



INFLUENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study, examined the influence of unemployment on the psychological health of youths in Lagos State, Nigeria. The descriptive inter-correlations hypothesis showed significant relationship between unemployment and low self-esteem, suicidal ideation depression, irrational thoughts/behavior and negatively correlated with perseverance (Grit).

Method: The purposive sampling and criteria-based techniques were used for the study. The sample size comprised of three hundred and ninety (380) unemployed youths within the age bracket of 18-35 (Male = 221, Female = 159), and data was collected using a self-report questionnaire. The procedure adhered to the principles of the human participant and clearly explained the nature of the study

The results of simple linear regression showed the partially correlation and prediction hypotheses were confirmed. It was recommended that relevant institutions in the public sector and government bodies should re-strategize, prioritize, and adopt youth-inclusive criteria by which employment levels can be improved in the country and further research directions were discussed.

Keywords: *Depression, low self-esteem, unemployment, suicide ideation, perseverance*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'unemployment' as defined by (Adebayo, 1999, p. 185) is a state in which skilled individuals do not have jobs or are constantly in search of one for salary or income. It has unquestionably become one of the greatest challenges globally (Anyanwu, 2014) and typically increases during a recession with adverse effects on the economy. Some of its effects are an increase in insufficiency, pressure

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and distortions, labour reduction mobility, promotion of social/civil unrest and conflicts.

It has become a subject of discussions in Nigeria (Ajufo, 2013) despite the country being an enabling environment for businesses, accommodating investors across the world. It is further considered a major challenge obstructing the peace and security of the country with its skyrocketing rate in the past few years. Its major effect is its disruption on youths' lives with consequences such as substance dependency, depression, crimes, and anti-social behaviour (Ajufo, 2013). The National Bureau of Statistics (2019), averaged youth unemployment in Nigeria at 23.63 percent as of 2014 to 2018, with an all-time high of 38 percent in the second quarter of 2018 and a record fall of 11.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2014.

This situation in Nigeria has tremendously deteriorated by the current overall financial crises affecting industries and the hope for youth (Fanimu & Olayinka, 2009). The outcome of being unemployed is characterized by various components namely; homelessness, insecure environments, segregation, hunger, and poor health conditions, improved morbidity and mortality from illnesses, and mental illness (Davids, 2010).

The reports of unemployment resulting from the substantial economic decline in Nigeria have shown adverse effects on youth psychological well-being such as despondency, depression, suicide, and sometimes, crime (Paul & Moser, 2009, David & Vicente, 2012) as well as their physical and intellectual performance (Breslin & Mustard, 2003). Unemployment is consistently associated with low psychological health with an increased vulnerability to psychiatric disorders (Mckee-Ryan, Kinnicki, Song & Wanberg, 2005). It is more firmly established that unemployment influences the cause and prognosis of those with pre-existing psychiatric disorders which in turn leads to reduced employability (Mark & Paul, 2011).

The consequences of unemployment are not as minimal as those associated with a long period of unemployment experience but not limited to financial setbacks, reduced self-confidence, and poor psychological and emotional strength (Amissah & Nyarko, 2017). Another impact linked with the mental well-being of an unemployed person is spirituality as a coping mechanism in dealing with a mental and emotional breakdown, period of disconnect, and helplessness. (Piedmont, Werdel & Fernando, 2009). Hence, the ability to use perseverance through religion in analyzing difficult situations as a part of human life and existence (Lawler-Row & Elliot, 2009).

1.1 Theoretical Approach: Ecological System Theory

This study adopted the ecological system framework by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) whose theory does not only allow instructors, physicians, and researchers to understand the experience of an individual in a state of unemployment but helps

them gain in-depth knowledge on how environmental system and growth can impact youth unemployment.

The ecosystem theory consists of five levels of interaction that the past is nested in the future:

(1) Microsystem (2) Mesosystem (3) Exosystem 4) Macrosystem, and (5) Individual trait (Chronosystem).

