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Social Support, Gender, and Coping Strategy as Correlates of Psychological Wellbeing of Physically Challenged Students in University of Lagos

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Abstract

The challenges associated with disability are enormous and more especially with University students. It puts them at risk of developing depressive symptoms which invariably leads to poor psychological wellbeing. This study therefore investigated social support, gender and coping strategies as correlates of psychological wellbeing among physically challenged students in University of Lagos. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted and one hundred and forty-three (143) physically challenged students of the University of Lagos were purposively selected. Three hypotheses were generated and tested in the study. Inferential statistics reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing ($r = .63$, $df = 141$, $p < .05$). Problem focused coping, emotional focused coping, avoidance focused coping have joint influence on psychological wellbeing ($R^2 = 0.43$, $F(3,139) = 34.79$, $p < .05$). Also, problem focused coping ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.62$, $p < .05$), emotional focused coping ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -2.27$, $p < .05$) and avoidance focused coping ($\beta = -.40$, $t = -4.94$; $p < .05$) have significant independent influence on psychological wellbeing. Male students significantly reported higher psychological wellbeing ($t(141) = 9.61$, $p < .05$) than female student.

It was concluded that social support, coping strategy and gender have significant influence on psychological wellbeing of physically challenged students of the University of Lagos. The study therefore recommended that the school authority and the family members connected with physically challenged students should be more proactive in attending to the psycho-social needs of students experiencing disability.

Key word: Social support, Coping strategy, Gender and Psychological well-being

Introduction

Inability to use part of one's body can lead to grief, stress, and can result into depression. More especially in a developing country like Nigeria where adequate provisions are not available for disabilities in the development curriculum of the nation. There are variations in disability, while some may strictly be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional and developmental others may be a combination of these. Physical disability is an umbrella term that covers impairments activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Being physically challenged may be congenital or acquired. It is a traumatic change in life circumstances that is likely to have long term impact and which may lead to psychological reactions such as depression and poor psychological wellbeing (Cooper, & Bailey, 2001; Cooper, Smiley, Morrison, Williamson, & Allan, 2007). There are different ways through which disabilities can be managed and these include social support and coping strategy. Gender can also prove to be a source of managing disabilities. Social support is the availability of people who show that they care about, value, and love an individual (Sarason, Levine & Basham, 1983). It can also be referred to as the process by which various forms of assistance are provided to others by a member of a supportive social relationship. It can emanate from different sources such as family, friends, teachers, community, or any social group to which one belongs. Social support can therefore, be instrumental to successful accomplishments of goals in life, including the effective management of disabilities. Coping strategies can be referred to as the persistent alteration of cognitive and behavioural efforts at dealing with both internal and external request of a stressful situation such as disability (Iruloh and Ukaegbu, 2017).

It is an effort mobilized by an individual to reduce, change or diffuse the outcome of stressful life events such as disability. The individual coping ability of a physically challenged person is very important to their overall social functioning (McNulty, 2014). There are two types of coping strategies that include problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies or managing emotional responses to a problematic situation (McNulty, 2014). Physical coping depend largely on the provisions that are accessible to an individual while psychological coping is the ability to be positively minded, while others include problem-solving skills, social skills, social support, and material resources (McNulty, 2014). Gender is another variable that may influence psychological well-being because it may moderate the associations between impulsivity and some psychological wellbeing. Gender is an important factor for understanding the level of psychological wellbeing, although, the relationship does not appear to be simple. Differences in the biological make-up of the sexes can determine the differential level of stress and responses to these stressors in both sexes which in turn can influence well-being differently. Theoretically, Ryff's (2013) explained that individuals 'life experiences and the interpretations of these experiences influence people's well-being. Her dimensional approach of psychological wellbeing that include autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance are very good in explaining well-being. Relating this theory, students who are physically challenged and lack the basic or better wellbeing might not have the ability to cope with stress and rigor associated with pursuing academic goals on campus. It can therefore be said that ability of physically challenged students to cope and believe in themselves despite their physical condition will go a long way to determine their self-esteem which invariably buffer their psychological wellbeing.

Physically challenged individuals are like any other human being, only that they may be limited in moving around on their own or self-care management. Deficiencies that result from disability can also render a sufferer incapable of taking part in activities that other people engage in. Students with disability find it very difficult to access facilities within the school environment and this is a major challenge confronting physically challenged students because there are no facilities to ease their movement on campus. This also leads to frustration in some cases, which in turn adversely degenerate to non-actualization of one's aspirations.

Research Hypotheses

1. There will be significant positive relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing Students among physically challenged students in University of Lagos
2. Coping strategies adopted by physically challenged students in University of Lagos will significantly influenced their psychological wellbeing
3. Female students who are physically challenged will report a significant psychological wellbeing than their male counterpart at the University of Lagos.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive design using quantitative method in determining the relationship between social support, gender, coping strategy and psychological wellbeing among physically challenged students in the University of Lagos.

Study Population

This study was carried out among physically challenged students in the University of Lagos. The choice of this research setting is based on the accessibility of the students who are physically challenged.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select one hundred and fifty (150) physically challenged students on campus who participated in the study.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was divided into four sections:

Section A: Socio-demographic Variables

Designed to tap information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants which includes age, sex, religion, ethnicity and level of study.

