

Parental Involvement and Child Mental Outcome in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area

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Abstract

The study examined parental involvement and child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of parents and pupils/students in selected public and private schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area. A sample of 375 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. The findings of the study revealed that all dimensions of parental involvement examined had positive relationships with child mental outcome. Specifically, parental emotional support was found to enhance emotional security, stress management, and psychological well-being of children. Parental communication was shown to improve emotional adjustment, behavioural development, and interpersonal relationships. Parental monitoring and supervision contributed to children's sense of safety, responsible behaviour, and emotional stability. Furthermore, parental participation in academic and social activities was found to improve children's motivation, confidence, and overall mental well-being. The study concluded that parental involvement is a significant predictor of child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents should strengthen emotional support, improve communication, enhance supervision, and actively participate in their children's academic and social activities to promote positive mental health outcomes.

Keywords: Parental, Child, Mental, Communication, Academic

Introduction

Child mental outcome has emerged as a significant concern among educators, psychologists, and policymakers due to the increasing incidence of anxiety, depression, emotional instability, and behavioural challenges among children and adolescents. Child mental outcome refers to the psychological, emotional, and behavioural state of a child, including indicators such as emotional stability, self-esteem, resilience, social adjustment, academic functioning, and the absence of mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2022; World Health Organization, 2023). Positive child mental outcomes are essential for healthy growth and development because they influence a child's ability to regulate emotions, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, cope effectively with stress, and function successfully in both social and academic settings (Eccles & Roeser, 2021). Researchers and practitioners have increasingly focused on identifying protective factors that enhance positive child mental outcomes and reduce vulnerability to psychological

distress (Masten & Cicchetti, 2022). Among these protective factors, parental involvement has been identified as one of the most influential determinants of child mental outcome. Parental involvement refers to the active participation and engagement of parents in different dimensions of a child's life, including emotional, academic, social, and behavioural development. It encompasses practices such as providing emotional support, participating in school-related activities, maintaining effective communication, monitoring children's behaviour, and creating a safe, stable, and nurturing home environment (Epstein, 2023; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2021). Parental involvement is widely recognized as a critical factor in shaping positive developmental and psychological outcomes among children and adolescents. Research has consistently demonstrated that children who experience warm, responsive, and consistent parental involvement tend to exhibit higher levels of positive mental outcomes, including emotional stability, self-confidence, resilience, and effective stress management (Masten & Cicchetti, 2022; Steinberg, 2021). Such children are also less likely to experience emotional distress, anxiety, depression, or behavioural problems because supportive parental relationships provide emotional security and healthy coping mechanisms (Darling & Steinberg, 2022). Furthermore, active parental engagement contributes significantly to children's social competence and academic adjustment, which are closely linked to favourable mental outcomes (Eccles & Roeser, 2021). In contrast, children who experience limited, inconsistent, or negative parental engagement are at greater risk of poor child mental outcomes, including emotional instability, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and behavioural difficulties (Twenge & Campbell, 2023). Several extant studies have examined the relationship between parental involvement and child mental outcomes, thereby providing empirical foundations for understanding the role of family engagement in children's psychological development (Pine et al., 2024; Jami et al., 2021; Nordh et al., 2025; Lyu et al., 2025). Despite the growing body of literature on parental involvement and child mental outcomes, several gaps remain evident. First, many previous studies focused primarily on adolescents and clinical populations, with limited attention given to younger children within general educational settings. Second, most extant studies concentrated on parental mental health or parenting styles independently without comprehensively examining multiple dimensions of parental involvement such as emotional support, communication, monitoring, and academic participation simultaneously. This study seeks to bridge these identified gaps by examining the influence of parental involvement on child mental outcome using a broader conceptualization of child mental outcome. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how parental involvement contributes to positive child mental outcomes, particularly within the socio-cultural realities of developing societies such as Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Child mental outcome has become a growing concern globally and within Nigeria due to the increasing prevalence of emotional, psychological, and behavioural problems among children and adolescents. Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, emotional instability, attention disorders, low self-esteem, aggression, and poor social adjustment have continued to affect children's academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall development (World Health Organization, 2023). In recent years, children have been exposed to several psychosocial pressures including family instability, poor supervision, peer influence, academic stress, excessive screen exposure, and socio-economic challenges, all of which negatively influence their mental outcomes. In Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, the situation appears increasingly worrisome due to rapid urbanization, population growth, economic pressures, and changing family structures. Obio-Akpor is one of the most populated local government areas in Rivers State with a rapidly expanding urban population. These conditions may contribute to reduced parental supervision, weak family