Since the inception of the theory, it has been applied in various fields of study such as youth developmental process (Darling, 2007), child's mental health (McLeod & Shanahan, 1993), suicidal ideation (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Snarr, Slep, Heyman, & Foran, 2011) and in describing youth unemployment while reflecting on the environmental effects on human behaviour (Barbalat & Frank, 2020). The concept of youth unemployment can be linked at different levels, namely, microsystem, exosystemic, and Chronosystem (Individual) in a specific setting (Shelton, 2019). This would give a better understanding of individual and contextual factors affecting youth unemployment

Microsystem: This refers to the interpersonal relationships, activities, and roles that directly impact a person's development in a given setting such as institution, religion, family, friends, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the educational institution, the most important need of a student is proper guidance and counselling especially in the area of study and career choices. However, institutions in Nigeria do not make efforts to guide students in choosing desired or careers that are in demand for graduates (Obinwanne, 2019). So, it is likely to affect positive mind-set and psychological health of the unemployed youths' that some of the qualifications obtained are not in sync with positions required hence the difficulty in gainful employment.

Exosystem: This refers to social structures, both formal and informal, that individuals do not have an active role in the immediate settings, and thereby influence one's experience or decisions. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The influential structures for unemployed youths in Nigeria may include the political system, lack of quality curriculum and education, flawed government policies on youth unemployment, and health system etc. This suggests failure from the leaders (politicians) by not creating jobs and setting a quality standard of education as promised or manifested. Hence, the increase in the number of unemployed youth, reliance, and dependence on family support, the propensity to crime, and determinants of psychological health and illness (Feldman, 2002).

Lastly, the **Individual** refers to the personality trait through which the person perceives the world such as sex, age, temperament, health, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Shelton, 2019). Individual play a role with regards to employment as personality's trait affects hiring qualities which might make or mar work performance or employment possibility. For example, 'temperament' might be an inhibiting factor (Jiji, 2012), likewise age, gender, and health instability (Makama,

2013,). It is crucial to be conscious of reality as an impact of reaction to unemployment on youths' psychological health and subsequently the period as well as the process. The period of unemployment is critical given that individual traits and experiences may strengthen stigmatization, isolation resulting in the low psychological health of the unemployed.

Three Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological system approach was explored, 1) academic advisor, family and friends as sources of support in microsystem 2) policy influence in exosystem and 3) perceptions of personality traits in individual (chronosystem). Each of the phases shed guidance on understanding the influence of unemployment on the psychological health of unemployed youths.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To understand the psychological effect of unemployment
2. To highlight the possible correlations between the following variables: low self-esteem, depressions, suicidal ideation, perseverance and irrational thoughts
3. To evidence that unemployment affect youth perseverance
4. To confirm that unemployment predicts the variables, low self-esteem, depressions, suicidal ideation, and irrational thoughts

2.2. HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses are the following:

- 1: There is a significant correlation between unemployment and the variables low self-esteem, depressions, suicidal ideation, perseverance and irrational thoughts.
- 2: Unemployment will positively predict youth ability to persevere
- 3: Each of the psychological health variables: depression, low self-esteem, suicidal and irrational thoughts negatively predict unemployment

3. METHOD

3.1 The participants

The study population is the unemployed youth of Lagos State. The participants for this study comprised 380 unemployed participants in Lagos, between the ages of 18 and 35 ($M= 30.85$, $SD= 2.83$). The reason for participants' selection ages is that they constitute about 40-60 percent of the more than 14 million persons in Lagos and the minimum qualification was a bachelor's degree with Master's as the highest. The study required at least a bachelor's degree as it is the common requirement and route to skilled employment.

The purposive and criteria based sampling techniques were employed in the selection process to ensure active recruitment with a focus on individuals with specific research interests to aid appropriate research outcomes (Willemse, 2015). Unemployed youths are young people (between the ages of 18-35), who have not been employed for a period not less than two years. A total of 159 (41.8%) were female and 221 (58.2%) were male in the study.

3.2 The Instruments

The standardized questionnaires were used as the instrument for data collection. The demographic section of the questionnaire contained questions such as age, gender, marital status, work status, educational qualification, and length of unemployment. Items in this questionnaire were adapted from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg 1972) for screening psychological health (Dustmann & Fasani, 2016; Lídia, Francesco, & Hannes, 2018), and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995) for overall mood and cognitive state.

1. Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item scale that is used to measure individual self-esteem with a standardized Cronbach alpha range of 0.79 to 0.86. Some items in this scale are "I take a positive attitude toward myself", "I certainly feel useless at times," and "I feel that I have a number of good qualities." Responses are provided and scored using a 4 point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" with 4 Point, "Agree" 3point,"Disagree" 2 point, "Strongly disagree" with 1 point. While items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 on the scale are reversely scored. From "Strongly Disagree" 1 point, "Disagree" 2 points, "Agree" 3 points, and "Strongly Agree" 4 points. The score ranges from 10 (lowest) to 40 (highest).

2. General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg 1972) is used to measure minor symptoms of psychological problems that assess respondent's current state. The 28 item self-report has four (4) subscales with each containing seven (7) items that examine symptoms associated with depression, hopelessness/suicide ideation, social dysfunction, positive thinking (perseverance) and negative thoughts. The reported Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for GHQ ranges from 0.82 to 0.86. The sub sectional reliability coefficient were somatic indicator (alpha = 0.83); suicidal ideation/severe hopelessness (alpha= 0.81); Insomnia/thought distortion (alpha = 0.72); and social dysfunction (alpha =0.76) respectively. Each response was scored on a 4 point Likert scale from "Not at all" with 0 point, "No more than usual" 1 point, "Rather more than usual" 2 point and "Much more than usual" 3 point. Sample items on this scale are "I have been feeling perfectly well and in good health," I have been getting edgy and bad tempered," "I felt I am doing things well" and "I found the ideas of taking your own life kept coming to mind". The total score of all items ranged from lowest (0) to highest (84). So the higher the score the more severe the condition.

3. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995) is a 21 items is a set of three (3) self-report scales used to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress in an individual. The reported Cronbach alpha for DASS subscale reliability coefficient were with a values of 0.81, 0.89 and 0.78 with excellent internal consistency and validity for depression, anxiety and stress respectively. Each contains seven (7) items that measures symptoms such as hopelessness, devaluation of life, lack of interest and inertia on the depression scale. The anxiety scale measures symptoms as skeletal muscle effects, automatic arousal and situational anxiety while stress scale measures symptoms such as irrational behaviour, impatient, easily upset and difficulty relaxing. Some items on the scale are “I couldn’t seem to experience any positive feeling at all,” “I wasn’t worth much as a person,” and “I tended to over-react to situations,” Responses was scored on a 4 point Likert scale as follows: “Did not apply to me at all” 0 point, “Applied to me to some degree” 1 point, “Applied to me to some degree” 2 point and “Applied to me very much” with 3 point. The total score are multiplied by 2 and are labelled from normal (0-9 “depression”, 0-7 “anxiety” and 0-14 “stress”) moderate (14-20 “depression” anxiety “10-14” and stress “19-25”) Severe (depression “21+” anxiety “15+” stress “26+”).

3.3 Procedures

The descriptive statistics such as frequency count, simple percentages, mean, and standard deviation were generated in presenting the results. The Epi Info Version 3.5.1 was used for the data coding and exported into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for analyses. To determine the relationship between variables, researchers employed the Pearson's (r) correlation coefficient, and linear regression were used to significantly determine variables predictions variance in the study. A total of 400 questionnaires was prepared and administered by researchers to participants of the study. Out of which 388 were retrieved, however, 380 were duly completed and considered valid for the quantitative analysis. The procedure adhered to the principles of the human participant and clearly explained the nature of the study therefore, only those who volunteered and signed the ‘informed consent form’ participated, and agreed, the data to be computed and the results to be published in an international journal.

3.4 The design

The study employed a descriptive research design. The variables for the regression models were:

Independent variable: unemployment

Dependent variables: low self-esteem, depressions, suicidal ideation, perseverance and irrational thoughts

4. RESULTS

Result in table 1 showed the Pearson *r* inter-correlation analysis of the psychological health variable to determine their strength and relationships

Table.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Unemployment	3.72(.45)	-					
Low self-esteem	3.03(.67)	.29**	-				
Suicidal ideation	3.75(.33)	.22**	.19**	-			
Depression	3.74(.35)	.18**	.22**	.94**	-		
Perseverance	3.68(.34)	-.05**	.65**	.69**	.64**	-	
Irrational thoughts/behaviour	3.02(.62)	.25**	.58**	.42**	.78**	-.064**	-

Significant at ** $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$

Testing hypothesis one in table 1, matrix of bivariate correlation of the variables revealed significant relationship with each other except perseverance. Unemployment has a significant relationship with low self-esteem ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), suicidal ideation ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$), depression ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), irrational thoughts/behaviour ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$) and negatively with perseverance (Grit) ($r = -0.05$, $p > 0.05$).

