



Psychological Distress As Predictor Of Quality Of Life Among Undergraduates In Public Universities In Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates psychological distress as predictor of quality of life among undergraduates in Anambra State. The objectives of the study include to ascertain the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among undergraduates; find out the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among male and female undergraduates; and ascertain the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among students of lower (100 – 200) and higher (300 – 400) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 55,416 undergraduates from two public universities in Anambra State. A sample of 1662 respondents was selected using proportionate stratified sampling technique. The instruments used for data collection were Psychological Distress Scale (PDS) and Quality of Life Scale (QLS). The instruments were face validated by three experts and the reliability of the instruments were determined using Cronbach Alpha co-efficient which yielded coefficient values of 0.79 for PDS and 0.82 for QLS. Simple regression analysis was used in analyzing the data. The findings of the study revealed that psychological distress ($r = -0.041$, $p = 0.000$) negatively predicted quality of life of undergraduates. The findings also showed that psychological distress of male ($r = -0.342$, $p = 0.000$), of female ($r = -0.249$, $p = 0.000$), students of lower (100 – 200) levels of study ($r = -0.344$, $p = 0.000$) and students of higher (300 – 400) levels of study ($r = -0.142$, $p = 0.000$) negatively predicted quality of life of undergraduates. The study concluded that psychological distress negatively predicted quality of life of undergraduates. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that measures to tackle psychological distress should be embedded in the school guidance and counselling programmes by the ministry of education and the school management in order to improve the quality of life of undergraduates. The study contributed to the body of knowledge in the sense that it helped in understanding how mental well-being influenced overall quality of life among undergraduates particularly in developing country settings.

Keywords: Psychological Distress, Quality of Life, Undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

The importance of quality of life cannot be overemphasized. Quality of life is the degree to which an individual is healthy, comfortable, and able to participate in or enjoy life events. The term quality of life is inherently ambiguous, as it can refer both to the experience an individual has of his own life and to the living conditions in which individuals find themselves. Hence, quality of life is highly subjective (Naz et al, 2016). Quality of life is defined as individual's perception of their position in life in the context of culture and value system where they are inserted, which also involves their goals, perspectives, standards and concerns (WHO, 2018). It implies how individual needs are met, the

extent of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in several aspects of life and considered as a compound and multi-dimensional concept which embedded in social, physical and cultural context (Naz et al, 2016). In this study, quality of life is viewed an individual purpose-aligned cultural and value system by which a person lives, relative to their aims, hopes, living standards and interests.

Due to the poor state of the economy particularly in developing countries, the quality of life of the people particularly students are at very low ebb. The people are exposed to poor housing, inadequate health infrastructures, poor educational facilities and poor commute infrastructure. This have reduced the quality of life enjoyed by the populace particularly students. The quality of life is not only limited to the psychological health but also environmental and social status which can considerably contribute to the function of a person. And students with poor quality of life can experience psychological distress which might affect the very essence of their involvement in academic activities.

Students may encounter anxiety and depression in the course of their study. These are symptoms of psychological distress. The unique characteristics of today's university students and the developmental stage of the students have created a population that is prone to psychological distress. Furthermore, psychological distress of university students have significant implications not only at the individual level, but also at interpersonal (for example, roommates, classmates, and faculty) and at the institutional levels (for example, legal challenges and counseling services) (Kitzrow, 2013). Thus, understanding factors that contribute to psychological distress of students and designing and providing preventive or remedial services have gained importance for both researchers and practitioners.

Psychological distress is an emotional state characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety which is experienced in response to stress and is associated with a perceived inability to cope effectively daily life activities (Deasy et al, 2014). Similarly, Alfiyan et al (2020) see psychological distress as a negative emotional experience experienced by individuals such as sadness, disappointment, hopelessness, depression, helplessness, frustration, anger, resentment, and other negative emotions. Psychological distress therefore is defined as the unpleasant emotions or feelings a person experiences when overwhelmed, which can severely affect daily life activities (Nieuwoudt, 2021). The factors that contribute to psychological distress include a range of academic- and course related stressors, as well as the transition from home to college and into adulthood. Sharif and Armitage (2014) listed other stressors to include lack of financial certainty, poor employment prospects, increased pressure to do well and technological overload. Distress experienced by higher level students is linked with the adoption of risk behaviours, including smoking, hazardous drinking and poor dietary habits (Tavolacci et al., 2013).

