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# Psychosocial Challenges of Female Secondary School Students in Abeokuta Metropolis: Implications for Mental Health Counsellors

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## Abstract

The period of adolescence is associated with several dramatic changes and life challenges particularly among female secondary school students. This study, therefore, investigated the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. The variables taken into consideration were age, class, school type and mother's educational attainment. It was a survey research. Sample comprised all the female in-school adolescents in Abeokuta metropolis. A questionnaire entitled "Psychosocial Challenges of Female Students Questionnaire" (PCFSQ) was used to collect data for the study. The findings revealed that the psychosocial challenges of female in-school adolescents were a result of their body shape, sexual harassment from teachers, fear of failure, being bullied by male counterparts, and pressure to perform excellently among others. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that mental health counsellors should assist female in-school adolescents to overcome psychosocial challenges.

**Keywords:** female secondary school students, mental health psychosocial challenges

## Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of uncertainty, puzzlement, storm, and challenges for teenagers, especially girls. The increase in the desire for freedom from parental control, swift developmental changes, increased concern for social and peer group activities and the fostering of self-identification are some of the challenges associated with adolescence. The challenges become more severe as the personality of the teenage girls evolves. Female in-school adolescents are exposed to a myriad of psychosocial conflicts that have the potential of tearing them apart. The biological, psychological and social modifications that occur at some stages in adolescence can take a toll on their overall development.

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Recently, there has been a reduction in the period that parents spend with their wards as they are in constant search for the survival of the family (Guth, [2008](#)). Worse still, the educational institutions could not meet the psychological and psychosocial demands of these wards. It is however worrisome that, female in-school adolescents could be faced with numerous debilitating situations that may lead to psychosocial issues. The school and family have then been seen to lack in the provision of adequate care and support for adolescents but this is not without grievous consequences on their psychosocial development (Knitzer & Lefkowitz, [2006](#)).

According to Trenoweth and Moone ([2017](#)), the term psychosocial refers to a set of behaviours which have both psychological and social aspects; this includes age, education, marital and related aspects of a person's development (Cardoso & Chronister, [2016](#)). Jacqueline and Walsh ([2016](#)) viewed psychosocial development as the psychological development of the individual in relation to his or her social environment. In the same vein, Pallassana and Balgopal ([2016](#)) viewed people from the social context taking - and emotional development and functioning.

World Health Organization ([2017](#)) opined that the psychosocial challenges of adolescents encompass all crises experienced with self or environment. Psychosocial challenges are common among adolescents due to confusion that characterizes the stage of adolescence (Reijneveld et al., [2003](#)). Due to a lack of support, these psychosocial challenges, such as relating to thoughts, emotions, behavior, and education appear to be more among adolescent girls as many of them experience emotional and physical suffering (Kessler et al., [1994](#)). The adolescence period is a critical time for developing good mental health (Kessler et al., [2005](#)). Friedrich et al. ([2010](#)) submitted that at the stage of adolescence, adolescents are expected to have healthy cognitive and emotional development however; adolescents with psychosocial challenges have poor cognitive and emotional functioning which affects his/her overall health (Agabrian, [2007](#); Spear, [2009](#)) and disposition to the environment (Knitzer & Lefkowitz, [2006](#)).

Most of the growing females, particularly adolescents, carry the notion of inferiority complex especially in the presence of their male counterparts (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, [2003](#); Maccoby, [2002](#)). In line with this, Tolman and Brown ([2001](#)) stated that girls live a stereotyped life, always waiting for directives and approval of others. They hardly could truly express their feelings. Tolman and Brown ([2001](#)) labeled this as a “loss of voice,” and in

no small measure affects female adolescents' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and identity formation. Furthermore, Maccoby (2002) expressed that many of the girls who wait for orders and could not express their feelings are regarded as being humble and respectful but not competent enough to occupy positions of authority.

Female secondary school students face numerous psychosocial issues aside from the educational and social pressure of getting ready for their future careers (Thomas & Borrayo, 2016). Many female secondary school students are faced with psychological and social challenges which predispose them to depression, tension, and stress, which might be pretty common (Shamsuddin et al., 2013). According to Reivich et al. (2013), at any point in time, approximately 6-9% of female in-school adolescents experience a major depressive disorder.

