PSYCHOLOGY

Self-Perception, Internalized Stigma and Psychological Resilience among Persons with Albinism in Biu and Agatu Local Government Areas of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined self-perception, internalized stigma, and psychological resilience among persons with albinism in Biu Local Government Area of Borno State and Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, with particular focus on the uneducated and out-of-school population. A cross-sectional survey of 248 participants (139 males, 109 females; mean age = 22.8 years) was conducted across five wards in each LGA. The majority (68.5%) had no formal education or had dropped out of primary school. The questionnaire was administered in English with the assistance of interpreters fluent in Agatu Idoma, Bura-Babur, and Hausa languages. Validated scales measuring self-perception, internalized stigma, and psychological resilience (Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale – 10) were used. Pearson correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that self-perception significantly and positively predicted psychological resilience, while internalized stigma was a significant negative predictor. The final model accounted for 38.6% of the variance in resilience. Findings highlight the heightened vulnerability of uneducated persons with albinism and underscore the urgent need for community-based interventions that address stigma, promote positive identity, and expand educational access in Biu and Agatu LGAs.

Keywords: Self-perception; internalized stigma; psychological resilience; albinism; Biu; Agatu; out-of-school; uneducated; Northern Nigeria

1 Introduction

Persons with albinism, often referred to affectionately and sometimes teasingly as “Africa Oyibos”, occupy a unique and frequently misunderstood position in Nigerian society. While a small number of educated persons with albinism in tertiary institutions have begun to reconstruct positive identities and demonstrate notable resilience, a much larger and more vulnerable group remains largely invisible: the uneducated and out-of-school persons with albinism, particularly in rural and conflict-affected communities of Benue and Borno States. This study focuses specifically on Biu Local Government Area in Borno State and Agatu Local Government Area in Benue State. Many children and young adults with albinism in these localities never enroll in school or drop out early. The reasons are layered and deeply rooted. Parental and community misconceptions remain widespread. In parts of Agatu (Benue) and Biu (Borno), traditional beliefs sometimes frame albinism as a curse, spiritual affliction, or bad omen. Some parents, especially those with little or no formal education, view investing in the education of a child with albinism as wasted resources. Others fear that sending the child to school will expose the family to stigma or increase the risk of ritual-related harm.

Similarly, visual impairment without support further compounds the problem. Most public schools in both LGAs lack basic accommodations such as preferential seating, large-print materials, or teachers trained to support learners with low vision. Children who cannot see the blackboard become frustrated, perform poorly, and eventually withdraw. Teachers and peers may mock their eyesight or appearance, accelerating dropout. Sun exposure and health fears also play a significant role. The intense heat and lack of shaded learning spaces or protective clothing make regular school attendance physically painful and dangerous for many children with albinism. Families sometimes keep them at home for their own protection. In Biu LGA, prolonged conflict and displacement have disrupted education for entire communities. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) with albinism face compounded exclusion including limited access to special health needs such as sunscreen and eye care, heightened vulnerability, and fewer opportunities for inclusive education in camps or host communities. In both Biu and Agatu, poverty and competing survival needs force many families to prioritize immediate survival over long-term education, particularly for children already viewed as different. Without education, these individuals are more likely to internalize stigma. They often grow up with limited knowledge to challenge negative cosmological beliefs about themselves, weaker self-esteem, reduced economic opportunities, and higher risk of social isolation. The positive traits frequently observed among persons with albinism such as sensitivity, intuition, intelligence, humour, and careful personal presentation remain underdeveloped or hidden when basic literacy, social confidence, and exposure to affirmative narratives are absent. Invariably, the gap between educated and uneducated persons with albinism is not merely academic; it is a gap in identity reconstruction, psychological resilience, and life chances.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Despite growing national attention to albinism, empirical research focusing specifically on uneducated and out-of-school persons with albinism in Biu and Agatu Local Government Areas remains scarce. Most existing studies have concentrated on urban or tertiary-educated samples. Consequently, little is known about the levels of self-perception, the depth of internalized stigma, and the resilience capacities of this highly vulnerable rural population. Without such data, evidence-based interventions remain difficult to design.

