



Depression and Anger during Covid-19 Pandemic as Correlate of Psychosocial Maladjustment of Secondary School Students in Imo State, Nigeria

C. M. Onwukwe ¹

¹*School of Education Demonstration Secondary School, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri Nigeria*

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic upended educational systems worldwide and posed profound psychological challenges for students. Parents became stuck at home with their young adults and adolescents, who had begun to manage their own life affairs and looking forward to finishing school and advance to the next level of life's prospects and dreams. The sphere of social space and interactions for these young people shrunk dramatically and drastically. The lock down imposed on all fabrics of society had no imminent time frame. Frustration, depression and anger mounted on families from all fronts. Live began to drift to uncomfortable new-normal. It was in the midst of the new-normal of face-masking, hand washing and sanitizing rituals, social distancing, among others that schools reopened to even new academic procedures like virtual classrooms. To what extent could the possible emotional distress of depression and anger of junior secondary school students be related to their psychosocial maladjustment in the midst of COVID-19, pandemic became the burden to the researcher. This study therefore, investigated the relationship between emotional distress of anger and depression on psychosocial maladjustment of junior secondary students in Imo state, Nigeria, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study design was a survey. A sample of 400 junior secondary students were randomly selected from sixteen junior secondary schools out of all junior secondary schools in the state. Two self-made instruments titled: "COVID-19 Emotional Distress Scale (CEDS)" and "Psychosocial Adjustment Scale (PAS)" were used to collect data. COVID-19 Emotional Distress Scale was calibrated on a four-point scale of Very High Extent (VHE =4 points), High Extent (HE= 3 points), Low Extent (LE= 2 points) and Very Low Extent (VLE =1 point). The data collected from the study was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Results show that Depression and anger related positively and insignificantly with psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State.

Keywords: Anger, COVID-19, Depression. Emotional distress, Maladjustment, Psychosocial

Introduction

Globally, research has shown great levels of emotional distress among students during Covid-19 pandemic, including increased anxiety, depressive symptoms and stress (Son et al, 2020). These states are often linked to reduced social interaction, academic disturbances and fear for personal and family health. Emotional distress generally includes feelings of anxiety, depression and worry that may impair daily functioning. Psychosocial adjustment refers to an individual's capacity to cope with social and psychological demands in their environment (Gan et al, 2021). In our country, Nigeria, particularly in Imo state, restrictive measures and prolonged closures intensified psychosocial changes among learners. However, limited empirical data exist on how emotional distress correlates with psychosocial maladjustment in this context. Understanding this relationship is important for designing effective interventions to support student well-being.

Concept of Emotional Distress

Emotional distress is a stress of the mind. The mind is unsettled in the event or case of emotional distress. It is characterized by anguish. An emotionally distressed person is visibly disturbed. His/her mood is not stable. Confusion, agony, restlessness and/or instability are some of the observable manifestations of emotional distress. Iheanacho (2020) elucidated that emotional distress is an affective problem characterized by the inability to calm the mind down. It is a challenging emotional state as the individual in question is disturbed or emotionally disorganized. The mind cannot calm down or settle down. As the name implies, emotional distress pertains to a turbulence or disturbance of the emotion. It is a state of unease, restlessness or anguish. This, no doubt is a galling or appalling situation. Emotion, which is the operational base of this distress deals with the mind. The mind is the center of affective feeling or mood. That is why emotional distress is an umbrella term for emotional states, conditions or occurrences that are troublesome, unpleasant or enervating. It encases challenging emotions of all sorts more often than not; such emotions are known for commotion, mental disarray, subjective suffering and chronic psychosocial disturbances. Below is a conceptual clarification on the emotional distresses under investigation:

Depression: Depression is an extreme form of sadness. Suffice it to state that depression is a mood disease that brings about a chronic feeling of unhappiness and disinterest (Shrivastava et al., 2013). At its worst, depression can cause suicide (Akinade, 2020). It is a plunge in moods severe enough to devastate an individual (Iheanacho, 2002). Depression can affect an individual's cognition, behavior, motivation, emotion and/or sense of wellbeing, (Jeronima 2019). Depression is characterized by anhedonia; inability to experience pleasure and existential vacuum and in-depth sadness (Gilbert, 2007). Depression can be distinguished from dysthymia in the area of duration. Whereas dysthymia, which is equally a plunge in mood goes away on its own after a while, however, depression is known to last longer.

Anger

Anger also known as wrath is a corrosive emotion. It is a state of indignation or exasperation. Anger in most cases is characterized by the ventilation of bottled-up aggression. Anger is an intense emotional state evolving a strong uncomfortable and uncooperative response (hostility) to a perceived provocation, hurt or threat. Angry individuals are known to experience physical effects such as increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, and increased adrenaline level (Alia-Klein et al., 2020). The study is anchored on psychodynamic theory of adjustment by Sigmund Freud; the theorist postulated that human behavior results from interactions between the id, ego and super ego, (Deal, 2007). Adjustment is a mental process used by the ego (reality principle) to block harmful id's impulses also known as (pleasure drive). According to the theorist, the ego helps to protect the human person from being overwhelmed by animalistic instincts and the problems of life. The super ego is the gate keeper of consciousness (Iwundu, 2019). Ackland et al. (2017) examined hope, coping, and psychosocial adjustment after spinal cord injury. The study was a prospective, longitudinal design. The aim was to explore the role of hope in the coping and psychosocial adjustment process after spinal cord injury. The result revealed that hope levels and coping strategies remained consistent over time. Until

now, little or no studies have been conducted on the emotional distress of COVID -19 as a correlate of psychosocial mal-adjustment among the public junior secondary school students in Imo State.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to examine emotional distresses of depression and anger during COVID-19 as correlates of psychosocial maladjustment among public junior secondary school students in Imo State. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does depression relate to psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State?
2. To what extent does anger relate to psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State?

