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Social Support Systems as a Correlate of Mental Health Disorders among Young Adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated Social Support Systems as a Correlate of Mental Health Disorders among Young Adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. It emphasized the need to recognize and prioritize social support systems (such as family, friends, mental health services, online communities, and crisis helplines), as a vital tool to address mental health disorders (anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation) among young adults, which has become a global menace. A total of 674,861 young adults of both genders, aged 20-49 years from the 13 Local Governments in Nasarawa State made up the population of the study. A sample size of 400 young adults, consisting of 200 males and 200 females, was selected using the Slovin formula. A self-developed 4-point Likert scale instrument titled Social Support Systems and Mental Health Disorders (SSSMHD) was used for data collection. The study was premised on the Resilience Theory. At 0.05 level of significance and with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.906, the result shows a significant positive linear relationship between social support systems and the willingness of young adults to seek support which could reduce stress and help to prevent or manage mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Socio-economic factors such as income and employment, cultural beliefs, and stigmatization also contribute to young adults' decision to seek support. This study recommends that families, community, health practitioners, policymakers and government should work towards achieving mental health wellness and productivity of young adults in Nasarawa state.

Keywords: Social Support Systems, Social Support, Mental Health Disorders

Introduction

Mental health is a condition of mental wellness that enables people to manage life's stressors, develop their potential, study and work effectively, and give back to their communities. It is a crucial element of health and well-being that supports both our individual and societal capacities for decision-making, relationship-building, and world-shaping (WHO, 2022). Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being are all parts of our mental health. It influences our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Additionally, it influences how we respond to stress, interact with others, and make good decisions. A core human right is access to mental health. Every stage of life—from childhood and adolescence through adulthood—values it (CDC, 2023), and it is essential for socioeconomic, communal, and personal development.

The state of someone's mental health may alter throughout time depending on a variety of factors. A person's mental health may be affected if the demands placed on them are greater than their capacity for coping and resources. A person may have poor mental health, for instance, if they work long hours, provide care for a relative who is terminally sick, or are struggling financially. Sexual abuse, trauma, substance misuse, biological issues, social isolation, and feelings of

loneliness are other elements that might have an effect on an individual's mental health (Amoah, Heck & Kim, 2022).

In particular, among young adults between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine, mental health issues are among the most prevalent medical illnesses worldwide. Anxiety, eating disorders including bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), substance misuse, and depression which is the most prevalent of these diseases, are frequent mental health conditions affecting young adults (Martin, Dourish, Hook, Chamberlin & Higgs, 2020). These disorders might appear occasionally or persist for a long time in the lives of those who are affected. Lack of attention, severe mood swings, a lack of ambition, social isolation from family and friends, a significant change in eating habits, low self-esteem, and irregular sleep patterns are among the symptoms of mental health disorders in young adults that are frequently present. Mental health disorders can have environmental or genetic causes, such as poor living circumstances brought on by financial difficulty, a family history of mental health disorders, workplace or family disputes, traumatic experiences, and a lack of access to good support systems.

The mental health of young adults is influenced by life events. Social support has been revealed to have a cushion effect on the influence such events may have on mental health (Haugstvedt, 2022). Social support refers to the comfort given to people which could help them to overcome a set of social, economic, cultural, psychological, ethnic/racial and behavioral factors that can potentially impact their physical and mental health negatively (Adimora, Ogba, Omeje, Amaeze & Adene, 2021) and (Bello, Kinnawo, Akpunne & Onisile, 2022). Social support from family and close friends especially, is a vital protective factor (Bauer, Stevens, Purtscheller, Knapp, Fonagy, Evans-Lacko & Paul, 2021) which is very important for maintaining a positive mental health and for recovering from moderate to acute mental health disorders (Biorlykhaug, Karlsson, Hesook & Kleppe, 2021). Social support could come in various forms such as emotional, financial, tangible, appraisal, and informational support. These forms of support could be accessed physically or from support groups online from support systems such as the family, friends, school/work colleagues, online communities, crisis helplines, from government programs, and mental health professionals. However, a larger size of interpersonal interaction is said to be linked to a greater likelihood of receiving different types of social support, which in turn promote subjective mental health well-being (Han, 2023). In Nigeria's diverse society, social connections and relationships are highly prized but cost-push inflation and the current economic hardship has made it almost impossible for Nigerians to provide adequate social support for one another. Non-governmental organizations are crumbling under the weight of unfavorable government policies while anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation levels increase among young adults in the country.

