



Unemployment and Mental Health: Focus on Nigerian Youths

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Abstract

This article focuses on the relationship between unemployment and mental health among Nigerian youths. It highlights the incidence of unemployment, mental health and also uses archival methods through the review of some theoretical and empirical studies to establish that unemployment and mental health are correlated. Based on the theoretical perspective, pragmatic measures for reducing mental health problems that may evolve from unemployment were highlighted. And among other things creating new employment windows such as establishing agency for professional home care givers was recommended.

Keywords; Unemployment, Mental Health, Nigerian Youth

Introduction

Youths are people who have strength, promising, good health and full of energy to get things done. Youths are the bedrock of every developed and developing nation. The stronger the youth of a country, the more the country will be developed. According to the National Youth Development Policy (2001), youths are referred to as persons, both male and female between 18 and 35 years but for the purpose of this paper, the age bracket is 18- 45 years as a result of the cultural norms in the country, whereby young people are still dependent and living with their parents even after marriage. This period is associated with many challenges of life and prospects which have implication on behaviour and mental health. Good mental health is therefore very essential to youth successful adjustment and achievement because they are the assumed leaders of tomorrow. The purpose of this paper is to explore the hydra headed problems associated with youth unemployment in Nigeria with the psychological factors in perspective.

Unemployment

According to Onyeizugbo (2007), work is a creative process and through employment one earns a means of livelihood. A person who is employed earns salary or wages that enables one take care of oneself and needs. Gainful employment empowers a person to go about taking decisive actions in ones family and society. Unemployment ca

which one earns a salary or wage. It can be defined as a state of lack of money to maintain one's self, parents and siblings. It is an economic problem which is fast becoming one of the most prevalent challenges among Nigerian youths today.

Unemployment rate in Nigeria has continued to be on the increase despite the abundant human and natural resources available in the country. Chronic youths' unemployment is evident in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2013a). The magnitude of the danger which youth unemployment poses to the society is better understood when one considers that according to Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010), over 64 million youths are unemployed and 1.6 million are under-employed. This precarious situation has left the youths in a vicious cycle of poverty that daily erodes their confidence and bright future (Adebayo, 2013a).

The magnitude and expansion of poverty in Nigeria and the threat it poses makes it one of the biggest challenges in the nation today. The rate of poverty in Nigeria has worsened since the late 1990s, to the extent that the country is now considered as one of the twenty poorest countries of the world (Adebayo, 2013c). The frustration and desperation that daily torments the unemployed creates a fertile ground for crime to thrive. In recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and political instability (Ajufu, 2013).

Youth unemployment seems to be one of the major economic factors facing Nigeria. In the survey carried out by the World Bank (World Bank, 2009), it was estimated that about 40 million Nigerians were unemployed. They also observed that one out of every five adults was employed, just as only one out of 10 university graduates was gainfully employed. In the latest report titled "Analyzing Employment and Growth For better Economic Policy" published in 2010, the World Bank Stated that notwithstanding strong growth in Nigeria's non - oil economy, unemployment did not fall between 1999 and 2006 (Omoniyi & Osakinle, 2011).

Causes of Unemployment

According to a study carried out by Onyeizugbo (2007) using a hundred and two participants, 47 young women and 55 young men in Enugu metropolis and Nsukka urban, aged 18- 35 years with a questionnaire named unemployment survey, major causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria were identified as follows:



1. Corruption (including favoritism, public fund embezzlement and bribery)
2. Lack of industries
3. No job creation
4. Overpopulation
5. Unskilled
6. Aged refusing to retire
7. Nepotism
8. Underdevelopment
9. Poor Investment by Government
10. Laziness of youths
11. Youth Impatience / lack of skills

Mental Health

Mental health is defined by the American Psychological Association (2007) as a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioural adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with ordinary demands and stresses of life. Omoluabi (2007) also defined psychological health as the sum total of the mental and psychophysical conditions of an individual which promote a state of adequate and balanced functioning in daily living. Mental health is characterized by the ability to love self and another, productivity, happiness, ability to manage any distress in life and being satisfied with life. The notion of Nigerian youth's mental health, therefore, implies their ability to respond to the many varied experiences of life with flexibility and a sense of purpose. In other words, Nigerian youth's mental health will reflect in their ability to maintain a balance between themselves, other people and the environment.

Unemployment and mental health: A theoretical perspective

Various theories can help one understand how unemployment is related to mental health. If well established, this could help in forming some models that will help in reducing the possible impact of unemployment on mental health.

Social Cognitive Theory

It was pioneered by Bandura (1986). This theory posits a comprehensive casual structure in which self- efficacy beliefs control in concert with cognized goals, outcome expectations and perceived environmental impediments in the regulation of human motivation, action and wellbeing. Unless an individual believes that he/she can produce desired effects, there is little or no incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties like unemployment. This seems to be

the plight of people that are unemployed because of their inability to have exchange power that will enable them attend to their responsibilities, they feel unhappy. A wide range of studies have supported the hypothesis that depressed people show negative ways of thinking, and some longitudinal studies have shown that these thinking styles predict depression overtime (Abramson, Alloy, Hankin, MacCoon & Gibb, 2002).

Learned Helplessness Theory

The learned helplessness model (based on animal studies) suggests that depression arises when individuals come to believe they have no control over the stresses and pains that beset them. Seligman (1975) suggests that people become depressed when they decide or make an attribution that they have no control over the stress in their lives. This implies that depression follows a marked hopelessness about coping with the difficult life events (Barlow, 2002) like being unemployed.