1.2 Research objectives

1. To examine the relationship between self-perception and psychological resilience among persons with albinism in Biu and Agatu LGAs.
2. To examine the relationship between internalized stigma and psychological resilience among the same population.
3. To determine the joint predictive contribution of self-perception and internalized stigma to psychological resilience, with emphasis on uneducated and out-of-school participants.

2 Literature review

2.1 Self-perception and psychological resilience

Self-perception refers to an individual's evaluation of their own worth, competence, and identity. Positive self-perception has consistently been linked to higher psychological resilience among persons with visible differences (Olagunju et al., 2025; Adah & Adah, 2024). Among persons with albinism, those who develop affirmative views of their identity tend to demonstrate greater adaptive

coping and emotional stability. Conversely, negative self-perception exacerbates vulnerability to stress and social exclusion (Otobrise & Uyanwune, 2025).

2.2 Internalized stigma and resilience

Internalized stigma occurs when individuals accept and apply negative societal attitudes about their condition to themselves. Research in Nigeria has shown that internalized stigma is strongly associated with lower self-esteem, depression, and reduced resilience among persons with albinism (Otobrise & Uyanwune, 2025; Adah & Adah, 2024). When community narratives frame albinism as a curse or spiritual affliction, affected individuals are more likely to absorb these messages, particularly in the absence of formal education that could provide alternative interpretations (Imafidon, 2019; Reimer-Kirkham et al., 2019).

2.3 Educational exclusion and vulnerability

Educational exclusion remains one of the most significant barriers facing persons with albinism in Nigeria. Studies have documented that many children with albinism drop out of school due to visual impairment without accommodations, peer bullying, teacher insensitivity, and parental misconceptions (Olagunju et al., 2025; United Nations, 2024). In rural and conflict-affected settings such as Biu and Agatu, these challenges are intensified by poverty, insecurity, and limited access to inclusive education programmes. The absence of education limits opportunities for identity reconstruction and weakens psychological resources needed for resilience (Ungar, 2015).

2.4 Cultural and cosmological context

African cosmological beliefs play a dual role in shaping the experiences of persons with albinism. While some traditional and religious interpretations frame albinism as a divine gift or sacred mark, others continue to associate it with curses or ancestral punishment (Imafidon, 2019; Reimer-Kirkham et al., 2019). In communities where negative cosmologies dominate, uneducated persons with albinism are particularly vulnerable to internalizing stigma because they lack alternative explanatory frameworks that formal education might provide.

2.5 Research hypotheses

1. Self-perception will significantly and positively predict psychological resilience.
2. Internalized stigma will significantly and negatively predict psychological resilience.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

The study sample comprised 248 persons with albinism drawn from Biu Local Government Area (Borno State) and Agatu Local Government Area (Benue State). Of these, 139 (56.0%) were males and 109 (44.0%) were females. The mean age was 22.8 years (SD = 6.4). Educational status showed that 170 participants (68.5%) had no formal education or had dropped out of primary school, while 78 (31.5%) had completed primary education or above. In Biu LGA, participants were recruited from five wards: Biu Central, Miringa, Buratai, Galdimare Ken Ken, and Garubula. In Agatu LGA, participants were drawn from five wards: Obagaji, Odugbeho, Usha, Egba, and Enungba. Recruitment was facilitated through community leaders, local albinism networks, primary healthcare centres, and IDP camps (in Biu) using purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

3.2 Instruments

The following instruments were used:

- **Self-perception scale:** an adaptation of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) with albinism-specific items (Cronbach's α = .79).
- **Internalized Stigma of Albinism Scale:** adapted from the Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale (α = .83).
- Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale, 10-item version (CD-RISC-10), validated in Nigeria by Aloba et al. (2016) (α = .81).

3.3 Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from the participants. The questionnaire was prepared in English but administered with the assistance of trained interpreters who were fluent in Agatu Idoma, Bura-Babur, and Hausa languages. This approach ensured that participants with limited English literacy could fully understand and respond to the items. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study.

3.4 Design and statistics

A cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical multiple regression were conducted.