Although a negative relationship emerged with perseverance (attitude of grit) and the overall effect of unemployment on youth among variables of the study. This shows that unemployed youth are more likely to adopt a negative attitude and become more psychologically down in their condition than to persevere. Therefore, it is not surprising that unemployment had a negative correlation with perseverance.

For the rest of the hypothesis the simple linear regression models were applied. Hence, the following results were obtained:

1. Testing the second hypotheses “unemployment will positively predict youth ability to persevere” it was confirmed for $R = .049$, $p > .05$. The simple linear regression model is the following: Perseverance = $3.952 - .063 * \text{unemployment}$

2. Testing hypothesis three “predicting each psychological health variables negatively on unemployment”.

For “unemployment predicts depression” it was confirmed for $R = .183$, $p < .01$. The linear regression equation is the following:

$$\text{Depression} = 2.828 + .238 * \text{unemployment}$$

For “Low self-esteem and unemployment” it was confirmed for $R = .298$, $p < .01$. The simple linear regression equation is the following:

$$\text{Low self-esteem} = 3.113 + .200 * \text{unemployment}$$

For “youth unemployment predicts suicidal ideation” it was confirmed for $R = .212$, $p > .01$. The simple linear regression equation is the following:

$$\text{Suicide ideation} = 2.616 + .294 * \text{unemployment}$$

For “unemployment negatively predicts irrational thoughts” it was confirmed for $R=.252$, $p<.01$. The regression equation is the following:

$$\text{Irrational thought} = 3.168 + .182 * \text{unemployment.}$$

Regarding the prediction models, the hypotheses were confirmed that low self-esteem, depression, suicidal ideation, and irrational thought was found to negatively statistically significantly predict unemployment for $p<.01$ and positively not significant with perseverance $p>.05$. Results confirmed literatures in the introduction that unemployment significantly cause poor psychological health such as low self-esteem, irrational thoughts and depression. This finding is in line with the Bronfenbrenner’s theory that the microsystems interact with each other. For example, to strengthen and propel unemployed individual for success psychologically, family and friends could create a safe place socially or at home where these individuals feel comfortable to express their feelings and emotions.

According to the results and previous studies youth have become vulnerable to suicidal thoughts since such negative thoughts occur when an unemployed person is psychologically depressed which is related to the study conducted by Boden, Fergusson & Horwood (2014) that unemployment sometimes leads to suicide attempts contributing to social insecurity and all sorts of undesirable behaviours. This emanates from the hope of good employment upon graduation, a better life, enabling environment and a good future getting watered down over the years. The findings also confirmed Bronfenbrenner’s theory that the ecosystems influences ones behaviour, experience and decisions.

Analyzing these results in this study confirmed Bronfenbrenner theory that the chronosystem (individual) personality traits help to better understand and manage the issues of psychological health during unemployment. Arguably, this result should be interpreted with caution, which mean, individual difference play a huge role in people’s response to unemployment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that youth unemployment significantly correlates with low self-esteem, depression, suicidal ideation, and irrational thought which confirms the primary research hypothesis. Youth unemployment has a substantial significant adverse effect on psychological health. Therefore, the state's leadership needs to play a critical role in adequately growing and shaping the economy, job creation policies, and programs that will ultimately avail opportunities to realize their potentials in the work environment rather than constantly struggling to get employed. Also, based on the fast declining economy and hardship, youth unemployment should not be overlooked. On the bases of the findings, it was recommended that the need for health care facilities and rapid special health-promoting measures for unemployed youth experiencing low self-esteem, depression, suicidal ideation, and other psychological issues be made generally available.

Further studies could focus on exploring range of essential supports unemployed individuals requires; as well as to ascertain the psychological effects of youth unemployment comparing previously employed and never being employed youth so that useful information can be gathered for the improvement of social interventions to help unemployed individuals cope better. Also, relating psychological health to other variables such as financial stress, nepotism, anxiety, spirituality, social and family expectation to youth unemployment.

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