Psychosocial challenges are independently linked with stress, ill health, and low academic achievement, impaired peer group relationships (Spitz et al., 2007). Generally, in-school adolescents experience overwhelming stress which can degenerate into several mental issues such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and substance abuse (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Kessler et al., 2007). According to Shamsuddin et al. (2013), psychosocial challenges appear to be more common in females than males. Similarly, psychosocial challenges have a strong link to a lack of motivation, concentration, and psychosomatic complaints (Dusselier et al., 2005). Retreating these, Salzer (2012) stated that many female adolescents with psychosocial challenges find it difficult to engage in academic activities, have poor social interaction, and have high rates of school dropout. According to Pledge et al. (2008), females facing psychosocial challenges have suicidal thoughts, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, and attempts.

Worldwide, numerous studies have been conducted and the findings revealed that there is a high incidence of mental health issues among female students (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Chia & Graves, 2016; Daniel, 2013; Jenkins, 2013). Chronic depression was a reported experience among female students in Asia (Chia & Graves, 2016; Nordin et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2006), USA (Eisenberg et al., 2007), and Middle East (Hamdan-Mansour et al., 2009; Hamdan-Mansour & Marmash, 2007). Higher rates of depression were found to be associated with age, financial status, and body weight. This condition was also found to be influenced by social, demographic, behavioral, and educational factors (Jeevarthina, 2017).

Furthermore, the identity crisis peak during this stage of student life (Blanco et al., [2015](#)). Therefore, this present study sought to find the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The stage of adolescence is characterized by sudden body change and life stress. Many female in-school adolescents experience pressure from parents to maintain healthy relationships and perform well academically. More precisely, cognitive and emotional development is correlated with high academic achievement, sound health, and good social relation however, this reserve is the case for many in-school adolescents in Nigeria, especially among female in-school adolescents. In many societies in Nigeria, the school communities, school premises, and the family are affected by lots of problems that have an effect on the psychological and social development of female in-school adolescents. Moreover, other problems such as family problems, anxiety, school, and home stress, and a host of other factors dishearten the female students which later leads to negative or unhealthy intrapersonal behavioral or unhealthy relationship building (Mathew, [2017](#)). The psychosocial challenges of female adolescents can lead to poor self-esteem, somatic disorder, eating disorders, psychological trauma, and suicidal attempt.

Several researchers had carried out studies on psychosocial challenges among students (Bano & Iqbal, [2018](#); Bista et al., [2016](#); Famakinwa, Olagunju & Akinnawonu, [2016](#); Nsereko et al., [2014](#)). Even though these studies abound, the psychosocial challenges of female adolescents continue to increase; more so, limited researchers had worked on the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students. Therefore, this present study intends to fill this gap by examining the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria thus, the need for this study.

### **Research Question**

What are the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the conduct of the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on age.
2. There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on class.
3. There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on school type.
4. There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on their mother's educational attainment.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The descriptive survey was deemed appropriate as the study will reveal the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State. This research design gives the researcher the opportunity of getting the opinion of a sample population and make inferences regarding the larger population.

### **Population, Sample, and Sampling Techniques**

The female in-school adolescents in Abeokuta metropolis, Ogun State formed the population of this study while the target population consisted of female secondary school students from various selected secondary schools. Ten (10) secondary schools were selected from Abeokuta metropolis, using the random sampling technique. Using this technique, the researcher wrote the names of the schools in Abeokuta Metropolis on paper and puts them in a bottle, shook the bottle, and then picked a piece of paper; each name of the school written on the paper chosen formed the sample. The process continued until 10 secondary schools were selected. Again, a total of 20 respondents were selected from each of the schools selected using the random sampling technique. The procedure continued until a total of 200 female in-school adolescents were gotten.

