



DEPRESSION AND EXAMINATION FAILURE AMONG STUDENTS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

P. U. EKPANG, UNIMNA BESHEL FIDELIS AND UGBE BLESSING USHIBIMA

(Received 16, March 2023; Revision Accepted 26, July 2023)

ABSTRACT

This study examined the depression and examination failure among students of tertiary institution in Cross River State, Nigeria and its counselling implication. Descriptive research survey was adopted for the study. The population of the study was all the students both male and female in all the major tertiary institution in Cross River State, Nigeria. A total of 1,000 students between the ages of 15 – 20 years were selected using multistage sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire titled Depression Evaluation Scale (DES) was used to elicit information from respondents. The instrument was validated and reliability was obtained using test-re-test method. The reliability co-efficient was 0.75 at 0.05 level of significance. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis for the general questions raised while t-test was used to test the hypothesis raised at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that there is significant difference between male and female students with depression. It was also revealed that there was a significant relationship of depression and mass failure among male students than female counterpart. Based on the findings, it is concluded that depression is a health and behavioural challenge among students in tertiary institution, it was recommended that school counsellors should design an effective counselling programme to assist the students with depression in our tertiary institutions across the globe.

KEYWORDS: depression, programmes, evaluation, counselling, implication, tertiary.

INTRODUCTION

Depression is a mood disorder in which the sufferer experience deep profound unhappiness for a prolonged period of time.

This mood disorder is seen in the form of lowered self-esteem, changes in sleep patterns, changes in appetite or weight and inability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt, instability and anxiety (Comer, 2007). Further, in

P. U. Ekpang, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Unimna Beshel Fidelis, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Ugbe Blessing Ushibima, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, Cross River State University of Technology

the description of depression, Black Dog Institute (2012) identified some other signs of depressive mood to include varying emotions throughout the day, reduced capacity to experience pleasure (that is, inability to enjoy what one used to enjoy in the past), reduced pain tolerance for minor aches and pains changed sex drives, poor concentration and memory, reduced motivation to carry out usual tasks and lowered energy level.

The psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson (1987) of the eight stages of human development suggested that individuals between the ages of 18 – 25 have one major development versus isolation. Those young adults who are not able to make the appropriate social connections often find themselves feeling isolated and miserable. It has been reported that in many universities campus, perhaps because of their vestness, students have often with the emphasis on intellectual development, students often feel that little or no attention is paid to their personal development expressed feelings of isolation, sense of abandonment and rejection (Cornish and Benton, 2001). It has also been found by Seligman (1975) that learned helplessness play a significant role in depression. According to him, depression occurs as a result of individual belief that they have no control over their own outcomes, that such views develop after experiencing situations where that kind of control was absent and then generalized it to other situations.

Beck (1976) said ones who is suffering from depression often have negative conceptions of their own traits, abilities and behaviour and because of that they tend to be highly sensitive to criticism from others. According to Beck, ultimately such depressed individuals tend to demonstrate what can be described the negative cognitive trait whereby they have automatic repetitive and negative thoughts about themselves, the world and the future. In essence, depressed persons viewed themselves worthless and inadequate, have this persistent feeling that they can't cope with the demands made on them and is fearful of the future because they believe it holds nothing different or better for them (Beck, 1976).

Researchers observed that depression might be potentially life threatening mood disorder and warned that it might rank second after heart diseases worldwide by the year 2024 (Adeniyi and Okafor 2011). Depression is further seen as increasing not only in students but also among

the adults in Cross River State, Nigeria and it is seen common among students in tertiary institutions. Also, in a study carried out among youths in Nigeria, Omigbodun, Esan and Bakare (2004) reported a depression prevalence of 12.6% which is at the upper end of the globally reported range of 0.4 –14.2%, through Adewuya (2006) and Adewuya, Ola and Aloba (2007) found that the prevalence of major depressive disorder in the western cultures. It is believed that if this trend is not curtailed alarge percentage of students might experience major depressive episode in thecourse of their development. In essence, measures to stop the trend must be pursued with all seriousness. From the above symptoms and the influence generally depression may be described as a serious health challenge which may render students ineffective. It may be more serious among the students in tertiary institution as it may influence negatively on their thinking, interpersonal relationship and may enhance participation in many unhelpful social activities. In a recent study, it was found that depression is not only found among adults but also among in-school adolescents (Ibimiluyi, 2017).

In the recent literature, researchers have not reached a consensus on the nature of the relationship between male students and female students in terms of depression (Fluharty, Taylor, Grabski and Munafo, 2017). Although some researchers have also confirmed that male students are strongly associated with depression than female students of tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. Calling wood (2010) asserts that depression is more common among male students than female students. These studies show that there is an association between depression and the studies but can such be replicated among Nigerian sample?

