

# **PSYCHOSOCIAL VARIABLES INFLUENCING UNDERGRADUATES' PRONENESS TO CULTISM IN UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**By**

**ISIGUZO, BLESSING CHIOMA (PH.D)**

**cisiguzo@gmail.com**

**08034297177**

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling  
Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt

**&**

**ISIGUZO, REGINALD CHIKA (PH.D)**

**chikareggis@yahoo.co.uk**

Security Unit,

University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Umuagwo,  
Imo State.

## **Abstract**

The study examined psychosocial variables influencing undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. The study used the ex-post-facto research design. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised all 1, 418 students residing in the hostels in University of Port Harcourt. A sample size of 300 students was drawn for the study using the purposive sampling technique. A self-designed instrument (questionnaire) titled; Proneness to Cultism Inventory (PCI) was used to collect data for the study. The Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.81. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while hypotheses were tested with t-test analysis. The finding of the study revealed that peer pressure and low self-esteem significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that parents and care givers should endeavour to check and moderate the activities of their children/wards from time to time to enhance the reduction of some risky and mischievous behaviours that students get involved in especially in their privacy both at home and in school. Moreover, the University Authority should enforce strict disciplinary measures prohibiting any form of cultism among students.

**Keywords:** *Undergraduate, Peer Pressure, Low Self-esteem, Proneness to Cultism*

## **Introduction**

The University is the pinnacle of academic learning and knowledge production. It provides functional education for national development. This is rooted in the freedom

of ideas, giving level playing grounds for teachers and students to present their philosophical and academic knowledge differently without racial, religious or political encumbrances (Isiguzo, 2020).

According to Dambazu (2014) the fundamental aim of establishing universities in Nigeria is for them to act as wheels for resolving problems likely to cause a breach in national security such as unemployment, illiteracy and other drivers of underdevelopment. In order to develop, a country must have a very considerable proportion of trained citizens, not only as doctors, engineers, teachers and agriculturists among others but also to establish its own values of justice, selection on merit, flexibility, empiricism and efficiency which constitute a process of peace and security in any nation (Gboyega & Aloyebi as cited in Isiguzo, 2020). With the view that a University is fundamentally established for teaching, research and community service, therefore, these statutory objectives can only be achieved in peaceful and conducive environment where there is no threat to life (Akindayo, (2014) cited in Isiguzo, 2020). However, with the advent of campus cultism, these laudable objectives have suffered a great set back in goal attainment.

The emergence of cultism could be traced to the formation of the Pirates Confraternity in 1952 by Wole Soyinka, Olumuyiwa Awe, Ralph Opara, Tunji Tubi, Diag Imokhuede, Pius Olegbe and Olu Agunloya (2017, Olwale). The activities of this pirates confraternity upto the 1960s were not secret. The founding members were reasonable and focused. Rather than running away from them as it is the case today, students rallied around them for their humanness and helpfulness. This status quo remained in Universities until the initial founders graduated, and in

the hands of their successors, the fraternity derailed and disintegrated into splinter groups with different names as campus cult groups. These cult groups are now secret and used to unleash mayhem and threats to unsuspecting members of the University community. They often achieve their objectives through violence. This situation laid the foundation of youth rascalism that unleashed students' gangsterism in the universities and paved way to undergraduates' involvement in cultism. The paradox however, is that Soyinka and his friends did not realize beforehand, the extent to which their pioneering efforts in students' activism will reshape students' activities in higher educational institutions in Nigeria and the society at large (Nnajiето & Ahamefula, 2015).

The quest for higher education usually comes with harrowing experiences occasioned by separation from families and established friendships. Normally, individuals grow among known and friendly others. This in turn causes the development of familiar patterns of interactions and associations. However, most of these familiar living conditions are usually disrupted when the individual secures admission into a higher educational institution. Higher educational institutions constitute new environments, requiring the development of new adaptive mechanisms in individuals. Whereas this adaptation is relatively easier for some individuals, it is not exactly so for others. To an undergraduate facing the daunting challenge of coping with life on campus, it is may be a good feeling to be wanted or flattering to be asked to join a group.

There are several organized and informal social, religious, or political groups that scout for membership among students. Some are well organized, some are very informal. The choice to belong to a particular group is an important decision in a student's life on campus. How to differentiate a psychologically manipulative group from a group that is not harmful is also an important decision for undergraduate students.