The analysis of the demographic data revealed that 101 (50.5%) of the respondents were between ages 12-14 years, 90 (45.0%) were between ages

15-17 years, and 9 (4.5%) were 18 years and above. Based on class level, a total of 131(65.5%) of the respondents were in Junior Secondary School while 69 (34.5%) were in Senior Secondary School. A total of 67 (33.5%) of the respondents were from the private school, while 133 (66.5%) of the respondents were from public schools. The analysis showed that 3 (1.5%) of the respondent's mothers had no formal education, 15 (7.5%) had primary/secondary education, 50 (25.0%) had NCE/OND, 127 (63.5%) had 1st degree, while 5 (2.5%) of the respondent's mother had postgraduate education.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument adopted for collecting data for this study was a researcher-structured questionnaire entitled “Psychosocial Challenges of Female Students Questionnaire” (PCFSQ). The instrument has two sections (i & ii). The first part comprised the personal information of the participants e.g. age, class, school type, and mother's educational attainment; Age was categorized as 12-14 years old, 15-17 years old, and 18 years old & above; Class was categorized as Junior Secondary Class and Senior Secondary Class; school type was categorized as Private School and Public School while mother's educational attainment was categorized as NCE/OND, first degree and Postgraduate degree. The second section included 20 statements on the psychosocial challenges of female students, for instance, “As far as I am concerned: my challenges are as a result of: I am not comfortable with my body shape, sexual harassment from teachers, and discriminatory treatment from male classmates”. The second part was measured using rating scale comprising *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree*.

The psychometric properties of the instrument were established through (i) validity (ii) reliability (iii) usability. The validity was ascertained by giving the instrument to 5 experts in the field of psychology to assess its face and content validity. These experts advised that ambiguous statements be reworded for clarity while items that were deemed as not fit to measure what they were structured to measure were advised to be deleted. This procedure continued until all the items in the instrument were adjudged valid to measure what they were designed to measure. The instrument was tested for reliability through the test re-tests reliability method to measure the internal consistency of the instrument. The instrument was administered twice, at an interval of two weeks twice to 20 female secondary school

students who did not partake in the study. The two results (the ones collected in the first and second administrations) were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Formula (PPMC); a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. A reliability coefficient of this magnitude is adjudged reliable. For usability, and a chance to determine whether the study is feasible, the instrument was pilot-tested. To do this, 20 female in-school adolescents were selected in one of the schools of interest; the instrument was administered and the respondents were allowed to respond to it as they would have done in the actual administration. The instrument was collected back, scored, and analyzed. The result of the analysis revealed that the instrument is usable for the study.

### **Procedures of Data Collection**

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the selected respondents in Abeokuta metropolis; Ogun state after permission from school authorities had been sought. Copies of the questionnaire forms were administered by the researcher and two well briefed Research Assistants. The questionnaires were collected back on the spot which allowed for total retrieval of all the questionnaires.

### **The Procedure of Scoring**

The format of each section (A and B) of the questionnaire form holds the weight of scoring. Section 'A' was analyzed using percentages for the demographic data. Section 'B' which contained 20 items on the psychosocial challenges of female students was scored using following Likert scale:

Strongly Agree	(SA)	= 4 points
Agree	(A)	= 3 points
Disagree	(D)	= 2 points
Strongly Disagree	(SD)	= 1 point

In section B, any item that has the mean score above 2.50 was regarded as psychosocial challenges of female secondary school students and items below 2.50 were not considered as psychosocial challenges of female secondary school students. The data analyses of the study were done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The result obtained from the demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as



frequency and percentage. While the data obtained from the statements (Section B) was analyzed using mean and rank order and inferential statistics such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test statistical tools were employed in testing the formulated hypotheses. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

## Results

### Research Question 1

What are the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State?

**Table 1**

*Mean and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' Expression on Their Psycho-social Challenges*

Item No	As far as I am concerned: my challenges are as a result of	Mean	Rank
1	I am not comfortable with my body shape	3.44	1 <sup>st</sup>
3	sexual harassment from teachers	3.27	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	being bullied by male counterparts	3.07	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	discriminatory treatment from male classmates	3.06	4 <sup>th</sup>
6	Stress of menstrual periods	2.97	5 <sup>th</sup>
18	Pressure to perform excellently academically	2.95	6 <sup>th</sup>
10	Fear of failure	2.93	7 <sup>th</sup>
19	competition for grades	2.92	8 <sup>th</sup>
9	hectic class timetable	2.89	9 <sup>th</sup>
5	hectic domestic chores	2.88	10 <sup>th</sup>
17	undesirable academic outcomes	2.83	11 <sup>th</sup>
7	trying to meet up with high parents' expectations	2.77	12 <sup>th</sup>
11	inability to read and understand	2.70	13 <sup>th</sup>