4 Results

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 248 participants. The sample comprised 139 males (56.0%) and 109 females (44.0%). A total of 132 participants (53.2%) were drawn from Biu LGA in Borno State, while 116 participants (46.8%) were drawn from Agatu LGA in Benue State. Importantly, 170 participants (68.5%) had no formal education or had dropped out of primary school, while only 78 participants (31.5%) had completed primary education or higher. This distribution confirms that the study successfully focused on the uneducated and out-of-school population that formed the central concern of the research.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 248).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	139	56.0%
	Female	109	44.0%
LGA	Biu (Borno)	132	53.2%
	Agatu (Benue)	116	46.8%
Educational Status	No formal education / Dropout	170	68.5%
	Primary and above	78	31.5%

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the study variables. Internalized stigma recorded a relatively high mean score (M = 34.9, SD = 8.1), indicating that many participants had absorbed negative societal beliefs about albinism. Self-perception had a mean of 24.6 (SD = 6.8), while psychological resilience had a mean of 26.3 (SD = 7.4). The correlation results

revealed a strong negative relationship between self-perception and internalized stigma ($r = –.53$, $p < .01$), a moderate positive relationship between self-perception and psychological resilience ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), and a strong negative relationship between internalized stigma and psychological resilience ($r = –.51$, $p < .01$). These significant correlations in the expected directions provided justification for proceeding to hierarchical regression analysis.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations among study variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Self-Perception	24.6	6.8	1		
2. Internalised Stigma	34.9	8.1	–.53**	1	
3. Psychological Resilience	26.3	7.4	.48**	–.51**	1

Note: **$p < .01$; N = 248.

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis. In Model 1, self-perception alone significantly predicted psychological resilience, accounting for 23.0% of the variance ($R^2 = .230$, $\beta = .48$, $p < .001$). In Model 2, when internalised stigma was added, the model improved substantially ($\Delta R^2 = .156$), and the two predictors together explained 38.6% of the variance in psychological resilience ($R^2 = .386$). Self-perception remained a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), while internalized stigma emerged as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = –.38$, $p < .001$). These results confirm both research hypotheses and demonstrate that self-perception and internalized stigma jointly make a meaningful contribution to understanding differences in psychological resilience among persons with albinism in Biu and Agatu LGAs, particularly the uneducated majority.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis predicting psychological resilience.

Model	Predictors	R	R^2	ΔR^2	β	t	p
1	Self-Perception	.48	.230	.230	.48	8.57	<.001
2	Self-Perception	.62	.386	.156	.31	5.42	<.001
	Internalized Stigma				–.38	–6.61	<.001

Note: Dependent variable = psychological resilience. Final model $R^2 = .386$ (38.6% of variance explained).

5 Discussion

The findings confirm that self-perception positively predicts psychological resilience, while internalized stigma exerts a significant negative effect among persons with albinism in Biu and Agatu Local Government Areas. The relatively high mean score on internalized stigma and the predominance of uneducated and out-of-school participants (68.5%) underscore the vulnerability of this population. Without formal education, many individuals lack the cognitive and social tools needed to challenge negative community narratives about albinism, resulting in deeper stigma internalization and lower resilience (Otobrise & Uyanwune, 2025; Olagunju et al., 2025).

These results align with earlier observations that educational exclusion widens the identity and resilience gap between educated and uneducated persons with albinism. In Biu, the additional burden of insecurity and displacement further erodes protective resources, while in Agatu, persistent

traditional misconceptions continue to limit educational investment in children with albinism (Imafidon, 2019; Reimer-Kirkham et al., 2019).

6 Conclusions

Self-perception and internalized stigma are significant predictors of psychological resilience among persons with albinism in Biu and Agatu Local Government Areas. The high proportion of uneducated and out-of-school participants highlights an urgent equity gap that requires targeted intervention.

7 Recommendations

1. Community sensitization programmes should be intensified in Biu and Agatu to challenge harmful myths and promote positive understandings of albinism.
2. Existing out-of-school and second-chance education initiatives (including Benue's BRACE-UP programme) should deliberately include children and youth with albinism and provide reasonable accommodations.
3. Provision of sunscreen, protective clothing, and basic visual aids should be integrated into primary healthcare and education outreach in both LGAs.
4. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and organizations such as TAF Africa should be actively engaged in rural advocacy and support programmes.

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