Stressful Life Events

Two pioneers in stress research, Holmes and Rahe (1967) argued that when an organism must make a substantial adjustment to the environment, the likelihood of stress is high. Although all people experience at least some stressful events, some will experience a lot and it is this group, according to them, that is most vulnerable to illness like depression. Unemployment which involves a lot of psychological adjustments may render some people more vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

Related Empirical findings on Unemployment and Mental Health

Unemployed persons typically experience a range of negative psychological symptoms, referred to as the 'unemployment blues' which manifest themselves in a variety of psychological and psycho-physical symptoms, such as worry, fatigue, lack of concentration, sleeplessness, restlessness, feelings of loneliness and boredom among others (Moller, 1991). Studies have portrayed a positive relationship between unemployment rates and conditions such as mortality, heart disease, mental health, heavy drinking, and the use of mental health services (Jin, Shah, & Svoboda, 1995).

In extreme cases, alienated youth, especially if they are many, can cause social disruption in society, as in the case of Sierra Leon, Liberia and other war-torn countries (Omoniyi and Osakinle, 2011). O' Higgins (2001) concluded that the longer the unemployment period, the greater the cost to the person and to the society, in terms of physiological and psychological damage and negative effect



on marriage and family. Sustained unemployment imposes significant economic, personal and social costs that include: loss of current output, social exclusion, the loss of freedom, skill loss, psychological harm, ill health and reduced life expectancy, loss of motivation, the undermining of human relations and family life, loss of social value and responsibility (Anderson, 2002 ; Larsen, 2003).

Warr and Jahoda (as cited in Mckee-ryan, Song, Wanberg, and Kinicki, 2005) provided theoretical explanations for why unemployment may negatively impact individuals' well-being. Warr (1987) proposed that unemployment leads to negative psychological and physical outcomes because unemployed individuals do not experience nine positive benefits associated with employment: opportunity for control, opportunity for skill use, externally generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, availability of money, physical security, opportunity for interpersonal contact, and valued social position. Jahoda (1982) similarly concluded that job loss spawns negative outcomes because unemployed individuals are less likely to experience a host of positive evidence and hidden consequences associated with working. She suggested that employment imposes a time structure on the day, allows individuals to socialize with others, provides people with a sense of purpose, allows individuals increased status, and encourages activity.

Del Bono, Weber, and Winter-Ebmer (2008) and Lindo (2010) showed that layoff affects fertility rates, and Lindner and Peters (2013) found negative effects of job loss of mothers and fathers on family stability, especially for married parents, which is one factor through which parental job loss may affect the well-being of children. Sullivan and von Wachter (2009) found that the mortality consequences of displacement are severe, with a 50 to 100 percent increase in death rates the year following displacement and 10 to 15 percent increases in death rates for the next 20 years. Also, Browning and Heinesen (2012) used micro-level data from Denmark and found that job loss increases alcohol-related disease, mental illness, and suicide and suicide attempts, but these effects could be due to job loss itself, and unrelated to unemployment duration.

Recommendations

A situation in which Nigerians as a people are languishing in poverty, ignorance and immorality in the mist of plenty should not be allowed to continue at this time and age. In order to improve the mental health of Nigerian youths, judging from these findings, intervention programmes which address both the psychological and the economic deprivations associated with unemployment simultaneously, may be most beneficial in improving perceived quality of life for the unemployed. The proactive intervention programs include:

Agriculture

Government should make agriculture very attractive and well packaged. This will promote mass food production and increase in agricultural output. If the youths are empowered to be involved in large scale farming, rate of unemployment and its related mental health issues will be reduced.

Seminars must be organized to train the youths to develop their mental acumen thereby being creative. Developing a positive mindset and having a strong efficacy of self will enable the youths to create jobs for themselves.

In conclusion, imbibing the right principles with the right strategy and good governance, the cancerous disease called youth unemployment will be reduced and gradually dies off. The issue of slave mentality as advocated by Obi-Nwosu (2013) should be handled properly as well. If these approaches discussed are activated, a mental reorientation which determines the stability of one's personality will be achieved.

Entrepreneurship

Soft loans should be given to the unemployed youths to encourage entrepreneurship. Job opportunities and skill acquisition programmes should be created by the government in order to reduce the crime rate in the country.

Opportunities such as opening up new windows that could create employment (for instance professionalization of home care services) should be advocated and duly implemented by government agencies and private organizations.

In Finland, the Tyohon Job Search Intervention (a week of intensive group activities helping participants identify their skills and teaching job search skills as well as strategies to deal with setbacks while seeking employment) produced significant increases in re-employment and improved mental health compared to the control group during the 2-year follow-up period (Vuori & Silvonen, 2005).

Establishment of mental health services

Mental health services should be established in every hospital both private and government owned. People experiencing economic strain and mental ill-health require well-resourced mental health services to identify and treat common mental disorders. Salvador-Carulla & Roca, (2013) reported that primary care settings in Spain witnessed an increase in patients presenting with anxiety, depression and alcohol misuse disorders during the economic downturn.



Welfare Packages

The government should establish welfare packages to be given to the unemployed youths on monthly basis in order to reduce lack of funds. Robust social policies to ensure adequate welfare benefits for the unemployed are thought to be central to offsetting the impact of mental health issues associated with it. The government should also require the services of clinical psychologist in the state and federal levels during policy making and implementation. Membership of social organizations, such as trade unions, churches, sports groups or political organizations should exert a protective effect on the unemployed youths.

Group Therapy

Clinicians should apply psychological principles on the unemployed youths in a group setting. Forming a synergy in form of support groups among themselves will help in having a feeling of self worth and self belonging knowing that they are not alone in the situation. For example, the Michigan Prevention Research Center (MPRC), a program funded for 20 years by the National Institute for Mental Health, developed and evaluated the JOBS Program to help unemployed workers effectively seek reemployment and cope with the multiple challenges and stressors associated with unemployment and job--searching. Currently supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the JOBS Program is a group--based intervention.

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