Item No	As far as I am concerned: my challenges are as a result of	Mean	Rank
8	my inability to pay tuition fees on time	2.69	14 <sup>th</sup>
20	marital instability of my parents	2.67	15 <sup>th</sup>
12	inability to rest at home	2.64	16 <sup>th</sup>
16	poor relationship with my colleagues in school	2.56	17 <sup>th</sup>
14	my physical changes	2.51	18 <sup>th</sup>
15	not having control over my body development	2.43	19 <sup>th</sup>
13	stress of struggling to get public transport	2.15	20 <sup>th</sup>

Table 1 presents the mean and rank order of the respondents' psychosocial challenges. The table indicates that item 1 which states that my challenges are a result of: I am not comfortable with my body shape ranked 1<sup>st</sup> with a mean score of 3.44. Item 3 which states that "sexual harassment from the teacher", ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> with a mean score of 3.27. Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> is item 2 which states that "being bullied by male counterparts" with a mean score of 3.07. Similarly, item 14 states that my challenges are a result of my health challenges ranked 18<sup>th</sup> with a mean score of 2.51. Item 15 which states that "not having control over my body development" ranked 19<sup>th</sup> with a mean score of 2.43. Ranked least is item 13 which states that "stress of struggling to get public transport" with a mean score of 2.15. Since eighteen out of twenty items have mean scores that are above 2.50, then it can be said that psychosocial challenges of female secondary school students are psychosocial challenges of female in-school adolescents are their body shape, sexual harassment from teachers, fear of failure, being bullied by male counterparts, pressure to perform excellently academically among others.

### Hypotheses Testing

Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

### ***Hypothesis One***

There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on age

**Table 2**

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Respondents' Expression on their Psycho-social Challenges Based on Age*

Source	SS	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	394.343	2	197.171			.012
Within Groups	8572.84	197	43.517	4.53*	3.00	
Total	8967.18	199				

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the calculated F-ratio of 4.53 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .012 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on age. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 6.

**Table 3**

*Scheffe Post-Hoc Based on Age*

Age	N	1	2	3
12-14 years	101	54.93		
15-17 years	90		57.54	
18 years and above	9			59.00*

Table 3 shows that respondents who were between 12-14 years had a mean score of 54.93 (in subset 1), 15-17 years had a mean score of 57.54 (in subset 2), while 18 years and above had the mean score of 59.00 (in subset 3). This implies that the mean score of respondents who were 18

years of age and above is greater than the mean scores of other age groups, thus, contributing to the significant difference.

### ***Hypothesis Two***

There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on class level

**Table 4**

*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of the Respondents' Expression on Their Psycho-social Challenges Based on Class Level*

Variable	JSS ( <i>n</i> = 131)		SSS ( <i>n</i> = 69)		<i>t</i> (168)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Psycho-social challenges	56.33	7.15	56.22	5.82	1.11	.912

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.11 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 with a corresponding p-value of .912 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is greater than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on class level

### ***Hypothesis Three***

There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on school type

**Table 5**

*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of the Respondents' Expression on Their Psycho-social Challenges Based on School Type*

Variable	Private ( <i>n</i> = 67)		Public ( <i>n</i> = 133)		<i>t</i> (198)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Psycho-social challenges	55.99	4.50	56.44	7.59	0.45	.65

Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.45 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 with a corresponding p-value of .650 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is greater than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on school type.

### ***Hypothesis Four***

There is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on their mother's educational attainment

**Table 6**

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Respondents' Expression on Their Psycho-social Challenges Based on Mother's Educational Attainment*

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	F	Crit. F-ratio	p
Between Groups	24.292	4	97.171	2.10	2.101	.089
Within Groups	8942.89	195	45.850			
Total	8967.18	199				

Table 6 shows the calculated F-ratio of 2.10 is less than the critical F-value of 2.11 with a corresponding p-value of .089 which is greater than 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated p-value is greater than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected. Hence, there is no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on their mother's educational attainment.