Psychological distress of undergraduates caused by extreme academic, environmental and personal stressors is a global phenomenon that affects the healthy psychological and physical well-being of students across the world (Amira et al, 2022). If disregarded and having not learned the constructive coping skills, developed internal resources, and provided with strong social support, it may result to poor academic performance, physical illness, frustration, depression, and even worse mental illnesses (Ndionuka, 2017). Unfortunately, undergraduates seem not to be exposed to any sort of psychological preparation or self-awareness tools, rather undergraduates tend to lack the resources and abilities needed to meet the rigors and demands that their academic environment requires of them day to day.

The attainment of a tertiary education can enrich students' lives by improving their career prospects and increasing their self-esteem, studying at university can be a stressful experience for many students (Sharp & Theiler, 2018). Psychological distress does not only have significant implications on student's psychological health, but also might adverse implications on societies because university students have a significant role in shaping the future of societies. Thus, psychological well-being of students becomes an important issue for universities. According to Kitzrow (2013), universities have responsibility for prevention and treatment of mental health issues. Universities are well positioned to promote psychological health of students because they have several important resources such as health services, residences, social networks, and extracurricular activities. Universities may be evaluated as a resource for promoting psychological well-being of young people that may be difficult to achieve elsewhere. Psychological health issues of university students are more diverse and complex than in years past (Alfiyan et al, 2022).

University education can be very challenging for students (Hassel et al, 2018). The change from secondary school to university, academic pressure, lack of family support, and also economic factors can trigger a high level of stress in students that could lead to emotional exhaustion (Knoesen et al, 2018). General psychological discomfort such as somatization (having trouble getting breath, feeling weak, having nausea or chest pain without medical reasons), anxiety (nervousness, feeling fearful or having spells of panic), or depression (feeling no interest in things, hopeless about future or feeling of worthlessness), are common in university students (Hakami, 2018). Much research has shown that college students are among the populations with the highest distress levels (Abouserie, as cited in Shostak et al, 2021). Viertio et al (2021) noted that psychological distress, which focuses on distress resulting from symptoms associated with depression, anxiety or stress, has been associated with significant reductions in academic performance and engagement. Students that experience high psychological distress are significantly impacted in their capacity to study (Larcombe et al., 2016).

Furthermore, elevated psychological distress has been shown to impact other issues such as lower academic achievement, alcohol problems, suicide ideation and attempts (Eskin et al., 2016). Psychological distress are associated with lower quality of life and increased morbidity and mortality (Mohammed et al, 2017). High psychological distress may have adverse effects on students' general quality of life and is linked to problematic health behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, and suicidal thoughts (Sharp & Theiler, 2018). Students who experience severe psychological distress have a reduced capacity for work and/or study activities, as elevated levels of distress lead to greater disability and this can depend on their gender and level of study.

Factor such as gender is important when considering how psychological distress predicts quality of life among undergraduate students in Anambra state. Gender constitutes a structure of social practice that establishes relations of power, attitudes and hierarchies, not only among people, but also among groups and institutions, which would simply overcome the analysis or individual perception of being female or male (Elgin & Hector, 2020). Gender, is generally asserted to influence how psychological distress predicts quality of life (Viertio et al, 2021). Gender differences seem to exist in the experiencing of psychological distress with females reporting higher distress. Larcombe et al. (2016) found that females have higher psychological distress than males. Similarly, Eskin et al. (2016) found significant psychological differences between males and females. They stated that females reported significantly higher psychological distress than men. Bayram and Bilgel (2018) asserted that females reported more symptoms of anxiety and stress than male. Demirüstü et al. (2019) findings indicated that female students have significantly higher psychological distress than males. Elgin and Hector (2020) found no statistical difference level of psychological distress and quality of life of male and female school personnel.

Apart from gender, students academic level is an important factor when considering how psychological distress predicts quality of life among undergraduate students in Anambra state. The students are classified as new and old students based on their year of study. The newly admitted students are usually found at 100 -200 levels while the older ones are found in 300-400 or 500 depending on a person's course of study. The younger students tend to live a more restrictive life and are still adjusting to the new environment while the older students have adjusted fully to the academic environment. To this end, the level of psychological distress of young and old students and how it affect the quality of their life may not be the same as will be proved by the result of the present study.

The present research concentration is anchored on the premise that reducing psychological distress can improve quality of life. With these, the study hypothesized that psychological distress can predict the quality of life of undergraduates. Furthermore, there seen to be dearth of local literature that focuses on the psychological distress as a predictor of quality of life among undergraduates within the university system in Anambra State Nigeria. The result of this present research would enable to provide a thorough literature that would allow institutions to provide intervention programs for undergraduates as a preventive measure to reduce further mental health issues and other psychological concerns. Furthermore, the findings will serve as a framework in proposing an intervention program for undergraduate within the university system.

