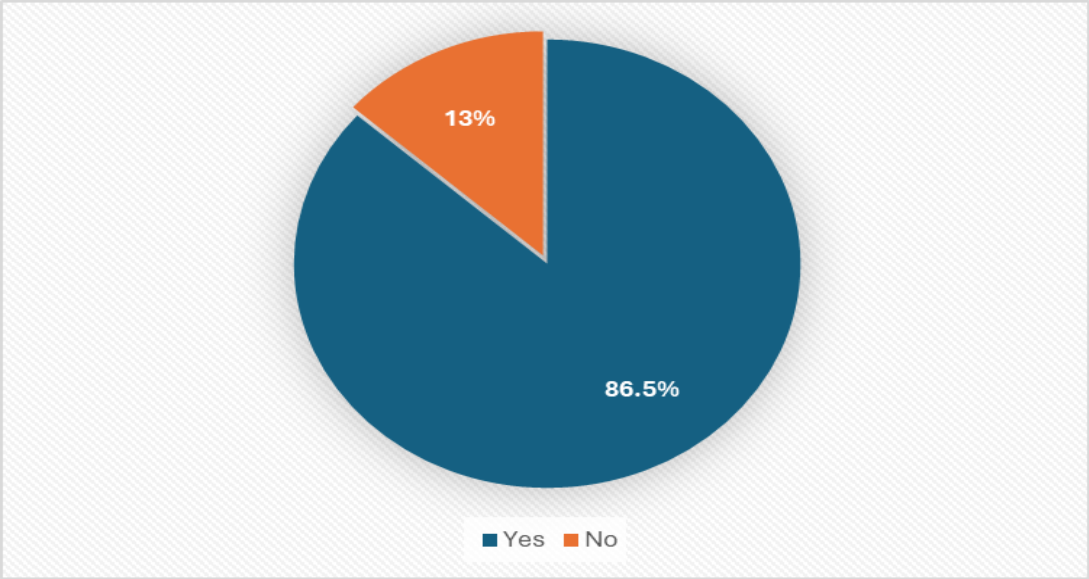


Figure 1: Experienced Sexual Exposure

The result, as indicated in Figure 1, shows that 86.5% of the respondents experienced one form of sexual exposure. In comparison, only 13.5% had no sexual exposure at the time of carrying out the study. This is a worrisome distribution as the demographic information has reported gender imbalance, with the possibility of females having more sexual exposure, putting this gender class at risk.