## **Discussion**

The study revealed that psychosocial challenges of female secondary school students are their body shape, sexual harassment from teachers, fear of failure, being bullied by male counterparts, and pressure to perform excellently among others. The finding of the study is in line with the study of Van Breda (2017) who found that the psychosocial challenges of many students were fear of academic failure or poor academic performance and

financial difficulties. Haynes (2002) found that stress, sexual harassment, interpersonal relation problems, verbal abuse, and being bullied were some of the psychosocial challenges of female in-school adolescents. Similarly, the finding supports the study of Pledge et al. (2008) who asserted that university female students possess severe level of psychosocial problems often experienced depression, fear of failure, mental illness etcetera. The reason for this finding could be that female gender, adolescents inclusive, are treated as subordinates of their male counterparts. Similarly, the issue of body shape and sexual harassment from male teachers can compound the challenges of female adolescents psychologically and socially.

Testing of Hypothesis one revealed that there was significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on age. This implies that expression of the respondents was different on the psychosocial challenges based on age. The Scheffe post-hoc report showed that respondents who were 18 years of age and above contributed to the significant different. The finding negates the study of Bano and Iqbal (2018) who found no significant age difference in the manifestation of psychosocial problems among female students. This could be as a result of the varying level of maturity among the respondents. This finding could also be as a result of the fact that older female adolescents must have adopted coping strategies against psychosocial challenges.

Hypothesis two was proved right that there was no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on class level. This implies that the expression of the respondents was not different based on class level on the psychosocial challenges experienced among them. The finding is in line with the submission of Chia and Graves (2016) and Daniel (2013) who asserted that female in-school adolescents at all levels of education experience psychological challenges. This could be due to the fact that female in-school adolescents are in the same developmental stage where they experience stress and storm thus, they experience similar psychosocial challenges.

Hypothesis three proved that was no significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on school type. This implies that expression of the respondents from public and private schools were no difference on psychosocial challenges experienced. The finding is supported by the study

conducted by Bano and Iqbal (2018) who found no significant difference in psychosocial and emotional problems experienced by female students in both public and private tertiary institutions. Even though type of school could influence the respondents due to the same gender and developmental stage, their respondents did not differ. This may be as a result of the fact that female students from both private and public schools have unresolved psychosocial challenges.

Hypothesis four proved non-significant difference in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on mother's educational attainment. This implies that expression of the respondents was no difference based on their mother's educational attainment. The finding supports the study of Bista et al. (2016) who found non-significant difference in the psychosocial problems among adolescent students irrespective of parents socio economic status. This could be due to the fact that all female in-school adolescents will at one time or the other, experience psychosocial challenges in schools, at home or in the community irrespective of their parents' educational attainment.

## **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the psychosocial challenges of female in-school adolescents are enormous. They are due to their body shape, sexual harassment from teachers, fear of failure, being bullied by male counterparts, and pressure to perform excellently academically among others. No significant difference was found in the psycho-social challenges of female secondary school students in Abeokuta, Ogun State based on class level, school type and mother's educational attainment but a significant difference was found based on age group.

## **Implications to Mental Health Counsellors**

The findings of this study has the following implications for mental health counsellors:

- Mental Health Counsellors should float an orientation programme in schools to enlighten all staff members and all students on the psychological challenges of female adolescents. Thus, male teachers and students can seek redress for their actions that add to the female student's psychosocial challenges.

- Mental Health Counsellors should assist female in-school adolescents to learn how to manage psychosocial challenges and cope with everyday social and academic pressures.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- Mental Health Counsellors should float an orientation programme in schools to enlighten all staff members and all students on the psychological challenges of female adolescents. Thus, male teachers and students can seek redress for their actions that add to the female student's psychosocial challenges.
- Mental Health Counsellors should assist female in-school adolescents to learn how to manage psychosocial challenges and cope with everyday social and academic pressures.
- female in-school adolescents should go for a counselling session in order to overcome psychosocial challenges by developing social and emotional learning skills.
- School Counsellors should assist female in-school adolescents to learn how to manage psychosocial challenges and cope with everyday social and academic pressures.
- Mental Health Counsellors can collaborate with school Counsellors to use emotion-focused coping strategies which regulate the emotional response to a stressor and reduce psychological discomfort. They can also use a problem-focused coping strategy which can help alter the situation to minimize or eliminate the source of the psychological challenges.

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