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## THE IMPACTS OF MENTAL DISABILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study was to explore the impacts of mental disability and the social work intervention measures in response to the phenomenon. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study consisted of all family members - male and female - of patients with mental disorders and social workers at the Psychiatric Hospital, Uselu, Benin City. Using the stepwise random sampling procedure, 130 relatives of the mentally challenged persons that were in and out patients and 20 mental health social workers at the Psychiatric Hospital were randomly selected, giving a total of 150 participants of the study. The data collected was analyzed using linear regression at .05 level of significance and displayed on an ANOVA table. Results revealed that there is an increasing impact of mental disability on the mentally challenged individuals in the Nigerian context, given the influences on their socio-economic context, poor educational attainment, limited social interaction and inability to maintain appropriate parenting role. Also revealed is the need for social work interventions in response to the phenomenon. Given the findings, potential social work implications are suggested for improving the social functioning of the mentally challenged.*

**KEY TERMS:** *mental disability, mental illness, social functioning, social work, intervention*

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health indicates how well an individual copes with his/her daily life and the challenges it brings, when an individual's mental health is poor it could be difficult to function in daily life. The pervasiveness of mental disability worldwide has generated a lot of debate over the actual meaning and the nature of the phenomenon. According to Oyewunmi, Oyewunmi, Iyiola and Ojo (2015), in Nigeria, the notion of mental health is often culturally or socially dodged; as a number of people are not usually disposed to reflect on it agreeably (Bakare, 2014). However, mental health indicators in Nigeria are increasing, whilst research indicates that the prevalence of mental illness in Nigeria is estimated at 20%, with a population of 174 million (World Bank, 2013) and 64 million Nigerians are deemed to suffer from one form of mental disability or the other (Owoyemi as cited in Oyewunmi, et al., 2015). Knowledge about mental disability differs in most communities; this channels the pattern of attitude of people towards mental disability differently (Jugessur & Iles, 2009; Ngui, Khasakhala, Ndeti & Roberts, 2010).

Mental disability is the term used to describe a broad range of mental and emotional conditions, mental impairment or mental retardation, organic brain damage, learning disabilities and drug dependence (Mji, MacLanahan, Melling-Williams & Gcaza, 2009; World Health Organization, 2015). However, mental disability is of concern due to high prevalence and/or severity of condition include, but are not limited to, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (referred to as severe mental disorders), depression, anxiety, somatoform disorders epilepsy, alcohol and substance abuse disorders and child and adolescent mental health problems (Omorogiuwa, 2009). Although mental health is a formidable public challenge in Nigeria, the affected individuals suffer from serious institutional and normative consequences (Bakare, 2014). Mental illnesses are increasingly recognized as a leading cause of financial insufficiency, difficulty in coping with educational development, inability to parent a child effectively and poor social interaction worldwide (WHO, 2006; Ngui & Flores, 2007). However, despite the growing burden of mental illness and the resultant level of suffering for individuals and society, efforts to address it are unsatisfactory.

Mental health may play an important role in determining social status in society. Mental adversities linked to low socio-economic status may further damage the psychological functioning of individuals affected (Berdirhan, 1999; Audu, Idris, Olisah & Sheikh, 2013). Mental disability has been shown to have a serious impact on educational chances of the mentally challenged (Richard & Abbott, 2009). Mental health problems may impact on human capital accumulation by reducing both the amount of schooling and the productivity level, which may in turn have lifelong consequences for employment, income and other outcomes (Eisenberg, Golberstein & Hunt, 2009). Parenting a child when the parent has a mental disability brings multiple challenges to family, such as dealing with the inability to rear the child appropriately, and social stigma associated with the disability (Richard & Abbott, 2009; Moron-Nozaleda, Gomez de Tojeiro, Cobos-Munoz & Fernandez-Liria, 2011).

The theory utilized in this study is the ecological perspective. This is because the study focuses on the interaction between the environment and the individual with mental disability, given the ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1994), which applies the study of ecology to the social environment. In the study ecology, organisms are considered with regard to their environments. Consequently, ecological framework conceptualizes the environment "as if the individual were an open system at its centre surrounded by the interacting environmental layers" (Howe & Briggs, 1982, p. 327)." Using the ecological framework, the extent of mental disability is not ascertained solely within individuals but by dealings between them and their environments. Social workers have, thus, emphasized the significance of all inclusive, support and accommodation for individuals with mental disabilities in the society (Hiranandani, 2005). Hence, adopting an ecological approach of disability could help keep social service providers embedded in their context of help and provide a more transactional assistance with regard to mental disability issues.