It has long been known that stressful situations and unfavourable life events have the potential to cause mental health disorders. In the same vein, people have long been interested in the excellent outcomes that certain people achieve amid extremely unfavourable circumstances. Resilience in the context of psychology is the generic term used to describe these favourable reactions or results an individual exhibit in the face of severe danger to their physical and mental health (Vella & Pai, 2019). Various experts from diverse fields including psychology have studied

Resilience theory over time and have related it to their study, therefore, the theory does not have a single proponent. However, from the field of psychology, there are notable persons who were considered pioneers of resilience theory based on their input. These people include Norman Garmezy and Ann Masten whose studies contributed to knowledge on resilience in children, child development and importance of social support systems since 1970. Psychology's notion of resilience is a dynamic, multidisciplinary field of study that takes into account both environmental and personal elements that affect a person's capacity to adjust to and prosper in the face of hardship or intense challenge. Among young adults, certain positive traits like optimism, social and personal resourcefulness, optimism, and a sense of purpose in life may serve as buffers against anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Murphy & Allan, 2022)

Despite the increase in mental health disorders among young adults globally and in Nigeria, individuals still refuse to access the help which social support systems provide due to some factors. Socio-economic factors such as income and employment (Hazell, Thornton, Haghparast-Bidgoli & Patalay, 2022), cultural beliefs and stigmatization due to mental health disorders (Rodwin, Shimizu, Banya, Moore, Bessaha, Pahwa, Yanos & Munson, 2023) are all significant barriers to young adults' willingness to seek mental health service use and recovery.

This study investigated the relationship between social support systems and mental health disorders (anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation) among young adults between the ages of twenty and forty-nine years old in the thirteen local government areas of Nasarawa state. Ethical considerations including acquisition of informed consent from respondents, confidentiality, and protection of the respondents' data were strictly carried out during the course of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The growing prevalence of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, to mention a few, among young adults between the ages of twenty and forty-nine years has become a major public health concern in Nigeria. Socio-economic factors (especially in the face of the current economic hardship due to a hike in petroleum prices), cultural beliefs, stigmatization attached to mental health issues and traditional healing practices which are unique to Nigeria and to Nasarawa state all contribute to the willingness of these young adults to seek out available social support systems which could help lift their burdens and also prevent or reduce the effect of mental health disorders on their lives. Due to the limited number of literature on the role of social support systems in preventing or eradicating mental health disorders, this study seeks to address this gap in literature by exploring the relationship between social support systems and mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state, Nigeria

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to determine the relationship between social support systems and mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state, Nigeria. The study's objectives were to:

1. examine the level and patterns of mental health disorders (anxiety, depression) among young adults in Nasarawa state
2. examine the level of social support systems available to young adults in Nasarawa state

3. examine the influence of social support systems on the prevention of mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state
4. identify the combined influence of socio-economic factors (income, employment), cultural beliefs, stigmatization due to mental health disorders on young adults' willingness to seek social support.

Research Questions

1. What is the level and patterns of mental health disorders (anxiety, depression) among young adults in Nasarawa state?
2. What is the level of social support systems available to young adults in Nasarawa state?