bonding, and inadequate emotional support for children (Epstein, 2023). Studies conducted within Obio-Akpor LGA have revealed the presence of psychosocial and emotional challenges among children and adolescents, including social anxiety disorders, emotional difficulties, attention deficit disorders, and poor socio-emotional adjustment. Such conditions suggest the need for increased attention to factors that can promote positive child mental outcomes within the area. Parental involvement has been recognized as one of the major determinants of healthy child mental outcome. Effective parental involvement through emotional support, communication, monitoring, participation in school activities, and positive parent-child relationships contributes significantly to children's emotional stability, resilience, self-confidence, and behavioural adjustment (Epstein, 2023). It is against this background that this study seeks to examine parental involvement and child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State with a view to providing empirical evidence that could assist parents, educators, counsellors, and policymakers in promoting healthy psychological development among children.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of the study was to: examine the relationship between parental emotional support and child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Question

The understated research question was raised by the study: how does parental emotional support relate with child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Attachment Theory

The Attachment Theory was developed by Bowlby in 1980. The theory posits that children are biologically predisposed to seek closeness to caregivers for safety, comfort, and survival. Through repeated interactions, children develop internal working models of relationships that shape their emotional, cognitive, and psychological development across the lifespan. It further assumes that attachment patterns formed in early childhood have long-lasting effects on mental health outcomes, although these patterns can be modified by later experiences. Proponents of the theory, particularly Bowlby (1969), argue that sensitive, consistent, and emotionally available parenting is the foundation of secure attachment and healthy psychological development. This study is anchored on Attachment Theory because it provides the most direct and theoretically grounded explanation of how parental engagement influences child mental outcomes. The theory explains the mechanism through which parental responsiveness, warmth, monitoring, communication, and emotional availability shape children's emotional security, coping ability, and psychological well-being. Its assumptions align closely with the study variables, as parental engagement represents the caregiving behaviors that foster secure attachment, while child mental outcomes reflect the emotional and psychological consequences of these early relational experiences. The adoption of Attachment Theory is further justified by its extensive empirical validation across disciplines and its relevance for designing interventions and policies aimed at strengthening parent-child relationships and improving child mental health outcomes. Although the theory has limitations, its explanatory power remains robust when applied within broader social and cultural contexts, making it a suitable and effective anchor for this study.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The theory assumes that children's mental, emotional, and psychological outcomes are not shaped by a single factor but by interrelated systems that range from immediate family relationships to broader social, cultural, economic, and policy environments. It further assumes that development occurs through reciprocal interactions between the child and these systems, and that changes in one system can influence others over time. Within this framework, parental engagement is located in the microsystem, the child's closest and most influential environment, where daily interactions with parents directly shape emotional security, behavior, and mental health outcomes. Proponents of the theory, led by Bronfenbrenner (1979), argue that the family is the most powerful context for early development and that consistent parental involvement, emotional support, and supervision enhance children's psychological well-being. Despite its widespread acceptance, Ecological Systems Theory has been criticized for being overly broad and difficult to operationalize empirically. Critics such as Tudge et al. (2009) argue that the theory lacks precise causal mechanisms and may be too descriptive, making it challenging to test statistically. Others contend that the theory underemphasizes individual biological and genetic factors in mental health development. However, even these critics acknowledge that the ecological approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how family processes interact with wider social contexts to shape child mental outcomes. The Ecological Systems Theory is highly relevant because it situates parental engagement within the child's immediate environment while acknowledging the influence of schools, peers, communities, and socio-economic conditions.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a multidimensional concept that refers to the active participation of parents in the emotional, social, behavioural, and academic development of their children. It encompasses the various ways through which parents support, guide, communicate with, and monitor their children in order to promote healthy growth and development. Scholars have defined parental involvement as the interactions and practices undertaken by parents both at home and in school settings to enhance children's learning, adjustment, and well-being (Epstein, 2023; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2021). Contemporary literature views parental involvement as a collaborative process between parents, schools, and communities aimed at fostering positive developmental outcomes among children. According to recent studies, parental involvement includes home-based engagement, school-based participation, emotional support, communication, behavioural monitoring, and academic supervision (Mocho et al., 2025). Research further emphasizes that parental involvement is not limited to school activities alone but also includes parents' responsiveness to children's emotional needs, provision of psychological support, and participation in children's social and developmental experiences (Otero-Mayer et al., 2025). In this study, parental involvement is classified as emotional support, communication, monitoring and participation in school activities. Parental emotional support refers to the extent to which parents provide love, care, encouragement, empathy, affection, and psychological security to their children. Emotional support creates a sense of belonging and safety that enhances children's emotional regulation, self-esteem, and resilience. Children who receive adequate emotional support from parents are more likely to develop positive coping skills and emotional stability (Masten & Cicchetti, 2022). Parental communication refers to the exchange of information, feelings, guidance, and ideas between parents and children through open, supportive, and constructive interaction. Effective communication enables parents to understand children's emotional needs, behavioural patterns, academic concerns, and social experiences. It also helps children feel valued, understood, and emotionally connected to their parents (Epstein, 2023).