Moreover, social workers work with individuals with mental disability to resolve associated psychosocial problems and with families in which mental health problems exist in connection with social problems, such as child rearing distress, unemployment/poverty and social isolation, and educational attainment problem (Omorogiuwa, 2009). As a consequence, mental health social workers interventions include: Detailed psychosocial assessment identifying the connections between mental health problems and complex social contexts; Assessment of the mental illness and its impact on the life of individuals and their families; Working with individuals, families, groups and communities to find solutions to mental health problems; Working cooperatively as part of multidisciplinary teams; Working within the guidelines of a professional code of ethics, practice standards and legal framework for practice (Bentley, 2002; Starnino, 2009; Omorogiuwa, 2009; Allen, 2014).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rate at which people are affected by mental disabilities is alarming as over 450 million people suffer from mental illness worldwide (WHO as cited in Audu et al., 2013) and Nigeria in particular it is reported as 20% (World Bank, 2013). Difficulties in productive achievement and participation are the main obstacles facing the mentally challenged. The occurrence of mental illness is known to create a hidden burden among the affected individuals, ultimately resulting in reluctance to seek help and delay in rehabilitation. Due to the prevalence of mental disability, the mentally challenged persons often experience difficulty in developing their socio-economic, educational status, parenting a child and maintaining social relationships outside of the contact they have with professionals and family members. The social functioning of individuals with mental disorders is limited and they often have smaller social networks than people without mental disability (Berdirhan, 1999). A number of the mentally challenged individuals in the Nigerian context are disadvantaged as there seems to be a general apathy and little or no attention given to the problems of their problems. The objective of the study was to highlight the impacts of mental disability and the implication for social work practice. The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

1. Mental disability will not significantly impact on the socio-economic development of the affected individuals
2. Mental disability will not significantly impact on parenting a child?
3. Mental disability will not significantly impact on the educational development of affected individuals?
4. Mental disability will not significantly impact on the social life of affected individuals?
5. Social work intervention will not significantly influence the assistance needed by the individuals with mental disability?

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study consists of all family members, male and females of patients with mental disorders and social workers at the Psychiatric Hospital, Uselu, Benin City. A sample of 150 family members of individuals with mental disorders and mental health social workers at the Psychiatric Hospital, Uselu was randomly selected, using the stepwise random sampling procedure. Firstly, two sets of respondents in the population were randomly selected and there after randomly selecting 130 relatives of the mentally challenged persons that are in and out patients, 20 mental health social workers at the Psychiatric Hospital, giving a total of 150 participants of the study. A structured questionnaire requesting demographic information covering, age and sex and section B consist of a twenty item four point Likert type scale, with four items each on the impacts of mental disability; socio-economic development, educational development, social life interaction, parenting a child and social work intervention needed in response to addressing the phenomenon of mental disability. The instrument was thereafter administered to twenty adults that are not to form a part of the sample of study, the data collected was analyzed using the Cronbach alpha formulae and reliability coefficients of 0.79 was obtained. The researcher administered the instrument with a research assistant and staff of the Psychiatric Hospital Staff. The data collected was analyzed using linear regression at .05 level of significance and displayed on ANOVA. To ascertain the covariance between mental disability and the varying impacts as well as the social work implication as presented in the tables below.

## RESULTS

**Hypothesis One:** Mental disability will not significantly impact on the socio-economic development of the affected individuals.

Table 1 shows an F value 43.054 and  $P < 0.05$ . The null hypothesis which states that “mental disability will not significantly impact on the socio-economic development of affected individual” is rejected. Consequently, the alternate which states that “mental disability will significantly impact on the socio-economic development of affected individual” is accepted. With an adjusted  $R^2$  value of .087, therefore mental disability accounts for 8.7% variation in low socio-economic development of affected individuals.

**Table 1:** ANOVA Table on Mental Disability and its impact on socio-economic development of affected individual

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	F	Sig. (P value)
Regression	401.00	1	401.011	43.054	.000
Residual	3465.555	367	5.622		
Total	3866.555	368			

  

Parameter	Estimates				
Variable (Constant)	B	SEB	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Mental disability on socio-economic development	-.394	.052	.301	.102	.087

B = Regression coefficient, SEB = standard error of B, P < 0.05

**Hypothesis Two:** Mental disability will not significantly impact on parenting a child.

**Table 2:** ANOVA Table on Mental Disability and its impact on parenting a child

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	F	Sig. (P value)
Regression	302.00	1	301.021	45.012	.000
Residual	2243.423	366	4.425		
Total	2545.423	367			

  

Parameter	Estimates				
Variable (Constant)	B	SEB	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Mental disability on parenting a child	-.388	.055	.302	.112	.077

B = Regression coefficient, SEB = standard error of B, P < 0.05

Table 2 shows an F value 45.012 and P < 0.05. The null hypothesis which states that “mental disability will not significantly impact on parenting a child” is rejected. Thus, the alternate hypothesis, which states that “mental disability will significantly impact on parenting a child”, is accepted. With an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of .077, therefore mental disability accounts for 7.7% variation in parenting a child with mental disability.