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant influence of social support systems on the prevention of mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state

HO₂: There is no significant combined influence of socio-economic factors (such as income, employment), cultural beliefs, or stigmatization due to mental health disorders on the willingness of young adults of Nasarawa state to seek social support

Methodology

The population of the study consists of a total of 674,861 male and female young adults between the ages of 20 and 49 years from the 13 Local Governments in Nasarawa State. The respondents at this level were specifically chosen for this study because they are in the transitional period of life; moving from the completion of their education to building careers and families. This age group is presumed to be able to provide pertinent information that could aid in achieving the study's goals. In order to construct a statistically meaningful sample for the study, the researcher created precise criteria for sampling both male and female residents of the 13 Local Government Areas in Nasarawa State. The sample size for the study; a total of 400 respondents which includes 200 male and 200 female respondents, was determined using Slovin's formula $n = N/(1 + Ne^2)$. Thirty respondents were chosen from each of the three smallest local governments while thirty-one respondents were chosen from each of the ten larger sized local government areas in the state. The sample for the study was chosen using simple random sampling technique.

A self-developed instrument tagged Social Support Systems and Mental Health Disorders (SSSMHD) was designed for the study to gather the required data from the respondents. The instrument is segmented into three sections A, B and C. The demographic information of the respondents, including age and gender, is gathered in Section A. Section B contain items to determine the types of social support, social support systems, the levels of availability of the support systems and the perceived influence of social support systems on mental health prevention among young adults in Nasarawa state. Section C contain items to determine the types and prevalence of mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state and the influence of factors such as socio-economic, cultural beliefs and stigmatization due to mental health disorders on the willingness of young adults to seek help from social support systems. The instrument was scrutinized and vetted by experts in research items generation at Lead City

University before it was administered to the respondents. A pilot study was carried out by administering the instrument to fifty (50) respondents who were exempted from the actual study. With a Cronbach alpha coefficient $r = 0.87$, the instrument was deemed reliable. Data analysis for the stated research questions and hypotheses was done using the IBM SPSS 25 statistical package.

Data Analysis

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level and patterns of mental health disorders (anxiety, depression) among young adults in Nasarawa state?

Table 4.2.1: Mental Health Disorders

S/N	Types and Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I am aware of the types of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation among young adults in Nasarawa state	2.04	1.111
2	I understand that mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation are prevalent among young adults in Nasarawa state	1.92	1.101
Total		1.98	1.106

Table 4.2.1 show a moderate level of awareness of the types of mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state. However, the respondents have varying degrees of the level of awareness of these mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state. Also, the respondents' understanding of the prevalence of these mental health disorders appears to be slightly lower compared to the level of awareness of the mental health disorders. This answers the first research question of this study.

Research Question 2: What is the level of social support systems available to young adults in Nasarawa state?

Table 4.2.2: Types of Social Support Received by Respondents

S/N	Social Support Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Emotional Support	70	17.5
2	Financial Support	48	12.0
3	Informational Support	91	22.8
4	Tangible Support	65	16.3
5	Instrumental Support	45	11.3
6	Appraisal Support	16	4.0
7	Companionship Support	48	12.0
8	Network Support	17	4.3
Total		400	100

Table 4.2.2 show the different types of social support received by young adults in Nasarawa state. Informational support is the highest social support type which young adults in Nasarawa state receives while Appraisal support is the least type of social support received by the young adults in Nasarawa state. This answers the second research question of this study.

Table 4.2.3: Levels of Social Support Received from Support Systems

S/N	Social Support Systems	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I receive emotional, financial, tangible and informational support from my family members	2.74	1.022
2	I am currently in a committed relationship	1.54	1.073
3	My spouse is supportive of my emotional, and financial well-being	1.50	.782
4	Besides family and friends, I turn to other sources for support during times of stress and difficulty	2.96	1.094
5	I have close friends whom I can confide in or seek support from	2.21	1.256
5	I am actively involved in community or social	2.46	.988
6		1.26	.460

groups within Nasarawa state		
7	I attend religious gatherings (church or mosque) where I interact with others and potentially receive support	3.51 .596
8	I participate in online social networks or support groups that provide emotional or/and informational support	2.45 .871
9		3.20 .816
10	I am satisfied with the support I currently receive from my social network	2.00 1.084
11	I take advantage of mental health services available in my school/work/environment and crisis hotlines when I undergo stress or need someone to talk to.	2.40 1.071
	I take advantage of government programs and financial aids to ease financial or emotional constraints	
	I am satisfied with my overall perceived social support	
Total		2.57 1.010