The existing empirical studies on the subject matter revealed conflicting findings. These conflicting empirical findings revealed knowledge gap and also most of the studies (Elgin and Hector, 2020; Viertio et al, 2021; Nguyen et al, 2022; Fatemeh et al, 2020; Franzen et al, 2021; Amira et al, 2022;

Alfiyan et al, 2022; Mohammed, 2017) were done outside the study area revealing a knowledge gap among undergraduates in Anambra State. This lack of consistency on the empirical findings makes the situation worrisome, hence the need for this study. Based on the foregoing, the study examined how psychological distress predicts the quality of life of undergraduate students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study examined the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among male and female undergraduates and the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among students of lower (100 – 200) and higher (300 – 400) levels of study.

METHOD

Correlational research design was adopted for the study. A correlation reflects the strength and/or direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. The rationale for adopting this design was to ascertain the predictive ability of psychological distress on quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam were sampled for the study. The sample for the study was 1662 undergraduates, comprising 695 males, 967 females, 866 lower level students and 796 higher levels students.

The instruments used for data collection were Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) and Psychological Distress Scale (PDS). Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) developed by World Health Organization (2018) was to measure an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. The instrument was adapted by the researcher. The questionnaire contains 26 items which elicited information on quality of life of the respondents. The items were placed on a 5 point scale of Not at all (NA), A Little (AL), A Moderate Amount (MA), Very Much (VM) and An Extreme Amount (EM). The range of scores were weighted as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Also, Psychological Distress Scale (PDS) developed by Kessler (2003) and adapted by the researcher. The instrument contained 10 items which sought information on the psychological distress of the respondents. The instrument was adapted by the researcher. The items were placed on a 5-point scale of None of the Time, A Little of the Time, Some of the Time, Most of the Time and All of the Time. The range of scores were weighted as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

The face and construct validity of the instruments were established by the researcher. The face validity was ascertained by two experts who are lecturers in the Guidance and Counselling and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation, all from the Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The instruments were trial-tested in a single administration on a representative sample of 40 undergraduates randomly selected from Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) and University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC). The institutions were chosen for reliability test because they share similar characteristics with universities used for this study. The scores obtained were collated to determine the internal consistency of the items in each of the instruments. Cronbach Alpha Co-efficient was used. The computation yielded reliability coefficients 0.82 for Quality of Life Scale and 0.80 for Psychological Distress Scale. The data collected were analyzed using simple regression technique. Simple regression was used for data analyses because they are the best statistical tool that can measure variables in a predictive study such as the present one.

RESULTS

The results of the empirical analyses are analyzed below.

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Psychological Distress as Predictor of Quality of Life

	<i>B</i>	SE	β	P-value
Constant	19.354	.468		0.000
Psychological Distress	-.041	.022	-.551	0.000
R	.051			
R ²	.543			
Adj.R ²	.532			
<i>F</i>	13.589			0.000

Table 1 measured the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. Table 1 indicated that the simple regression coefficient (R) is -0.041 while the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.543. This showed that 54.3 percent of the variations in quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State are predicted by the variation in the psychological distress experienced by the students. Using Muijs' criteria, the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State is significant. The beta weight ($\beta = -0.551$) is an indication that predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among undergraduates is significantly negative, such that a unit increase in psychological distress will leads to 0.551 decrease in the quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 1 above indicated that the F-ratio associated with these is 13.589 and the P-value = .000. Therefore, since P-value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, we reject the stated hypothesis. The study therefore concluded that psychological distress is a significant negative predictor of quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 2: Simple Regression Analysis of Psychological Distress as Predictor of Quality of Life Among Male and Female Undergraduates

		<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>P-value</i>
Male	Constant	18.975	.691		.000
	Psychological Distress	-.342	.033	-.450	.000
	R	.050			
	R^2	.503			
	Adj. R^2	.501			
	<i>F</i>	41.651			.000
Female	Constant	18.913	.648		.000
	Psychological Distress	-.249	.031	-.560	.000
	R	.060			
	R^2	.674			
	Adj. R^2	.622			
	<i>F</i>	42.599			.000

Table 2 above measured the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The Table showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) for male students is -0.342 while the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.503. This is an indication that psychological distress predicts 50.3 percent of the variations in the quality of life of male undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. Using Muijs' criteria, psychological distress negatively predicts quality of life among male undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The beta weight value of -0.450 indicates that psychological distress negatively predicted the quality of life among male undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. This indicates that a unit increase in psychological distress will likely lead to 0.342 decreases in the quality of life of male students.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient (R) for female students is -0.249 while the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.674. Using Muijs' criteria, psychological distress predicts quality of life among male undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The beta weight value of -0.560 showed that psychological distress negatively predicted quality of life among female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. This showed that a unit increase in psychological distress will lead to 0.249 decreases in quality of life among female undergraduates. This suggests that psychological distress negatively predicted quality of life is stronger in female students than male undergraduates in public universities in Anambra.