**Hypothesis Three:** Mental disability will not significantly impact on the educational development of affected individuals.

**Table 3:** ANOVA Table on Mental Disability and its impact on the educational development of affected individuals

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	F	Sig. (P value)
Regression	209.01	1	205.001	37.004	.001
Residual	3307.302	398	3.303		
Total	3516.312	399			

  

Parameter	Estimates				
Variable (Constant)	B	SEB	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Mental disability on socio-economic development	-.299	.065	.267	.012	.055

B = Regression coefficient, SEB = standard error of B, P < 0.05

Table 3 shows an F value 37.004 and  $P < 0.05$ . The null hypothesis which states that “mental disability will not significantly impact on the educational development of affected individuals” is rejected. Hence, the alternate, which states that “mental disability will significantly impact on the educational development of affected individuals”, is accepted. With an adjusted  $R^2$  value of .055, therefore mental disability accounts for 5.5% variation in educational development of affected individuals.

**Hypothesis Four:** Mental disability will not significantly impact on the social life of affected individual

**Table 4:** ANOVA Table on Mental Disability and its impact on social life

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	F	Sig. (P value)
Regression	303.02	1	301.00	31.002	.000
Residual	3233.221	413	4.201		
Total	3535.241	414			

  

Parameter	Estimates				
Variable	B	SEB	R	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$
(Constant)	06.310	.333	.343	.033	.077
Mental disability on Social life	-.399	.074			

B = Regression coefficient, SEB = standard error of B,  $P < 0.05$

Table 4 shows an F value 31.002 and  $P < 0.05$ . The null hypothesis, which states that “mental disability will not significantly impact on the social life of affected individual”, is rejected, while the alternate, which states that “mental disability will significantly impact on the social life of affected individual” is accepted. With an adjusted  $R^2$  value of .077, therefore mental disability accounts for 7.7% variation in social life of affected person.

**Hypothesis Five:** Social work intervention will not significantly influence the needed assistance for individuals with mental disability.

**Table 5:** ANOVA Table on Social work intervention and mental disability

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	F	Sig. (P value)
Regression	331.01	1	304.01	40.004	.003
Residual	3424.303	397	4.202		
Total	3755.313	398			

  

Parameter	Estimates				
Variable	B	SEB	R	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$
(Constant)	33.101	.202	.331	.033	.088
Social Work intervention and Mental disability	-.473	.514			

B = Regression coefficient, SEB = standard error of B,  $P < 0.05$

Table 5 shows an F value 40.004 and  $P < 0.05$ . The null hypothesis which states that “social work intervention will not significantly influence the needed assistance for individuals with mental disability” is rejected. Consequently, the alternate which states that “social work intervention will significantly influence the needed assistance for individuals with mental disability” is accepted. With an adjusted  $R^2$  value of .088, therefore social work intervention accounts for 8.8% variation in assisting individuals with mental disability.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study found that the main impacts of mental disability on the challenged individuals as indicated by the research participants include low socio-economic development, poor educational development, low social life influence and inability to rear a child effectively. This finding is consistent with the research of WHO (2006) that mental illnesses are increasingly recognized as a leading cause of financial insufficiency, difficulty in coping with educational development, inability to parent a child effectively and poor social interaction. The finding revealed that the mental disability of an individual can impact negatively on his/her socio-economic development. This is in line with Berdirhan (1999) that mental adversities linked to socio-economic status may damage the psychological functioning of individual mental disabilities. This also agrees with Eisenberg, Golberstein and Hunt (2009) that mental health problems may impact on an individual's productivity level, which may in turn have lifelong consequences for employment, income and other outcomes. This is indicative of the influence of mental illness on the socio-economic status or income generation of the affected individual. This study also found that rearing a child or parenting children could be challenging for the individual with mental disability. This is consistent with Richard and Abbott (2009) that parenting a child when the parent has a mental disability brings multiple challenges to family, such as dealing with the inability to rear the child appropriately, and social stigma associated with the disability. This is indicative of the difficulty associated with imbibing the proper behaviours in children.

The result of this study further revealed that mental disability and poor educational development of the affected individual has a close link. The study is supportive of Ngui et al. (2010) that mental disability has serious impact on educational chances of the mentally challenged. Similarly, Eisenberg, Golberstein and Hunt (2009), which that confirm mental health problems, may impact on human capital accumulation by reducing both the amount of schooling. The indication is that mental illness experience by individuals often subjects them to difficulty in schooling adjustment or achieving educational prospects.