The results on Table 4.2.3 show that the respondents seem satisfied with the level of support that they receive from their family members. The respondents agree to being in committed relationships with supportive spouses, and they seek varying levels of support from support

systems besides their family and friends. The respondents are involved in community and religious activities, online social networks, and are moderately satisfied with their current social support. The respondents reported taking advantage of mental health services and programs provided by the government to ease emotional and financial constraints of young adults. A total mean score of 2.57 and standard deviation of 1.010 indicates that the respondents have an overall moderate level of social support, at different degrees. Therefore, the first hypothesis (HO₁) of the study which states that there is no significant influence of social support systems on the prevention of mental health disorders among young adults in Nasarawa state is rejected.

Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant combined influence of socio-economic factors (such as income, employment), cultural beliefs, or stigmatization due to mental health disorders on the willingness of young adults of Nasarawa state to seek social support

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.906 ^a	.821	.820	1.36893	.056

a. Predictors: (Constant), SoCulStig

b. Dependent Variable: Willingness

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3412.003	1	3412.003	1820.742	.000 ^b
	Residual	745.837	398	1.874		
	Total	4157.840	399			

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness

b. Predictors: (Constant), SoCulStig

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.213		1.095	.274
	SoCulStig	.528	.906	42.670	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Willingness

With a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.906, the result of the regression analysis shows a significant positive linear relationship between social support systems and the willingness of young adults in Nasarawa state to seek social support from support systems due to socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs and stigmatization due to mental health disorders. Therefore, the second hypothesis (HO₂) of the study which states that there is no significant combined influence of socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, or stigmatization due to mental health disorders on the willingness of young adults of Nasarawa state to seek social support is rejected.

Summary of Findings

At 0.05 level of significance and with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.906, the result shows a significant positive linear relationship between social support systems and the willingness of young adults to seek support which could reduce stress and help to prevent or manage mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation

Conclusion

The ability to recover from hardship, such as stress, pain, trauma, and other life experiences, is known as resilience. It is vital to teach young people how to set long-term goals and a successful approach, as well as good coping mechanisms, adaptation, and perseverance, in spite of life's challenges. Reliable and efficient social support networks will help young adults prevent and manage anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in addition to helping them develop resilience.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations based on the findings of the study;

1. Promotion of community-based initiatives to raise awareness of mental health issues and to provide support services in Nasarawa state that are especially geared towards young adults. The goals of these efforts ought to be to raise awareness of symptoms, lessen the stigma associated with mental health illnesses, and advertise options that may be used to get assistance.
2. The growth and development of young adults' social support systems in the state of Nasarawa should be encouraged. This can entail setting up online forums, community centres, and peer support groups where people can get in touch with others going through comparable struggles. It can also be helpful to teach volunteers and community leaders in providing sympathetic support and making appropriate referrals to mental health services.
3. In Nasarawa state, mental health education and awareness initiatives ought to be part of the curricula of educational institutions and career centres. Likewise, workplaces must to offer training courses and workshops on coping mechanisms, stress management, and identifying symptoms of mental health issues. Promoting mental wellbeing at a young age and in the workplace helps people find better coping strategies and get help when they need it.

4. Adoption of laws in the state of Nasarawa with the goal of closing socioeconomic gaps, and removing societal stigmas related to mental health issues. This could entail making improvements to underprivileged young adults' access to healthcare, work opportunities, and education. Community-based interventions should also emphasise dispelling damaging cultural stereotypes about mental health and fostering understanding and acceptance in families and communities.

These recommendations seek to establish a conducive atmosphere in which young adults in the state of Nasarawa feel empowered to seek out mental health services, obtain sufficient assistance, and get over obstacles arising from cultural and socioeconomic considerations.

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