

PARENTAL STRESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS PREDICTORS OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated parental stress and substance use as psychosocial predictors of mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Correlational research design was used for the study. Two objectives, two research questions were answered while two corresponding null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A sample of 1,324 undergraduate students from a population of 78,525 undergraduate students was used for the study. Multistage sampling procedure was used. Instruments for data collection were titled psychosocial predictors questionnaire and mental health challenges scale comprising a 21 item self-report inventory known as DASS-Depression, anxiety, stress scales were used. The instruments were validated by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in measurement and evaluation in the department of Educational Psychological Guidance and Counselling University of Port Harcourt Choba. The coefficients of reliability for the two instruments were done using the Cronbach alpha reliability method of internal consistency, and the following reliabilities were obtained, psychosocial predictors questionnaire 0.835 and mental health challenges scale 0.911. The research questions were answered using simple regression while the null hypotheses were tested using t-test associated with simple regression. Findings revealed among others that there is a low and weak positive prediction between parental stress and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, same for substance use and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State and the prediction is statistically significant. Based on these findings it was recommended among others that parents should use the right parenting styles targeted at showing love, care, support and empathy towards their children. And secondly professional counsellors and mental health experts or specialists or healthcare providers should tailor interventions towards organizing seminars, workshops, counselling sessions/psychoeducation and screening tests for students with substance use or alcohol use disorder. Also, those with chronic mental health challenges can be provided with medical care and intervention in a mental health facility with the support of their parents.

Keywords: Parental stress, substance use, mental health challenges, undergraduate students.

Introduction

Tertiary education is not just advantageous to an individual but also the society at large. Graduates of tertiary institutions are more environmentally conscious, have healthier habits and have a higher level of civic participation. This can only be possible if such undergraduate students are healthy in

mind, body and spirit. The role of these tertiary institutions in the overall development of students is very vital, as university life or life in the higher institution is a period of personal growth, academic pressure, and the formation of professional identities. However, transitioning to a life in the higher institution most times involves various psychosocial challenges that can majorly affect students' mental health. Stressors like social challenges, and personal expectations are common sources of stress for undergraduate students (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). If not properly managed, these psychosocial challenges can hinder students' mental well-being. If these students are faced with one mental health challenge or the other, they may find it difficult to be active, productive and functional members of their society.

Mental health can be seen as a continuous experience, where an individual's mental health may have different possible values (Keyes, 2002). Mental wellness is seen as a positive characteristic or feature, this definition of mental health explains emotional well-being, as the ability to live a full and creative life, and the flexibility to deal with life's inevitable challenges. Some explanations are formed based on contentment or happiness (Graham, 2014). Many therapeutic experiences and self-help books give techniques and philosophies exposing strategies and techniques considered as effective for further encouraging mental wellness. Positive psychology is becoming very important in mental health.

Mental health challenge is a concept that existed over a long period of time. It is used to describe a problem or distress a person is going through emotionally, socially, psychologically, among others that makes it difficult for an individual to carry out his/her daily activities effectively. It could also be detrimental to the overall development of the individual involved.

According to World Health Organization (2021), a mental health challenge is known by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation or behavior. It is usually connected with distress or impairment in critical areas of functioning. There are various types of mental health challenges. Mental health challenges can also be referred to as mental health conditions. The latter is a wider term used to describe psychosocial disabilities and other mental states linked with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or danger of self-harm. This study focuses on mental disorders as described by the international classification of diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11). These mental health challenges are; parental stress, substance use, trauma, academic stress among others.

When a parent is stressed out it has the tendency to transmit such negative stress effects to the child, something that cannot be avoided easily due to the nature of the relationship between parent and child (Sharry, 2024). "The bond between parents and their children is many times or always extremely associated with each other's mental health. When the parent can show they are positive and happy it can create an atmosphere of safety and security for the child. Such an atmosphere leads to greater well being for everyone involved", "signs of strain in parents are usually manifested by signs of tension, like anxiety, quick-temper, trouble getting enough sleep and even physical reactions like migraines and feeling of unwellness" (Sharry, 2024) "when parents are under pressure, it can have a major impact on their parenting abilities. This is because feeling stressed stops or hinders them from performing their parental role like listening and really understanding what their children are saying. Furthermore, it makes parents to be irritable and more likely to respond harshly when faced with difficult moments (Sharry, 2024). Thus this situation can cause mental health challenges for undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Rakhshani et al (2022) conducted an experimental study on adolescent girls aged 12-16 years in Mahshahr city, Khizestan Province, Iran, in 2020. The multi stage sampling procedure was used. Mean anxiety and depression before, two and six months after intervention was measured by the test and control groups using parenting style, anxiety, and depression questionnaires. The result of the study showed that mean and standard deviation of the age were 14.03 ± 1.41 in the experimental