Parental monitoring and supervision refer to parents' awareness and regulation of children's activities, behaviours, peer relationships, academic engagements, and daily routines. It involves setting behavioural expectations, guiding children's conduct, monitoring their movements, and ensuring compliance with acceptable social and moral standards (Darling & Steinberg, 2022). Effective parental monitoring helps children avoid risky behaviours such as substance abuse, delinquency, aggression, and negative peer influence.

Parental participation in children's academic and social activities refers to parents' active involvement in school-related programmes, homework supervision, extracurricular activities, social interactions, and developmental experiences. This dimension reflects parents' commitment to children's educational progress and social development (Otero-Mayer et al., 2025). Academic participation includes attending parent-teacher meetings, assisting with homework, monitoring academic progress, and encouraging educational achievement. Social participation involves supporting children's recreational activities, social interactions, cultural engagements, and community participation.

Child Mental Outcome

Child mental outcome is a multidimensional concept that refers to the overall psychological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural functioning of a child, reflecting their level of mental well-being, adjustment, and absence or presence of mental health difficulties. It encompasses how children think, feel, regulate emotions, interact socially, and respond to environmental demands across developmental stages. Recent literature conceptualizes child mental outcome as a continuum ranging from optimal mental well-being to clinically significant mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023; Kalra et al., 2025). Child mental outcome is increasingly recognized as a key indicator of healthy development because it influences learning capacity, social competence, emotional regulation, and long-term life outcomes. Contemporary research emphasizes that mental outcomes in childhood are not static but evolve through interactions between biological predispositions, family environment, school context, and broader socio-economic conditions (UNICEF, 2022; Masten & Cicchetti, 2022). Children who demonstrate positive mental outcomes typically exhibit resilience, self-esteem, emotional stability, and effective coping strategies, while poor outcomes are associated with anxiety, depression, aggression, and social withdrawal (Twenge & Campbell, 2023; Liu et al., 2024).