Table 2 indicated that the F-ratio associated with these is 41.651 and 42.599 respectively for male and female undergraduates while the P-value is 0.000 and 0.000 for male and female undergraduates respectively. Since the P-values are less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, hypothesis three is rejected. Therefore, psychological distress was a significant predictor of quality of life among male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis of Psychological Distress as Predictor of Quality of Life Among Students of Lower (100 – 200) and Higher (300 – 400) Levels of Study

		<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>P-value</i>
Lower Level of Study	Constant	19.027	.655		.000
	Psychological Distress	-.344	.031	-.553	.000
	R	.053			
	R ²	.643			
	Adj.R ²	.624			
	<i>F</i>	42.056			.000
Higher Level of Study	Constant	19.008	.689		.000
	Psychological Distress	-.142	.033	-.549	.003
	R	.049			
	R ²	.612			
	Adj.R ²	.591			
	<i>F</i>	71.625			.000

Table 3 measured the predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life among students of lower (100 – 200) and higher (300 – 400) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. The table showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) for students of lower (100 – 200) levels of study is -0.344 while the coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.643. This is an indication that psychological distress predicts 64.3 percent of the variations in the quality of life of students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. Using Muijs' criteria, psychological distress strongly predicted the quality of life among students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. The beta weight value of -0.553 indicated that psychological distress negatively predicts quality of life among students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. This indicated that a unit increase in psychological distress will likely lead to 0.344 decreases in the quality of life of students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient (R) in Table 3 for students of higher (300 – 400) levels of study is -0.142 while the coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.612. Using Muijs' criteria, psychological distress strongly predicts quality of life among students in higher (300 – 400) level of study in public universities in Anambra State. The beta weight value of -0.549 showed that psychological distress negatively predicts quality of life among students in higher (300 – 400) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. This showed that a unit increase in psychological distress will lead to 0.142 decreases in quality of life among students in higher (300 – 400) levels of study. This suggested that the negative predictive value of psychological distress on quality of life is stronger in students in lower (300 – 400) levels of study than students in higher (100 – 200) levels of study in public universities in Anambra.

Table 3 indicated that the F-ratio associated with these is 42.056 and 71.625 respectively for students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study and higher (300 – 400) levels of study while the P-value is 0.000 and 0.000 for students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study and higher (300 – 400) levels of study respectively. Since the P-values are less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, hypothesis five is rejected. Therefore, psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among students of lower (100 – 200) and higher (300 – 400) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study as shown in Table 1 indicated that psychological distress predicts quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. This implies that psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. This shows that the quality of life of undergraduate students is affected by psychological distress experienced by the students. This agrees with the findings of Mohammed et al (2017) who found that psychological distress has significant relationship with quality of life.

The findings of the study as shown on Table 2 indicated that psychological distress predicts quality of life among male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. That is psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among male and female

undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. This implies that a unit increase in psychological distress can reduce the quality of life of undergraduates. The result of this study agreed with Elgin and Hector (2020) whose study showed that there is significant correlation between quality of life and psychological distress of male and female personnel.

The result of the analysis in Table 3 shows that psychological distress predicts quality of life among students in lower (100 – 200) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. This shows indicated that psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among students of lower (100 – 200) and higher (300 – 400) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. This implies that psychological distress negatively influenced the quality of life of students' of lower and higher level of study. The finding of the present study is in line with Amira et al (2022) psychological distress adversely correlated with quality of life among undergraduate students.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated psychological distress as predictors of quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The data generated were subjected to statistical analysis. The study found that psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among undergraduates. Psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among male and female undergraduates. Psychological distress is a significant predictor of quality of life among students of lower (100 – 200) and higher (300 – 400) levels of study in public universities in Anambra State. Based on the foregoing, the study concluded that psychological distress predicts quality of life among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

The study recommends that the university management should not only monitor students through academic performance, but they should also concern themselves with the emotional state of their students, which must evolve at an optimal academic level while ensuring a better quality of life during their university education. Undergraduate Students should be encouraged by their lecturers and parents to meet with the school guidance counsellors to discuss their difficulties in school. This will help the counsellors to discern the quality of life of the students and how to improve on it. Resources to support the psychological wellbeing of students are needed, as many university educators are not sufficiently trained to respond to students' distress, and university counselling services often have a waitlist due to high demand.

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