group and 14.06 ± 1.38 in the control group. Before the educational intervention, the mean scores of anxiety and depression were not significantly different between the experimental and control groups. In contrast two months and six months after the education intervention, there was a significant difference in the mean scores of anxiety and depression between the experimental and control groups ($P < 0.05$). Conclusively the findings of this study revealed that educational intervention on a group of mothers regarding their parenting styles has helped their adolescent daughters to handle or manage their anxiety and depression and also led to a decrease or reduction in all anxiety and depression scores.

Vijay, Gonsalves & Ramesh (2022) did a study on parenting styles and mental of adolescents. The study adopted a cross sectional study in south India which involved adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 years studying in government secondary schools located in two villages of rural Karnataka, South India. Parenting styles were assessed by parenting styles and dimensions questionnaire (PSDQ) short version, and stress was measured using the perceived stress scale. The result revealed that among the 445 adolescents who took part in the study 228 (51.2%) were male and 217 (48.8%) were female. Based on the mean PSDQ score, authoritarian parenting style (55.07%) was the most prevalent type, followed by the authoritative style (52.6%). The prevalence of moderate and mild stress was among boys and girls respectively.

Substance abuse is the continuous use of alcohol, illegal drugs or the misuse of prescription or over-the-counter medicines with negative results. These results may include; problems with the law, problems at work, school, home or interpersonal relationships, health problems and physical dangers that come with the use of drugs in harmful situations or circumstances. Substances that are commonly used include; alcohol, amphetamines, cocaine, inhalants, LSD (Lysergic acid diethylamide), marijuana PCP (Phencyclidine) and prescription medicine. Other names for substance use are; substance abuse, illicit drug abuse, narcotic abuse, hallucinogen abuse (APA, 2022, Weiss & Liebschuts, 2023).

Substance abuse also known as drug abuse is the use of a drug in portions or by methods that are harmful to the individual or others. It is a form of substance related disorder. Various definitions of drug abuse are used in public health, medical and criminal justice context. In some cases, criminal or anti-social behavior occurs or happens when the individual is under the control of a drug and long term personality changes in persons may happen (Ray & Charles, 2022). In addition to possible physical, social and psychological harm, the use of some drugs may also lead to criminal penalties, although these differs widely depending on the social jurisdiction (Mosby, 2002).

Drugs most times are linked to this term include; opioids, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, cannabis, methaqualone. The exact cause of substance abuse is not clear, but there are two predominant or common theories, either a genetic predisposition or habit learnt from others; which one gets addicted to it, manifest itself as a chronic harmful disease thus causing mental health challenges for undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Richert, Anderberg and Dahleg (2020) carried out a study on mental health problems among young people in substance abuse treatment in Sweden. The study is based on structured interviews with 1,970 young people enrolled at outpatient clinics in 11 Swedish cities. The result revealed that self-reported mental health problems were prevalent among youths in this study. A relatively large percentage of the total group (34-54%) reported problems such as concentration difficulties, sleeping difficulties, anxiety and depression. At the same time, many of the youths did not report any symptoms and only a small group, about 20% reported diagnosed mental health disorders. The results show substantial gender variations, with girls reporting significantly higher levels of mental health problems. Multivariate logistic regression analysis depicted significant association between severity of drug use problems and anxiety, concentration difficulties, aggression, hallucinations and mental stress caused by experiences of trauma.

Blows and Isaacs (2022) carried out a study on prevalence and factors associated with substance use among university students in South Africa: Implications for prevention. The study adopted quantitative study, used convenience sampling to recruit university students who were 18 years and older from a university in the Western Cape. The study used self-administered online questionnaires, which participants completed using the survey monkey. The sample consisted of 2,915 students. Descriptive statistics were employed to describe and give the prevalence and overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The results of the findings revealed a substance use prevalence rate of 62.7%. The most prominent substances used by students were alcohol (80.6%), cannabis (46%) and ecstasy (5.3%). The study further revealed clear association between students' substance use and mental health. Students who reported substance use at the university reported higher depression and anxiety scores than those who did not. However, findings depict no significant association ($p=0.233$) between being a substance user and students' respective self-perceived stress scores.