Moreover, there are empirical studies to support the relationship of male students and female students on depression (Brown, Lewinsohn, Seeley & Wagner,1996). Ezeobedo and Kirch (1996) were among the first to examine the relationship between depression and behaviour. According to Audrain-McGovern, Rodriguez, Cuevas and Rodgers (2009), the association between cigarette smoking and depressive disorders can be explained in several ways.

First, depressive disorders may lead to cigarette use (Nezami, Unger, Tan, Mahaffrey, Suessman, Nguyen-Michel, Azen & Johnson, 2005). Using

data from the national longitudinal study of Adolescent health, munafohitsman, Rende, Metalfe and Niara (2008) found that among individuals who have never smoked at baseline, increases in depressive symptoms lead to smoking initiation but not to becoming regular smokers. Khantzian (1997) have earlier suggested that mood disorders may lead students to smoke due to their need to alleviate distressing symptoms they may be experiencing. These individuals are into smoking only to relieve themselves of their depressive situations.

The self-medication hypothesis proposed by Khantzian (1985) states that students choose to use certain substances because they offer the students alleviation from painful emotional states. This is supported by the work of Minnix, Blalock, Marani, Prokhorov and Cinciripini (2011) which found that the pathway through which self-medication hypotheses would work involves individuals having low self-efficacy in the control of their own emotional states and will in turn, create a vulnerability for depressive symptoms that then is controlled through the use of tobacco. Another view suggests that shared risk factors are involved in the etiology of both problems. Several studies from various countries outside Africa have provided evidence that depressive disorders and examination failure share similar, if not the same environmental and genetic precursors (Fergusson, Boden & Horwood, 2011). Some studies also found that there are significant relationships between depression and examination failure, even after controlling for environmental factors (e.g: experienced stressful life events, unemployment and affliction with deviant peers, among others). (Chen, Chen, Williamson, Aggen, Neala & Kendler, 2009; Boden, Ferguson & Horwood, 2010).

Certainly, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms responsible for the association between depression and examination failure symptoms (Munafa & Anava, 2010). High rates of co-occurrence have been reported for depression and examination failure symptoms (Mekenzie, Oisson, Jorm, Romaniuk & Patton, 2010; Weiss. Mouttapa, Cen Johnson and Unger, 2011). The available evidence suggests that students with depression disorder and a mental disorder are more psychologically distressed (Essua, 2011). Based on the above background a

research question is asked, will counseling intervention be an antidote to the prevention of depression and examination failure among students?

Statement of hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the incidence of depression between male and female in tertiary institutions.
2. There is no significant relationship between depression and examination failure among students in tertiary institution in Cross River State.

Research method

Descriptive research of the survey type was used for the study. This was considered appropriate because it focuses on the observation of the population. The population for the study consisted of all the students both male and female in University of Calabar and College of Health Technology, Calabar all in Cross River State southern senatorial district of Nigeria. This southern senatorial district appear to have similar culture being the ancestral home of the Efik ethnic group in Cross River State of Nigeria with similar languages but with different dialects.

The tertiary institution used included the University of Calabar and College of Health Technology, Calabar. The ages of the students that participated in the study were between 15-20 years. The sample for this study consisted of 2000 male and female students. The method of selection was multi-stage sampling technique. The first stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique by balloting system select five students from the 29 departments in the institution. The second stage entailed the use of purposive selection to select University of Calabar and College of Health Technology, Calabar in the state. The third stage also involved the use of stratified simple random sampling technique to select the sample from the schools selected. In all, a total of 2000 students participated in the study.

A self-designed questionnaire titled Depression Evaluation Scale (DES) was used to elicit information from respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two sections A, B and C. Section A contained information on demographic characteristics of these spondents, such as sex,

age and location, Section B is a modified form of Beck's depression inventory which has been found to have high validity rating of 0.77 and reliability of 0.93 among Nigerian sample (Ferinde, 2013). It consisted of 21 groups of statements on different symptoms of depression such as sadness, pessimism, failure, loss of pleasure, guilty feeling, self dislike and so on. Each statement is rated on a modified 4-point likert scale 1-4 with the respondents picking which of the statements best describe the way he or she is feeling in recent time and at the moment. Respondents were expected to pick just one out of the options. The items were summed up to form a total score of 84. Respondents were categorized as experiencing "low", "moderate" and "High" levels of depression based on percentile formula. Low (21.00-27.97), Moderate (27.98-55.97) and high (55.98-84.00). the instrument was subjected to face, content and construct validity. There liability of the instrument was established using test re-test method and there liability coefficient of 0.75 was found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance.