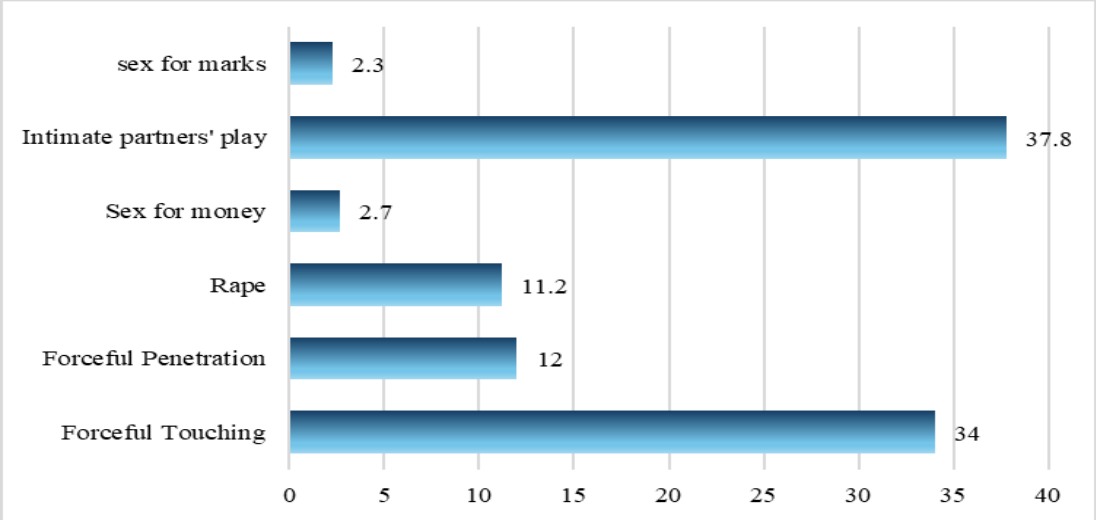


Figure 2: Sexual Exposure Circumstance

The circumstances that led to the respondents' sexual exposures are presented in Figure 2. Intimate partners' play accounted for 37.8%, which indicates that this group of individuals is in a relationship that could lead to sexual intimacy and suggests that many experience non-consensual sexual experiences in their relationship. Also, 2.3% had experienced 'sex for marks', which indicates that undergraduates do engage in transactional sex, most likely happening between them and their lecturers. This worrisome act reflects a societal issue that is beyond consent but reveals systemic deterioration in higher education. Similarly, another form of transactional sexual experience revealed by the respondents is sex for money, which accounted for 2.7%. This suggests a societal issue that could be caused by systemic issues in the economic structure. Some undergraduates may not have a stable way of financing their education or caring for their basic needs, and this economic struggle may push them into this immoral act with the mindset of using what they have to get what they want. In addition, 11.2% of the respondents revealed they had been raped at one point or another, while forceful penetration accounted for 12% and forceful touching accounted for 34%. This indicates a prevalence of coercive sexual experiences, and it remains a critical concern.

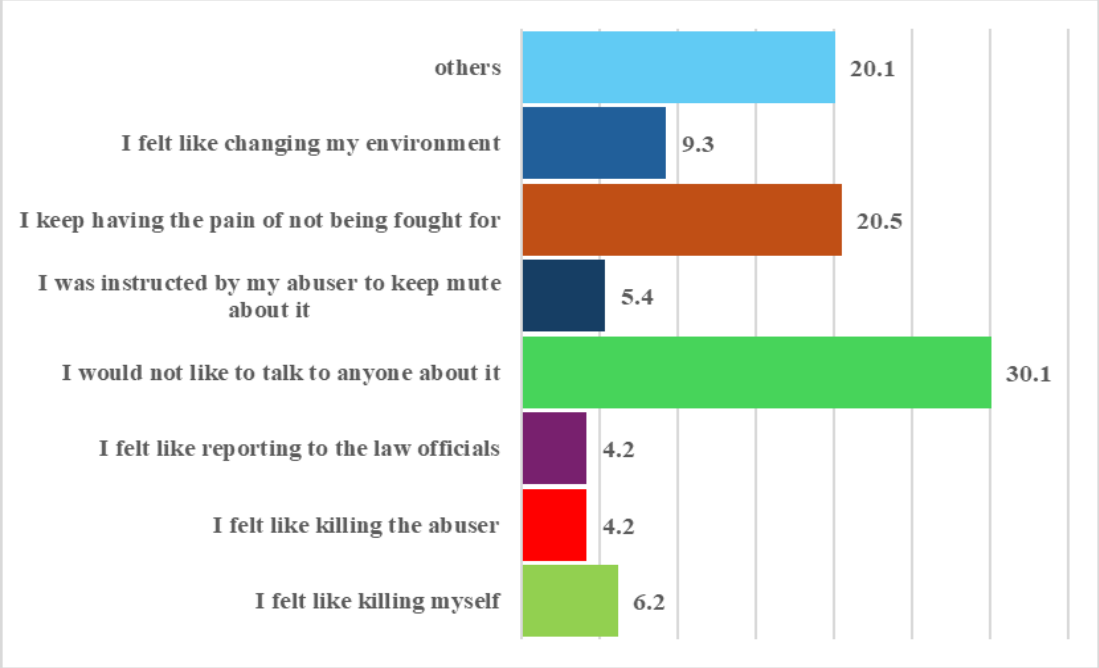


Figure 3: Emotional Responses to Sexual Abuse

Figure 3 reveals the emotional responses to sexual abuse as indicated by the respondents. Most of the respondents, 30.1%, preferred not to talk to anyone about this act. This poses a negative feeling among the respondents, which might indicate the stigma attached to sexual abuse and a lack of a safe environment for disclosure or