Undergraduates are students who are pursuing first degrees in various departments of the universities, be it in Science, Art, Social science, etc. Majority of these undergraduates are young adults who are still in their formative years with behaviour shaped by group endurance level to tolerate pain and often unwittingly explore even the impossible and dangerous (Isiguzo, 2020). Undergraduates are saddled by the vagaries of young age and tend to act both impulsively and recklessly. Egbochukwu (2009) noted that they often become homesick, feel unloved or overwhelmed. Their social world is full of fantasies and when with new friends or in groups be it social, religions or political they act according to the group idea or decision. This submission of personal will to group idea leads the innocent ones to embrace cultism without giving a thought to possible consequences or indulging in drugs in take as well as other anti-social behaviours. In addition their allegiance to their respective small groups of friends predispose them to unintentionally embrace cultism.

Students therefore get involved in cultism on campus due to several factors that are

either internal or external to individual students. This ranges from promise of safety and security, earning favours and enjoying the goodies on campus.

Cultism has been conceptualized as a movement that exhibits excessive devotion to some persons', idea or thing and employs manipulative and coercive methods of persuasion and control, designed to advance the goals of the group's leader to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families or communities (Olayiwola, Dada, Eyo & Abiona, 2016; Adesina & Oribabor, 2012). Cultism involves activities that are essentially covert, disguised and are usually carried out behind closed doors (Adesina & Oribabor, 2012); and their methods includes isolation of members from former friends and family, debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it (Olayiwola et al, 2016).

The root word from which cultism is derived is cult; and the word "cult" is itself a derivation from the Latin "cultus" which means "to worship or give reverence to a deity" (Maxey, 2004). In its original form, and intended usage therefore, a cult is label for a religious group, the object of their veneration notwithstanding; and historically refer to new religious system, as opposed to a sect, which is a breakaway group from an established religion (Egbochuku, 2009). However, cults today are neither religious nor spiritual in nature.

They are rather more inclined to gangsterism and engage in various antisocial behaviours. The concept of cult has thus assumed several dimensions in modern society, and has thus defied universal definition. It is any form of organisation whose activities are not only exclusive to members and are kept away from the knowledge of others; but are also nocturnal and often clash with accepted norms and values of society (Nnajieta & Ahamefula, 2015).

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), in Section 318 defines a cult as “any association, group or body of persons (whether registered or not) that uses secret signs, oaths, rite or symbols and which is formed to promote a course, the purpose or part of which is to foster, the interest of its members and to aid one another under any regard without due regard to merit, fairness or justice; whose oaths of secrecy and, the names and activities are held in secret”. Although there are many views about cults notwithstanding, cults share similar features which include violence, killings and intimidation. These acts make them notorious. They are all leader centred, exploitative and harmful. The leadership of cults exercise absolute control over the membership and use force to subdue the membership when necessary. Cults are thus exploitative, manipulative and abusive groups in which members are induced to serve the leaders (Langone, 1993). In view of the foregoing, one could infer that cults concern initiated few whose activities are very secretive and revolves around a leader with charisma; and whose inclinations may or may not be religious.

These secret cult organizations according to Akindayo (2014) cited in Isiguzo (2016) in their activities kill, maim, shed blood of innocent persons and perceived opponents indulge in drug abuse, rape, robbery and kidnapping.

With this, cultism which summarizes the wide range of obnoxious unimaginable inhuman and anti-social activities of secret cult groups have been an issue of urgent concern in Nigeria national security and the role of the police force (Isiguzo, 2016). The practice of cultism is prevalent especially among youths in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria due to societal values, institutional administration, environmental factors, students unionism ,drug abuse etc (Kaidel and Sanusi, 2010 as cited in Isiguzo, 2016). Infact, Akinade (2014) as cited in Isiguzo (2016) observed that apart from the pirate confraternity, other cults like Buccaneers, Eiye confraternity, Black Axe, the Mafia, the Vikings, the Icelanders, the Horse, the Sea Angels, the Daughters of Jezebel, the Black Braziers among others are not in the interest of national security, public safety, public order, public morality or public health. Furthermore, Isiguzo (2016) maintains that cult members have always made life very unbearable for non-members in the University community as they intimidate others, exhibit lack of respect for staff and often disobey institutional rules and regulations.