Section C contained 5 items on counselling intervention and responses were on "yes" and

"No" basis. "Yes" was rated 2 while "No" was rated 1. Frequency and percentages were used to ascertain the perception of respondents on the role of counselling on students depression. The instrument was administered to 2000 respondents by the researchers and four trained research assistants but a total of 1,600 copies of the questionnaire were collected and collated at the end of the administration. The data generated was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistic which include frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the questions raised while inferential statistics of students t-test was used to test the null hypothesis generated at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question: Would counselling intervention help to reduce the symptoms of depression and examination failure among students in tertiary institution in Cross Rivers State of Nigeria.

In answering the question, response on item 1-5 in section C of Depression Evaluation Scale (DES) were subjected to statistical analysis using frequency counts and percentages. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Counselling intervention and Students Depression

S/NO	Items	Yes		No		Total		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	Do you think consulting a guidance counselor would help reduce depression among students?	1109	68.2	516	31.8	1600	100.0	1.68
2	Do you think counselling services would help to reduce depressive symptoms among students?	1247	76.7	378	23.3	1600	100.0	1.77
3	Do you think social supports from counsellors or parents are important to the students?	1307	80.4	318	19.6	1600	100.0	1.80
4	Do you think forming a strong relationship between the counsellor and students would help to reduce depression?	995	61.2	630	38.8	1600	100.0	1.61
5	Do you think establishment of depression awareness club is necessary in tertiary institution?	1083	66.6	542	33.4	1600	100.0	

Table 1 shows that 1109 respondents representing 68.2% of the total sample agree that consulting a guidance counselor would help to

reduce depression among students while 516 (31.8%) disagree. 1247 (76.7%) agree that counselling services would help to reduce

depressive symptoms among students while 378 (23.3%) disagree. On whether social supports from counsellors or parents are important to the students. 1307 (80.4%) agree while 318 (19.6%) disagree. Also, 995 (61.2%) agree that forming a strong relationship between the counsellor and students would help reduce depression while 630 (38.8%) disagree. Furthermore, 1083 (66.6%) respondents agree that establishment of depression awareness club is necessary in tertiary institution while 542 (33.4%) disagree.

Using a cut off mean score, of 1.50 for the rating scale all the items had mean scores above the cut-off mean score. This implies that counselling intervention were important antidotes to depression as thought by the students in tertiary institution.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the incidence of depression between male and female students in tertiary institution. In order to test the hypothesis, scores relating to the incidence of depression among male and female students were computed and compared for statistical significance using t-test significance at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: T-test showing difference of depression between male and female students in tertiary institution

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	t-table
Male	788	33.56	12.04			
Female	237	31.96	9.93	1600	2.924	1.960

P<0.05

Table 2 shows that t-cal(2.924) is greater than t-table (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in the incidence of depression on male students than females in tertiary institution. Male students had higher mean score of 33.56 than female mean 31.96 counterparts. This implies that the incidence of depression is higher among male students who are involved in examination failure in school.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between depression and examination failure among students in tertiary institutions. In order to test the hypothesis, scores relating to depression and examination failure of students were computed using Depression Evaluation Scale (DES) respectively. These scores were subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson product moment correlation at 0.05 level. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between Depression and Examination failure among students

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-table
Depression	1600	4.74	0.64	0.359	0.195
Exam failure	1600	32.78	11.09		

P<0.05

Table 3 shows that t-cal (0.359) is greater than t-table (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that depression and examination failure among students are related.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study revealed that counselling intervention help to reduce symptoms of depression and subsequently examination failure among students of tertiary institutions. This corroborates psychologists and other researchers position that apart from drugs, counselling and other psychotherapeutic strategies can yield significant positive result in the treatment and prevention of depression especially among students of tertiary institutions. Through counselling, especially group counselling, they could network among their peers, form relationships, meet their personal social needs and reduce their sense of isolation as theorized by Erikson (1987). Through counselling they could also overcome their sense of worthlessness and fear of the future which is one of the reasons for depression according to Beck (1976).

The result also showed that there is a significant difference between male and female students in their levels of depression. Males tend to have higher incidences than their female counterparts. It could well be that females are more interactive and forms stronger bonds and relationships more easily than the males in the light of Erikson's (1987) theoretical position. It is also possible that the females have a more positive view of themselves, the world and their future than the males based on Beck's (1976) postulation.

The result further revealed a significant relationship between depression and examination failure. That is to say students who are depressed tend to fail in their examinations. This is not surprising because a mind that is weighed down by repressed thoughts and desires can hardly focus on or retain intellectual materials and subsequently to recall in examination situation. It is Sigmund Freud's belief that many of the symptoms experienced by persons with depression and other mental disorders were indirect and disguised forms of repressed desires and thoughts buried in the unconscious mind which ultimately impacts negatively on behaviour. This is also in line with Seligman (1975) theoretical position that says that depression to a large extent is as a result of learned helplessness. Students who are depressed may have failed before and feel that there is no point bothering because they may fail again anyway. They may feel like they have no control over the examination situation and over their lives.

IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

Campuses of tertiary institutions are vast arena where students can easily feel lost and isolated carrying around the weight of their emotional baggage and other serious psychological problems. There is need to create enabling environment where in addition to their thinking abilities, students need to develop personal-social, emotional aspects of their personalities. This therefore calls for active vibrant counselling services that will address the diversity of special needs in campuses. Counselling especially that of group should be all on-going experience. Such group settings, students can explore areas of themselves that they have kept hidden that are causing them difficulties identify the underlying blocks impeding the full utilization of their intellectual capacities, confront their dread of the future, their sense of worthlessness and hopelessness. The platform could also provide the opportunity for them forge friendships and long lasting relationship. In essence by dealing with their personal problems through counselling, students are set free from certain emotional blocks to learning and become better students, fully equipped to pursue their studies with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and committed. Thus, they can achieve excellence in their examination.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion is that depression poses a serious challenge among students of tertiary institution in Cross River State, Nigeria. It is also the conclusion that counselling intervention and strategies are essential tools for the prevention and treatment of depression and that there is a significant relationship between depression and failure in examination, with a higher incidence among males than female of tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation is that university counseling centres be given priority attention, sufficiently equipped with both human and material resource to enable them provide quality counselling services aimed at preventing and treating mental disorders and other serious personal-social problems among the students. The need for vibrant, active university counselling centres with the sole aim of preventing and

treating mental health issues among their students cannot be overemphasize.

REFERENCES

- Adeniyi, A. F., Okafor, N. C. and Adenuji C. Y., 2011. Depression and physical activity in a sample, of Nigeria adolescents: levels, relationships and predictors. *Child Adolescent Psychiatry Mental Health*, 5, 16 doi:10.1186/1753-2000-5-16. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC21569581
- Adewuya, A. O., Ola, B. A. and Aloba. O. O., 2007. Prevalence of major depressive disorders and a validation of the Beck depression inventory among Nigeria Adolescent Psychiatry 16, 287-292.
- Baron, R. A., 2006. *Psychology* (5th ed). New Delhi, India: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Black Dog Institute, 2012. Symptoms of depression. Black Dog institute. www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/does/symp_tomsol-deprssion.pdf Retrieved on 22/8/2013.
- Boden, J. M. Fergusson, D. M. and Horwood L. I., 2010. Cigarette smoking and depression. Tests of casual linkages using a longitudinal birth cohort. *The British Journal of psychiatry. The Journal of Mental Science*, 196(6) 440-446.
- Cornish, P. A. and Benton, D., 2001. Getting started in earlier relationship. Brief integrated dynamic group counselling setting. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* 26 (2), 129 – 143.
- Erikson, E. H., 1987. *A way of looking at things: selected papers from 1930 – 1980* (S. Schlen, ed). New York: Norton.
- Fergusson, D. N. Boden, J. M. and Horwood, L. P., 2009. Tests of casual links between alcohol abuse or dependence and major depression. *Achieve of General Psychiatry*. 66 200-266.
- Fluharty, M. Taylor, A. E. Grabski M. and Munafo, M. R., 2017. The association of cigarette smoking with depression and anxiety: A Systematic Review *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*: 19(1)3-13.
- Gomen, R. J., 2007. *Abnormal psychology*. New York. NY: Worth Publishers.
- Ibimiluyi, F. O., 2017. Psychological variables as correlates of depression among adolescents in southern Nigeria. Ph.D, Thesis Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.
- Mekennie, M. Olsson, C. A. Jorm, A. F., Romaniuk H. and Patton, G. C., 2010. Association of Adolescent Symptoms of depression and anxiety with daily smoking and nicotine dependence in young adulthood; Findings from a 10 year longitudinal study. *Addiction*, 105 (9), 1652-1659.do:1010411/lj.1360-0443.2010.03002X.
- Munafo, M. R. and Araya, R., 2010. Cigarette smoking and depression: a question of causation. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 196 (6), 425-426. Doi:10:1192/bjp.bp.109.074880.
- Omigbodun, O. Esan O. Bakare K. Yusuf B. O. Nuhu F. and Adesokan, A., 2004. Depression, depressive and suicidal symptoms among adolescents in rural south western Nigeria. Postal presentation at the 10th world congress of the International Association For Child and Adolescent Psychiatry And Allied Professions (IACAPAP), 22-26 August, 2004, Berlin.