reporting such cases. Some may be afraid that the abuser will get away with it, people will look down on them if they come forward, and they will be unable to protect themselves from additional abuse if they do. Additionally, 20.5% of the respondents reveal that they keep having the pain of not being fought for. This is an experience of feeling unsupported, possibly by people whom they trust most. This could indicate a crucial gap in the support or emotional recovery mechanism for sexual abuse victims. Also, 9.3% of the respondents showed that they felt like changing their environment. This is an indicator of feeling uncomfortable, which might lead to a desire to leave the area to escape the abuser or the humiliation of being teased. This could also be an attempt to get out of the emotional pain and recover from the emotional damage, which can have a significant impact on their mental health and overall well-being. Also, the result shows that 6.2% felt like killing themselves after the incident. This might be an indication that most sexual abuse victims in this category could have been involved in coercive sexual experiences. Considering suicide as an option for coming out of sexual abuse indicates the severe emotional torture it exerts on the victims. This could also suggest that many individuals may struggle to recover from the trauma since suicidal thoughts indicate a deep feeling of despair and hopelessness. In addition, 4.2% of the respondents feel like killing the abuser. As a result of the trauma they have experienced, victims of sexual abuse may act out violently due to the feeling of betrayal and anger, propelling the desire to harm their abuser. This is an indication that some sexual abuse victim will want to seek justice at all costs, not minding the effects of their actions. Also, 4.2% show they felt like reporting to a law enforcement agent. This shows that this group of victims also demands justice, but not violently, preferring legal means for regaining control over the situation.

Also, 5.4% show that their abusers instructed them to remain mute about the incident. This implies that being instructed by their abusers to keep silent about the incident is very disturbing and highlights the manipulative techniques generally utilized by perpetrators of sexual abuse. This compulsion may cause an intense feeling of isolation for victims, as they may feel trapped in a cycle of fear, guilt, and shame that may discourage them from seeking therapy or discussing their experiences. Such instruction may create emotions of powerlessness and may lead to long-term psychological issues, including anxiety and depression. Also, the result shows that 20.1% have multiple emotional responses to sexual abuse. This indicates mixed feelings regarding the response to sexual abuse by the victims. For example, some of the respondents in this category feel like killing themselves, the abuser, and reporting to the law officials. Also, some felt like reporting to the law officials, were not willing to talk to anyone, and kept having the pain of not being fought for. Some also feel like reporting to a law official and changing their environment. Also, some would not like to talk to anyone, keep having the pain of not being fought for, and feel like changing their environment. This range of views among victims concerning their responses to sexual abuse suggests a deep internal conflict, as survivors contend with

desires for justice, safety, and support while simultaneously experiencing seclusion, pain, and uncertainty about how to handle their trauma.

2. How Victims of Sexual Abuse Practice Mindfulness

Table 2

Mindfulness Practices Among Victims of Sexual Abuse

Item	Level	No	%
Perception about self-awareness	Knowledge about self	42	16.2
	Knowledge of what you like and dislike	13	5.0
	Knowledge and understanding of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours	204	78.8
Importance of Self-awareness	Yes	250	96.5
	No	9	3.5
Strategies for Developing Self-Awareness	Experiences	129	49.8
	Meditation	52	20.1
	Discussions	78	30.1
Self-awareness heals traumatic experiences	Yes	242	93.4
	No	17	6.6
Mechanism for facilitating self-awareness and trauma healing	Therapy	149	57.5
	Faith/religion	48	18.5
	Being active	62	23.9
Understanding mindfulness	Awareness of how the mind operates	78	30.1
	Consideration of others	9	3.5
	Consideration of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour	172	66.4
Personal Experiences with Mindfulness Practices	Yes	225	86.9
	No	34	13.1
Mindfulness Practices	Discussions	50	19.3
	Journaling	11	4.2
	Meditation	49	18.9
	Walking	3	1.2
	Reflecting/thinking	70	27.0
	Drawing/colouring	2	0.8
	Others	74	28.6
Perspectives on mental health interventions	Positive: good, helpful, insightful	202	78.0
	Negative: bad, expensive, too complex	4	1.5
	Neutral: both good and bad	39	15.1
	No thought about it	14	5.4