The activities of cultists in the nations Universities have not only constituted a miasma, they have rightly been described as national embarrassment. There is thus a

societal odium towards cultism and cultists. Hence, one will imagine that the attraction for an undergraduate to become a member of a cult group will be non-existent or very minimal; and that the activities of cultist will naturally fizzle out in our campuses. However, the stark reality is that membership of cult groups and cult activities have been on the increase. A plethora of factors have been suspected to be responsible for this, and scholars have proposed several variables that are either internal or external to individuals as possible causes. However, most of such studies did not target undergraduates as their population, did not incorporate both endogenous and exogenous variable in a single study or were not conducted in campuses where the activities of cultists have been a regular menace. Hence, this study examined psychosocial variables influencing undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

There are debates that undergraduates' proneness to cultism may be linked to peer pressure. Peers according to Ogazie and Ajoku (2016) are one's classmates, age mates or individuals who share many things in common as a group with the expectation of uniform or similar results. When they come together as a group they are referred to as peer group. A peer group is a small group of similar age, fairly close friends who share the same activities (Castrogiovanni, 2002). The influence of the members of the peer group on its members is referred to as peer influence. In a peer group where individuals (youths) act or perform in a particular way due to the pressure they receive from others in the

group who strongly influence, they are described to be under the influence of peer pressure. According to Temitope and Ogunsarki (2015) peer influence is the tendency or readiness in people of the same age or social status to behave in a particular way as a mark of conformity to the opinion, interest, standard and norms of their peer group.

Peer pressure according to Ryan (2000) is when people of same age encourage or urge another to do something or to keep something else no matter if the individual want it or not. In this case, individuals are encouraged to change their attitudes and values so as to conform to group norms. In same veins, Sasse (1997) as cited in Antwi and Gyamfi (2016) defined peer pressure as an attempt to influence someone in a similar group. This means that an individual experiences peer pressure when the friends want him/her to join in their activities, actions or beliefs. In their findings they further noted that peer pressure can be challenging, extremely strong and compelling to the adolescent. The study also revealed that due to the fact that these young ones have not yet formed a strong personal identity, they are often not sure exactly what they are worth. This uncertainty often results in a lack of inner strength to resist if friends pressurize them to follow certain negative behaviour. Majority of these young ones in this group find it difficult to say 'No' under the peer of cult pressure by the cultists and so this poses a danger not only to the University community but also to the entire society.

This shows that peer pressure from a form a social group one identified closely with, exerts great influence on the person's

behaviour. In the tertiary institutions, the peer friendship may mutate into dangerous cults or gangs, as Asouzu (2017) described them to be notorious for poor academic performance and with major occupations such as deviant acts which include cult activities. However, it should be noted that peer pressure or influence is not limited to adolescents and young adults. Adults too are influenced by peers. Peer group pressure has a bearing on undergraduates' proneness to cultism (Otite & Ogionwo, 2006). Undergraduates who willingly embrace cultism may gradually influence or pressure other students to join them either by displaying extravagant lives that others desire or by out-rightly forcing them to become members (Oyeoku & Azikiwe, 2013).

Another variable that may be linked to undergraduates' proneness to cultism is low self-esteem. Psychologists have defined self-esteem as the individual's positive and negative evaluations about self (Cheung, Cheung, & Hue, 2015). According to Kernohan (1998) as cited in Bowen (2020) self-esteem is a sense of one's value. It depends on the view of one's self and how one perceives specific experience. Furthermore, Franzoi (2000) as cited in Onu and Onyia (2020) described self-esteem as a person's numerous evaluation of self as being good, bad or mediocre. An individual with high self-esteem perceives self as better, more capable and of greater worth than someone with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem affects every facet of an individual's life, from the way one thinks to the way one reacts to life situations. The way one feels about oneself is adversely affected when

negative influences or thoughts are allowed to take a better part of one (Solomon, 2012). Under this condition, one internally focuses on the negative more often, over estimating the small things, and underestimating the larger ones. At this point, the brain is seen to store and handle negative information that is readily accessible (Duffy, 2019). One is now seen to be faced with negative criticism which may undermine self esteem and feelings of self worth (Crocker and Park, 2012). In the words of Mckay and Fanning, 2008 in Bowen (2020), they referred this inner voice that judges and attacks one as "pathological critic" which create internal psychological and emotional pain which undermine performance. This is glaring low self-esteem marked with frustration, failure, depression and other anti-social behaviour such as cultism. Studies have revealed that around one-half of undergraduates struggle with a low self-esteem which may lead to delinquency, risky behaviours, self-inflicted behaviours, suicide, gambling and cultism (Harter, 1990; Hirsch & DuBois, 1991; Isukwem & Ekechukwu, 2019). Smith (2001) stated that undergraduates with low self-esteem are at risk of a wide range of risky behaviours including cultism.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study examined psychosocial variables influencing undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following;

1. Determine the extent peer pressure influence undergraduates' proneness

- to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.
2. Ascertain the extent low self-esteem influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent does extent peer pressure influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt?
2. To what extent does extent low self-esteem influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt?

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study;

1. Peer pressure does not significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

### Results and Discussion

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does peer pressure influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt?