Empirical Review

Meng (2025) analyzed the mediating role of parental involvement in adolescent mental health and academic outcomes. The study focused on secondary school students across urban and rural areas. The objective was to examine whether parent-child communication mediates mental health outcomes. The research asked whether parental engagement improves mental health indirectly through communication quality. Data were collected via structured questionnaires. Regression and mediation analysis were applied. Findings showed that parental involvement reduced depressive symptoms through improved communication. The study concluded that communication is the main channel through which parental engagement affects mental health. Liu *et al.* (2024) investigated parental involvement and children's subjective well-being in Chinese primary schools. The scope covered urban and semi-urban primary schools across three regions of China. The objective was to assess how parental involvement influences children's well-being through psychological mediators. The study asked whether parental engagement improves children's well-being and whether sense of security and autonomous motivation mediate this relationship. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to students. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for analysis. Findings showed that parental involvement positively predicted subjective

well-being through enhanced security and motivation. The study concluded that parental engagement indirectly improves mental outcomes through emotional stability. Li et al. (2024) analyzed parental homework involvement and students' negative emotions in China. The study used national household panel data and focused on adolescents aged 10–18 years. The objective was to determine whether parental homework involvement reduces or intensifies negative emotions. The research question examined the mediating role of family responsibility and moderating role of parent–child communication. Data were collected from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). Hierarchical regression and mediation analysis were used. Findings showed that excessive parental involvement increased negative emotions, but effective communication reduced this effect. The study concluded that quality, not quantity, of parental engagement matters for mental health. Zhu et al. (2024) evaluated Parental involvement and externalizing behaviors among rural adolescents in the digital age. The scope covered rural adolescents in three Chinese provinces. The objective was to examine how parental engagement affects behavioral and emotional outcomes. The research question asked whether peer relationships mediate the relationship between parental involvement and mental outcomes. Data were collected through self-reported surveys. Regression and mediation analysis were used. Findings showed that higher parental involvement reduced aggression and emotional problems by improving peer relationships. The study concluded that parental engagement buffers the negative effects of digital exposure on mental health.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised parents and pupils/students in selected public and private schools in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population was estimated at 6,000 respondents. The sample size for the study was 375 respondents derived using Taro Yamene formula for sample size determination. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Parental Involvement and Child Mental Outcome Questionnaire (PICMOQ)”. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The research questions were answered using mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) statistics. Mean values of 2.50 and above were considered accepted, while the values below 2.50 were considered rejected. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 was used to facilitate the data analysis.

Result Presentation

Research Question: How does parental emotional support relate with child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Response of Respondents on how parental emotional support relate with child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

S/N	Statement	N	Sum	Mean	Std.
1	Parents in the LGA show me love and care when I am emotionally disturbed.	260	721	2.77	.677
2	My parents encourage and reassure me when I am facing academic or personal challenges.	260	706	2.72	.708
3	I feel emotionally secure because my parents listen to my problems and concerns.	260	795	3.06	.446
4	Emotional support from my parents helps me to handle stress and difficult situations effectively.	260	712	2.74	1.605

5	Lack of emotional support from parents can make children feel anxious, sad, or withdrawn.	260	815	3.13	.839
	Valid N (listwise)	260			

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2026)

Table 1 presents a summary of mean scores and standard deviations (SD) on respondents' perceptions of parental emotional support and child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The results showed that all the identified items were agreed upon by respondents, with mean scores ranging from 2.72 to 3.06. The findings revealed that parental emotional support plays a significant role in enhancing children's emotional security, stress management, psychological adjustment, self-confidence, and overall mental well-being in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that parental involvement—through emotional support, communication, monitoring, and participation in children's academic and social activities—has a significant positive relationship with child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. This implies that children who experience higher levels of parental involvement tend to demonstrate better emotional stability, improved stress management, stronger social adjustment, and overall positive mental well-being. This finding aligns with contemporary empirical evidence which consistently shows that parental involvement is a strong predictor of children's psychological adjustment and mental health outcomes (Epstein, 2023; World Health Organization, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that parental involvement has a significant relationship with child mental outcome in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Based on the above, the study recommended the following:

- i Parents in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area should consistently provide emotional support to their children through love, encouragement, active listening, and reassurance in order to enhance their emotional stability and psychological well-being.
- ii Parents should actively participate in their children's academic and social activities by attending school events, supporting learning at home, and encouraging involvement in positive extracurricular activities.
- iii Schools, counsellors, and community stakeholders should organize awareness programmes and parenting education workshops to educate parents on effective parenting practices that promote positive child mental outcomes.

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