The following null hypotheses were tested:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between depression and psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Imo State.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between Anger and psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Imo State.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive correlational design was adopted to explore the relationship between emotional distress and psychosocial maladjustment. Two self-made instruments titled: "COVID-19 Emotional Distress Scale (CEDS)" and "Psychosocial Maladjustment Scale (PMS)" was used to collect data for the study. COVID-19 Emotional Distress Scale was calibrated on a four-point scale of Very High Extent (VHE =4 points), High Extent (HE= 3 points), Low Extent (LE= 2 points) and Very Low Extent (VLE =1 point). It was developed in seven blocks of four item statements each. The item statements addressed the respective COVID-19 oriented emotional distresses. Concomitantly, Psychosocial Maladjustment Scale was developed in seven blocks of four item statements each and equally calibrated on a four-point scale as in COVID-19 Emotional Distress Scale. The item statements sought to elicit the way psychological and sociological aspects of the student's adjustment to COVID-19 emotional distresses. The data collected from the study was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does depression relate to psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State?

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient Between Depression and Psychosocial Maladjustment

Variable	N	R	R-square (%)	Remarks
Depression	393	.064	0.41	Positive relationship
Psychosocial maladjustment	393			

R = correlation coefficient

The result in Table 1 shows that depression relates positively with psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State. The result also shows that depression accounted for about 0.4% of the variance observed in students' psychosocial maladjustment.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between depression and psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State.

Table 2: Significance of the Relationship between the Two Variables

Variable	N	R	p-value	Decision
Depression	393	.064	.208	Not Significant
Psychosocial maladjustment	393			

From the correlation analysis showed in Table 2, the statement of hypothesis 1 is accepted; implying that there is no significant relationship between depression and psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State ($p = .208 > 0.05$). This is because the p-value is greater than the 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Research Question 2

To what extent does anger relate to psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State?

Table 3: Correlation Coefficient between Anger and Psychosocial Maladjustment

Variable	N	R	R-square(%)	Remarks
Anger	393	.019	0.04	Positive relationship
Psychosocial Maladjustment	393			

R = correlation coefficient

The result in Table 3 shows that anger relates positively with psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State. The result shows that anger accounted for about 0.04% of the variance observed in students' psychosocial maladjustment.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between anger and psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State.

Table 4: Significance of the Relationship between the Two Variables

Variable	N	R	p-value	Decision
Anger	393	.019	.702	Not Significant
Psychosocial maladjustment	393			

From the correlation analysis showed in Table 4, the statement of hypothesis 2 is accepted; implying that there is no significant relationship between anger and psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State ($p = .702 > 0.05$). This is because the p-value is greater than the 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

Depression relates positively and insignificantly with psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State. Also, depression accounted for about 0.4% of the variance observed in students' psychosocial maladjustment.

Anger relates positively and insignificantly with psychosocial maladjustment of public junior secondary school students during COVID-19 pandemic in Imo State. Also, anger accounted for about 0.04% of the variance observed in students' psychosocial maladjustment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded as follows:

During COVID-19 pandemic, depression and anger were found to be positively and insignificantly related to psychosocial maladjustments of public junior secondary school students in Imo state.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends as follows:

1. Classroom teachers and school administrators should seek to unravel the root causes of students' poor psychosocial adjustments with a view to helping improve same rather than dealing with the indicators like depression and anger which could increase their psychosocial maladjustment.
2. Parents, Teachers and other stakeholders should try to understand that when a large population of adolescents and youths are manifesting poor psychosocial adjustment at the same period of time, there must be a general causative factor as in the case of COVID-19 pandemic, which must be found and dealt with.
3. Governments and educational policy makers should train and post more educational psychologists and counsellors in schools to help students deal with indicators of emotional distress that could lead to psychosocial maladjustment for a healthier and more productive society.

References

- Acland, R., Sinnot, A., Gerahty, T., & Dorsett, P. (2017). Hope, coping and psychosocial adjustment after spinal cord injury. *Spinal Cord Ser Cases*, 21(3), 17-46.
- Alia-Klein, N., Gabriela, G., Gadi, B., Jessica, B., Antonio, D., Thomas, F., Hendler, T., Lowe, L., Mariotti, V., Muscatello, M.R, Palumbo, S., Pellgrini, S., Pietro, R., & Amelia, V.E (2020). *The feeling of anger: From brain networks to linguistic expressions*. John Wiley & Son, 567-585.
- Deal, K. H.(2007) *Psychodynamic Theory Advances Social Work*. 8 (1) 184-195
- Gan, Y., Liu, W., & Zhao, H. (2021). Psychosocial adjustment models in educational settings. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 51(4), 301–314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12772>
- Gilbert, P., & Leahy, R.L. (2007). *The therapeutic relationship in the cognitive behavioral psychotherapies*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis group.
- Iheanacho, E.O. (2000). *Introduction to abnormal psychology*. PortHarcourt: GOC Publishers.
- Iwundu, C.O. (2019). *Psychology for the education and health professions*. PortHarcourt: Pagraphics.
- Jeronima, L.E., Viilarreal, E.M., Leon, B., Musitu, D., Martinez, B., & Bomerlz, A. (2019). Family communication problems, psychosocial adjustment and cyber bullying. *International Journal of Environmental Resource Public Wealth*, 16(13), 2417.
- Shrivastava, A, Bureau, Y, Rewari, N., & Johnston, M. (2013). Clinical risk of stigma and discrimination of mental illnesses: Need for objective assessment and quantification. *Indian J Psychiatry*, 55(2), 178-182.
- Son, C., Hegde, S., & Smith, A. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on college student mental health. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 277, 43–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.08.011>