Table 2 shows the practices of mindfulness among victims of sexual abuse. The results show that most of the respondents (78.8%) know and understand their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours; 16.2% know about themselves, while only 5.0% have basic knowledge of what they like and dislike. This suggests that while many individuals are conscious of self-awareness, there is a big gap in

self-awareness knowledge, which could be crucial for personal recovery. In terms of the importance of self-awareness, 96.5% of participants identified its usefulness in their recovery process, while only 3.5% did not share this perspective. The large percentage reflects the transformative power of self-awareness and a shared understanding among participants that self-awareness is vital to controlling their experiences and establishing resilience. Also, while considering the strategies for developing self-awareness, experiences showed as the most used strategy (49.8%), followed by chats (30.1%) and meditation (20.1%). This suggests that learning from experience and social involvement are highly valued by victims of sexual abuse, supporting the evidence that common and practical strategies may greatly enhance self-awareness. These techniques demonstrate a preference for connecting with others and practical experiences over lonely routines, highlighting the role of community in healing. In addition, the perspective that self-awareness helps heal traumas from sexual abuse is well supported, with 93.4% of participants approving of this perspective. This suggests that self-awareness is an essential component of trauma healing, enabling increased emotional control and resilience. This also indicates that self-awareness is key to overcoming trauma and obtaining emotional healing. Additionally, when the mechanism for facilitating self-awareness trauma healing was considered, therapy was regarded as the principal approach (57.5%), followed by being active (23.9%) and faith/religion (18.5%). This suggests the multifaceted nature of getting over sexual abuse, revealing that therapy remains a cornerstone for trauma recovery while also highlighting the influence of physical activity and spiritual beliefs in creating self-awareness and healing. Regarding understanding mindfulness, 66.4% of the respondents claimed it is a consideration of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours; however, only 30.1% recognized the awareness of how the mind functions, and 3,5% saw it as a consideration of others. This shows a high inclination towards emotional awareness. The results suggest that while people are aware of their emotional experiences, there is an opportunity for development in understanding the fundamental cognitive processes of mindfulness.

Also, regarding personal experiences with mindfulness practices, 86.9% of participants have engaged in these strategies, showing considerable adoption among victims, while only 13.1% do not indicate these practices. Similarly, among the mindfulness practices reported, reflecting/thinking (27.0%) and meditation (18.9%) were the most frequent practices. This suggests an inclination for reflective strategies that generate contemplation and conversation, which could be vital for increasing self-awareness and processing trauma. Journaling (4.2%), walking (1.2%), and drawing/colouring (0.8%) had low representation, which could indicate that these practices are not popular among sexual abuse victims and may be due to their ineffectiveness.

However, engaging in two more of the identified practices, which are denoted as others, were being practiced by 28.6% of the sexual abuse victims. This suggests that the sexually abused practice more than one mindfulness practice so that they can recover from the trauma. Finally, in evaluating perspectives on mental health intervention, 78.0% of the respondents had Positive (good, helpful, insightful) views, while only 1.5% expressed negative perspectives towards it. 15.1% chose to be neutral, while 5.4% had no thought about it. The preponderance of favourable opinions represents an increasing acknowledgment of the advantages of mental health intervention, while the small number of negative remarks may be calling for development in some areas, possibly in terms of accessibility and complexity of services.

Table 3

Correlation Between Victims' Sexual Abuse Experiences and the Practice of Mindfulness

Variable	X	SD	N	R	p	Remark
Sexual Abuse Victims experience	1.13	0.34	259	.141	.023	Significant
Mindfulness Practices	4.00	1.89				

Table 3 shows the relationship between victims' sexual abuse experiences and the practice of mindfulness. The results reveal a significant positive correlation ($r = .141$, $p = .023$) between the experiences of sexual abuse victims and their engagement in mindfulness practices among a sample of 259 respondents. This suggests that greater degrees of mindfulness practice are related to better awareness or reporting of sexual abuse experiences. The mean score of 1.13 and standard deviation of 0.34 for sexual abuse experiences suggest that most respondents may have undergone similar degrees of trauma. However, the mean score of 4.00 for mindfulness practices, with a standard deviation of 1.89, shows a broader variability in how individuals engage with mindfulness practices. The significant correlation demonstrates that mindfulness practices may have a role in how victims process and cope with their experiences. Engaging in mindfulness could offer victims tools to enhance self-awareness, emotional control, and resilience, which are crucial for healing.