The researcher has observed that many undergraduate students in our tertiary institutions are daily faced with various mental health challenges that affect the daily functioning of their lives and these problems are becoming so alarming that a lot of them are beginning to suffer from mental health problems or issues leading to the need to take them to a mental health facility for medical care and intervention. These undergraduate students go through mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, stress, phobias, panic attacks, eating disorders, low self-esteem, insomnia, substance or drug abuse among others.

These challenges can lead to grievous consequences such as these youths going psychotic that is they begin to hear voices and see things that are not really there which are known as visual and auditory hallucinations and delusions. They begin to speak to themselves unknowingly, for some others they become malnourished and look skinny and abnormal behavior is observed. Many of them look unkempt and tattered. It also gets to a point that the vital or sensitive organs of these youths become diseased such organs as the heart, lungs, liver, kidney among others and this situation can lead to death.

The researcher also observed that these undergraduate students at a point can no longer cope with their school or academic programmes and they begin to drop out of school. They also begin to experience discrimination and stigmatization from family members or relatives and also their friends thus leading to lack of social support from these set of persons.

Some undergraduate students who are unable to cope with all of these challenges may begin to have suicidal tendencies or ideation, some even go as far as committing suicide. They also may suffer from brain disorder or problems. These undergraduate students may go as far as stealing money from anywhere just to remain on drugs to avoid withdrawal symptoms. They lack concentration in whatever they are doing. They cannot do any meaningful work. Some of these youths become anti-social beings because they break the law of any institution they find themselves and exhibit criminal tendencies including committing deadly crimes without any sign of remorse. What then could be responsible for all these? Could it be as a result of some psychosocial factors like parental stress and substance use among others.

It is against this premise that this paper is to investigate parental stress and substance use as predictors of mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

The aim of the study was to determine the prediction of parental stress and substance use on mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Specifically the aim of the study were:

1. To ascertain the extent to which parental stress predicts mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

2. To assess the level to which substance use predicts mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent does parental stress predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?
2. To what level does substance use predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

The following null hypothesis were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant prediction between parental stress and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant prediction between substance use and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted the use of correlational research design. It was used for the prediction of a criterion variable (dependent variable) on the basis of several predictor variables (independent variables), (Kpolovie, 2016). Nwankwo (2016) posited that correlation research design is the design that shows the direction and magnitude of relationship between two or more variables. The above descriptions by the two authors justified the design used for the study on parental stress and substance use as predictors of mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers state. The population of the study comprised all 78,525 undergraduate students in Rivers State. From the three government owned universities and two polytechnics. The sample size for the study was 1,324 undergraduate students in the tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to randomly select the faculties based on their respective institutions (universities and polytechnics) and the simple random sampling technique was also used to draw two departments from each of the faculties from the five tertiary institutions. These departments have specific number of students which the researcher made use of (uniport-353, RSU-478, IAUE-122, Kensarowiwa Poly-200 and Captain Elechi Amadi Poly-171) giving a sum total of 1,324 for the sample. The instruments for data collection were the psychosocial predictors questionnaire (PPQ) and the mental health challenges scale (comprising of depression, anxiety, stress scales) a 21-item self-reporting scale (DASS-21). Copies of the instruments were given to the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in measurement and evaluation, in the department of Educational psychology, Guidance and Counselling University of Port Harcourt, Choba. Their inputs/suggestions were used for remodeling and correcting of the instruments.

The reliability of the instruments, (psychosocial Predictors Questionnaires (PPQ) and mental health challenges scale (MHCs) were estimated using the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Method of Internal consistency. The reliability coefficients for the instruments were psychosocial predictor's Questionnaire 0.835 and mental health challenges scale 0.911. These are standardized instruments. The instruments were administered to the students by the researcher, assisted by two trained research assistants. Copies of the instruments were retrieved after the students had given their responses. Data collected was analysed using simple regression statistics in statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The research questions were answered using simple regression and the test of hypotheses was done using t-test associated with simple regression at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: To what extent does parental stress predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

Table 1: Simple Regression analysis on the extent parental stress predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Model	R	RSquare	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.073a	.005	.005	.47397

Table 1 revealed that the regression coefficient R was calculated to be 0.073 while the regression squared value was computed to be 0.005. This shows that there is a low and weak positive prediction between parental stress and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Judging by the coefficient of determination which is 7.3% change in mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers state can be predicted by parental stress, while 92.7% was accounted for by other variables not considered in this study.