**Hypothesis 1:** Peer pressure does not significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviation and t-test analysis on the influence of peer pressure on undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt

Peer Pressure	N	$\bar{X}$	Std.Dev.	Df	Cal-t	P-value
Low	194	36.31	4.11	298	5.26	0.000
High	106	39.18	5.16			

2. Low self-esteem does not significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

### Methodology

The study adopted the ex-post-facto research design. The population of the study comprised all 1, 418 students residing in the hostels in University of Port Harcourt. The sample size of the study was three hundred (300) students. The purposive sampling technique was used in achieving this. A self-designed instrument (questionnaire) titled Proneness to Cultism Inventory (PCI) was used to collect data for the study. The Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.81. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation while hypothesis was tested with t-test analysis.

In table 1 it is shown that undergraduates under low and high peer pressure are 194 and 106 in number respectively. That the low peer pressure group had the mean score of 36.31 and standard deviation of 4.11 while the high pressure group had mean score of 39.18 and a standard deviation of 5.16. Based on their mean scores it is deduced that the undergraduates on high pressure group are more prone to cultism than their

counterparts in low pressure group by a mean difference of 2.86. Furthermore, when mean difference was subjected to an independent t-test statistics, a calculated t-value of 5.26 at the degree of freedom 298 at 0.000 level is lower than 0.05, the chosen level of probability, it is then decided that peer pressure significantly influence undergraduates' prone to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does extent low self-esteem influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt?

**Hypothesis 2:** Low self-esteem does not significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

**Table 2:** Mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the influence of low self-esteem on undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	Std.Dev	Crti-t	Cal-t	Df	P
Low Self-esteem	300	39.59	9.71	1.96	2.255	298	S
Proneness to cultism	300	42.54	10.59				

The result of data analyzed showed that mean for low self-esteem is  $\bar{X}=39.59$ ,  $SD=9.71$ , while proneness to cultism is  $\bar{X}=42.54$ ,  $SD=10.59$ , with a cal. t. of 2.255,  $df=298$ , crit. t. =1.96. Since cal. t is higher than the crit. t. it means that the hypothesis of no significant influence of low self-esteem on undergraduates' proneness to cultism is rejected. Therefore, there is/exist a significant influence of low self-esteem on undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

### Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. Peer pressure significantly influence undergraduates' prone to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

2. Low self-esteem significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

### Discussion of Findings

#### Peer Pressure and Undergraduates' Proneness to Cultism

The finding of the study revealed that peer pressure significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis of no significant influence of peer pressure on undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt was rejected, indicating that peer pressure significantly influenced undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. This finding



of the present study is in harmony with that of an earlier study by Otite and Ogionwo (2006) who found out that peer group pressure has a bearing on undergraduates' proneness to cultism. Oyeoku and Azikiwe (2013) also found out that peer pressure significantly influence students' proneness to cultism and that students who willingly embrace cultism may gradually influence or pressure other students to join them either by displaying extravagant lives that others desire or by out-rightly forcing them to become members of a cult.

### **Low Self-esteem and Undergraduates' Proneness to Cultism**

The finding of the study showed that low self-esteem significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. The null hypothesis of no significant influence of low self-esteem on undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt was rejected indicating that there exist a significant influence of low self-esteem on undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt. The finding of the present study is in agreement with that of Solomon (2012) who found out that low self-esteem affects every facet of an individual's life, from the way one thinks to the way one reacts to life situations. Further finding of the study revealed that low self-esteem significantly influence students' proneness to cultism. Isukwem and Ekechukwu (2019) found out that undergraduates struggle with a low self-esteem which results in delinquency, risky behaviours, self-inflicted behaviours, suicide, gambling and cultism. Smith (2001) also found out that

undergraduates with low self-esteem are at risk of a wide range of risky behaviours including cultism.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was gathered that proneness to cultism is a major problem among undergraduates in universities and especially in University of Port Harcourt. This study has shown that peer pressure and low self-esteem significantly influence undergraduates' proneness to cultism in University of Port Harcourt.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended the following;

1. Parents, guardians, educational psychologists, counsellors and relevant others that are responsible for students in the university should guide them properly and counsel them on how to overcome peer pressures to engaging in cultism.
2. The University Authority should enforce strict disciplinary measures prohibiting any form of cultism among students.
3. Parents and care givers should endeavour to check and moderate the activities of their children/ wards from time to time as this will help in reducing some risky and mischievous behaviours that are carried on by students both at home and in school.
4. Periodic seminars and orientation programs on cultism should be organized to educate students on the effect of cultism on their academics, health and social wellbeing.

5. Self-esteem training should be incorporated into the school curriculum of students as this will

help students to be better equipped to manage themselves even at dire situations.

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