Moreover, the study reveals that mental disabilities have negative impact on the social life of affected persons. This is in line with Omorogiuwa (2009) and Moron-Nozaleda et al. (2011) that the negative effect of mental disability unfortunately extends beyond individuals diagnosis to their social life interaction with family members, friends and others, hence their significant others feel shame, self-blame and mistrust; leading to societal rejection and embarrassment. Finally, this present research found that social work intervention is vital to help the mentally challenged address the problems associated with their mental disability. This finding is supported by Spearman (2005) and Allen (2014) that social workers have a crucial part to play in improving the mental health outcomes and well-being of individuals with mental disabilities. Starnino (2009) supports that while it is apparent that mental disability impacts individuals' lives, there are also several social work implications for ameliorating the influences of mental disability. This is indicative of how intervention measures are placed into context within social work practice, education, policy and research to address the impacts of mental disability on affected individuals. Based on the findings of this study, all the factors retained may better explain the impacts of mental disability in Benin City, Nigeria.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

While it is apparent that mental disability impacts individuals' lives, there are also several implications of mental disability for social work professionals. This is because social work practice can be truly indispensable part of a mental health service (Schaefer et al., 1998), particularly in rehabilitating affected individuals. Indeed, social workers played a significant role in providing care for people with mental disabilities since the profession's earliest years (Starnino, 2009). Social workers are continued to be employed in multiple mental health settings and fill a variety of roles in assisting the mentally challenged, including that of case manager, therapist, crisis counselor, program evaluator, administrator, facilitator, advocate and policy analyst (Bentley, 2002; Omorogiuwa, 2009). Since social workers often provide gatekeeping and triage functions in their roles, they are among the first to be in contact with individuals with psychiatric conditions (Schaefer Vourlekis, Edinburg & Knee, 1998). While social workers' roles may vary in different countries, they can nonetheless be crucial in mitigating stigma in the Nigerian context.

Interventions with the mentally challenged individuals be a difficult transformation that requires significant personal work and/or therapy, hence, social workers as service providers are can work with their clients on issues and impacts of mental disability through their treatment provisions, triage roles, and outreach efforts (Laffey, 2003; Allen, 2014). Researcher suggests that more attention to families of individuals with mental disability conditions is needed to mitigate the impacts (Jarrett, 1999; Oyewunmi et al., 2015). While social workers have the opportunity to work with individuals, they also work with families. An important way social workers may seek to mitigate the impacts of mental disability on a micro level is individual therapy with the challenged person and on a meso level is through family therapy. Individual as well as family therapy may help relatives understand psychiatric conditions and how they can help/support the afflicted individual (Laffey,

2003; Starnino, 2009; Omorogiwa, 2009). If social workers are able to support an individual's support system (family), it may help improve treatment seeking and treatment engagement for that person.

On a macro level, social workers can also be instrumental in leading larger targeted educational efforts aimed at reducing the various impacts of mental disabilities. Targeted programs have shown effectiveness in challenging misconceptions, improving attitudes, and reducing social distance (Schaefer Vourlekis, Edinburg & Knee, 1998). Research indicates that large macro-level impacts campaigns that can be facilitated by social workers include public advertisements, targeted educational efforts, capacity building to enhance socio-economic context and advocacy for agency change (Jacobson & Curtis, 2000). Nonetheless, more interventions and strategies must be developed to mitigate the impacts and stigma attached to mental disabilities in all societies. Therefore, the development of intervention measures to assist social work professionals are needed to address dimensions of impacts linked with mental disability across all three levels concurrently.

Furthermore, to enhance the social functioning of the individuals affected by mental disabilities, in addition to the social services provision indicated above, social workers can promote health and income enhancing behaviours and opportunities, encouraging social support and linkages with available resources. These intervention measures can assist in enabling successful living and functioning of the individuals with mental disabilities.

## CONCLUSION

Given that there seemed to be scarcity of research on the influences of mental disabilities and the social work interventions. This present study attempted to offer an understanding of the impacts of mental disability experienced by the mentally challenged persons as well as providing possible social work measures to addressing these problems. Given the findings of the study, it is established that the impact of mental disability is not restricted to any specific factor, rather it is prevailing in all groups, socio-economic development, social life interaction, educational development and parenting a child, even though with petite difference. Therefore, it may conceivably be concluded that the mentally challenged individuals suffers as a result of their low socio-economic development, limited social life interaction, poor educational achievement and poor parenting capacity, which place the victims at risk of survival and social functioning. In addition, it can also be established that social work intervention measures could assist in response to the adversities associated with the phenomenon of mental disability. Thus, indicating that mental illness sometimes influences other issues. However, additional research is needed to confirm these notions.

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