Research Question Two: To what extent does substance use predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

Table 1: Simple Regression analysis on the extent substance use predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Model	R	RSquare	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.267 ^a	.071	.071	.45801

Table 2 revealed that the regression coefficient R was calculated to be 0.267 while the regression squared value was computed to be 0.071. This shows that there is a low and weak positive prediction between substance use and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Judging by the coefficient of determination which is 7.1% change in mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State can be predicted by substance use, while 92.9% was accounted for by other variables not considered in this study.

Hypothesis One: Parental stress does not significantly predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Table 3: T-test associated with Simple regressions on how Parental stress predicts mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.032	0.45		45.555	.000
	Parental stress	-.060	.022	-.073	-.662	.008

Table 3 shows that the t-test calculated for parental stress is -2.662 and the significant P-value of 0.008, is lower than 0.05 level of significant ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected,

this implies that parental stress significantly predicts mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: Substance use does not significantly predict mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Table 4: T-test associated with Simple regressions on how substance use predicts mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.564	0.38	41.693	.000
	Substance use	-.252	.025	-2.67	10.053
					.000

Table 4 shows that the t-test calculated for substance use is 10.053 and the significant P-value of 0.000, is lower than 0.05 level of significance ($P < 0.05$). therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, this implies that substance use significantly predicts mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Parental stress and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

There is a low and weak positive prediction between parental stress and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State and the prediction is statistically significant. This finding is in alignment with the views of Rakh Shani et al (2022) who conducted an experimental study on adolescent girls aged 12-16 years in Mahshajri Khuzetan province, Iran, in 2020. Their findings revealed that educational intervention on a group of matters regarding their parenting styles has helped their adolescent daughters to handle or manage their anxiety and depression and also led to a decrease or reduction in all anxiety and depressive scores. The result is also in alignment with Vijay Gonsalves and Ramesh (2022) who carried out a study on parenting styles and mental health of adolescents. The study revealed that according to adolescents their parents adopted authoritarian parenting styles, permissive styles among boys and authoritative parenting style among girls and this was associated with high stress levels. The results above are in alignment with the present study because parental stress makes it difficult for parents to give a listening ear to their children, it creates signs of tension like anxiety, quick temper, trouble, getting enough sleep, physical reactions like migraines among others. It can also have a significant effect or impact on the parenting abilities of parents when they are under pressure thereby leading to mental health challenges for both parents and children alike.

Substance use and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

There is a low and weak positive relationship between substance and mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State and the prediction is statistically significant. This finding is in line with Richert, Anderberg and Dahlberg (2020) who carried out a study on mental health problems among young people in substance treatment in Sweden. The result revealed that self-reported mental health problems were prevalent among youths in this study. A relatively large percentage of the total group (34-54%) reported problems

such as concentration difficulties, sleeping difficulties, anxiety and depression. At the same, many of the youths did not report any symptoms and only a small group about 20% reported diagnosis of mental health disorders. The result showed substantial gender variations with girls reporting significantly higher levels of mental health problems. Multivariate logistic regression analysis depicted significant association between severity of drug use problems and anxiety, concentration difficulties, aggression, hallucinations and mental stress caused by experiences of trauma.

The finding is also in agreement with Blows and Isaac (2022) who carried out a study on prevalence and factors associated with substance use among university students in South Africa implications for prevention. The result from the existing study revealed that there is a positive relationship between substance use and mental health challenges of undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The result above is not surprising because substance use can affect the overall health of the individual involved causing damages to various vital organs of the body like the heart, liver, kidney among others.

CONCLUSION

The study has given insight to the fact that many undergraduate students in our tertiary institutions today are going through psychosocial factors that predispose them to mental health challenges or conditions which can render them unfit or incapable of achieving their goals and aspirations in life if not properly managed. In conclusion the study found that parental stress and substance use had a low and weak positive prediction on mental health challenges among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents should use the right parenting styles targeted at showing love, care, support and empathy towards their children. This can be realized by parents checking up on their children in school from time to time to know how they are faring through their visits, phone calls, meeting the basic needs of their children, spending quality time with their children to know their challenges and proffer solutions to such problems.
2. Professional counsellors and mental health experts or specialists or healthcare providers should tailor interventions towards organizing seminars, workshops, counselling sessions/psychoeducation and screening tests for students with substance use or alcohol use disorder. And also those with chronic mental health challenges can also be provided with medical care and intervention in a mental health facility with the support of their parents.

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