Discussion

At the Federal University Oye-Ekiti in Nigeria, this study investigates how victims (tertiary school students) of sexual abuse navigate thoughts and

emotionally regulate themselves through mindfulness. The results of this study on students' sexual abuse experiences revealed that a very high percentage of the respondents have experienced one form of sexual exposure in their lifetime in school; this may be because almost all the participants are already in their maturity stage. Also, the circumstances that led to the respondents' sexual exposures can be linked to transactional sex (sex for money), systematic issues in the economic structure, which can push students into an immoral act to get what they want, using what they have. This finding is in tandem with Vineetha and Velayudhan's (2021) submission on Integrated Intervention among Sexually Abused Girl Children. Also, the study revealed that many of the victims were sexually abused in the bid to get favourable pass marks in their courses. Intimate partner's sexual abuse, like rape and forceful penetrations and touches, was also profound among the students. As regards situations that led to the students' abuses, the study found that most of the students who live outside the campus experience sexual abuse more than the students who reside on the campus. This could be due to the provision of security personnel in the hostels by the school authority. The study also revealed the students' responses to sexual experiences, in that the majority of the victims do not like to talk about it, many of them disclosed the pains of not being fought for, while some disclosed their intention of changing their environment to get over the situation.

This study also revealed that most of the sexually abused students understand mindfulness practices, though they preferred to keep mute about their abuses for the fear of the unknown aftermath, while only a few were indicated to be seeking justice no matter what happens. This could be due to the cultural barriers in reporting such issues to the appropriate quarters where justice and safety can be offered. National Sexual Violence Resource Centre (2010) submission is in tandem with this, as they submitted that cultural barriers are a key factor in reporting cases of sexual abuse. This study also shows that victims of sexual abuse acknowledge the importance of self-awareness and accept strategies for developing self-awareness. The study also revealed that the respondents underwent self-awareness for healing from traumatic experiences. The respondents also engaged in some mindfulness practices, such as discussing their experiences with their loved ones, meditation, and reflection on their traumatic experiences. Lastly, on mindfulness practices, the respondents believe that mental health interference is good, helpful, and insightful.

Furthermore, on stabilization of the victims' mental health, this study also found a preponderance of favourable opinions, which represents an increasing acknowledgement of the advantages of mental health intervention in healing sexual abuse experiences. This is in line with the study of Biss and Geist-Martin (2022), who saw sensemaking in the mental health intervention of Survivors' Sexual Assault Disclosures. In the context of mindfulness of the respondents, this

study found a significant positive correlation between the experiences of sexual abuse victims and their engagement in mindfulness practices. Our data provides a contrasting result as against the previous research (Linde-Krieger et al., 2020), which found that the victims depend on compensatory regulatory strategies such as dissociation. Could this be a result of inert contextual or cultural factors? We think that, given the context, undergraduates, irrespective of so many means of getting over the experiences of sexual abuse, their engagement in mindfulness practices is academically and psychologically resilient. This finding is in tandem with those of previous studies that indicated higher engagement of mindfulness practices in sexual abuse victims (Tilley et al., 2024; Goodarzi et al., 2020; Dussault et al., 2020). The study contrasts the findings conducted by Goldberg et al. (2018), which depicted mindfulness-based interventions for only psychiatric disorders; we think this could be contextual.

Conclusion

Mindfulness practices have been acclaimed to be a critical variable that impacts the healing process of students' sexual abuse experiences. This study has examined the relationship between the students' sexual abuse experiences and the practice of mindfulness at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria. The findings of the study have revealed a significant correlation between the students' sexual abuse experiences and their practice of mindfulness mechanisms. Findings further revealed that many of the undergraduates have experienced one form of sexual exposure for either economic issues or for transactional purposes, but most preferred to be silent about it while they engage in some coping strategies for healing. Based on these findings, we recommend that students at the University should be provided with more incentives that can help them with mindfulness practices when going through sexual abuse trauma, and the freedom to be heard by the management. Also, policies and practices of mindfulness should be enshrined in universities' learning operations, management, and culture.

Declarations

Informed Consent

The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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