Section B: Psychological well-being Scale

This section measured psychological wellbeing with an 18-item scale developed by Ryff's (1995). Each item has four responses, ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=agree, 4=Strongly Agree. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was reported as 0.70, indicating satisfactory results.

Section C: Coping strategy

For the purpose of this study a modified version of the brief cope, by [Schneider, Elhai and Gray, \(2007\)](#) consisting of 21 questions was used. Questions were measured on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 'never' to 'always'. The Brief Cope consists of 14 subscales containing two items each.

Section D: Social support Scale

Social support was measured with multidimensional scale of perceived social scale (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988). It is an easy to administer self-report questionnaire which contains twelve items rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale with scores ranging from 'very strongly disagree' (1) to 'very strongly agree'. The validity and reliability of the scale was made by [Eker & Akar \(1995\)](#).

4.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from the school authority before the study commenced. The anonymity of all the respondents in the study was strictly maintained. Information given by the respondents was kept confidential. The study did not cause any harm to the participants in the process of administering the questionnaire. Participation of the respondents in the study was purely voluntary.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics that includes frequencies and percentages were used to test the hypotheses set for the study. Correlations, regression analysis and t-test for independent sampling were used at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

This section deals with data analysis and interpretation of result of the findings. Specifically, the study provided answers to the research hypotheses.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistic Showing the Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variables	Options	Frequencies	Percentage
Age	16-18 years	101	70.6
	19-21 years	37	25.9
	22 years and above	5	3.5
	Total	143	100.0
Gender	Male	76	53.1
	Female	67	46.9
	Total	143	100.0
Religion	Christianity	73	51.0
	Islam	64	44.8
	Others	6	4.2
	Total	143	100.0

Level of study	100 Level	37	25.9
	200 Level	70	49.0
	300 Level	30	21.0
	400 Level	6	4.2
	Total	143	100.0

HYPOTHESIS I

The first hypothesis states that there will be significant positive relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing among physically challenged students in University of Lagos. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson r correlational analysis. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment correlation showing the relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing

Variables	Mean	S.D	r	P
Social support	22.63	8.28	.636	<.05
Psychological wellbeing	37.30	10.88		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results obtained from the test are shown in table 2. The table shows that there was significant positive relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing ($r = .63$, $df = 141$, $p < .05$). The result implies that students who are high on social support significantly report high psychological wellbeing. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

The second hypothesis states that coping strategies adopted by the physically challenged students of University of Lagos will significantly influenced their psychological wellbeing. This was tested using multiple regression analysis. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of coping strategies of the physically challenged students on Psychological wellbeing.

Predictors	β	t	P	R	R ²	F	P
Problem focused coping	.249	3.623	<.05	.66	.43	34.79	<.05
Emotional focused coping	-.181	-2.271	<.05				
Avoidance focused coping	-.396	-4.943	<.05				

The result revealed that problem focused coping, emotional focused coping and avoidance focused coping has joint influence on psychological wellbeing ($R^2 = 0.43$, $F(3,139) = 34.79$, $p < .05$). When combined problem focused coping, emotional focused coping, avoidance focused coping accounted for 43% of the change observed in the self-report psychological wellbeing. This revealed that the collective presence of problem focused coping, emotional focused coping, and avoidance focused coping have significant influence on psychological wellbeing. The result further revealed that problem focused coping ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.62$, $p < .05$), emotional focused coping ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -2.27$, $p < .05$) and avoidance focused coping ($\beta = -.40$, $t = -4.94$; $p < .05$) have significant independent influence on psychological wellbeing. The result indicated that physically challenged students with high problem focused coping, significantly reported high psychological wellbeing, also, physically challenged students with high emotional focused coping and avoidance focused coping significantly reported low psychological wellbeing. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

Hypothesis three

The third hypothesis states that female students who are physically challenged will report a significant psychological wellbeing than their male counterpart at University of Lagos. This hypothesis was tested using the t-test for independence and the result presented in Table 4.

Table 4: t-test summary table showing difference between male and female respondents on psychological wellbeing.

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Std	df	t	P
Psychological wellbeing	Male	67	44.57	9.72	141	9.61	<0.05
	Female	76	30.89	7.24			

The result from table 4 shows that male students ($M=44.57$, $S.D= 9.72$) significantly reported higher scores on psychological wellbeing compared to female students ($M=30.89$, $S.D =7.24$). Male students significantly reported higher Psychological wellbeing ($t(141) = 9.61$, $p<.05$) than female students. This implies that gender significantly influences psychological wellbeing among physically students in University of Lagos. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

DICSUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the first hypothesis shows that there is significant positive relationship between social support and psychological wellbeing. The result implies that students who received adequate social support significantly reported high psychological wellbeing. The result is in line with the study of Skok, Harvey & Reddihough (2006) who confirmed that perceived social support significantly predicted well-being. Also, the study carried out by Joronen and Astedt- Kurki, (2005) corroborated this finding that adolescents in a comfortable, safe home, loving atmosphere, open communication involving trust and free opinions, support from family members, familial involvement and a balance of family and external relations develop positive psychological well – being. Although, evidence suggests an overall positive relationship between social support and well-being among children and adolescents. Some other factors other than those mentioned above may as well influence its magnitude. Furthermore, because children and adolescents' relationships with their support providers are potentially quite different from adults', the association between social support and well-being among them may also be different.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that problem focused coping, emotional focused coping, avoidance focused coping have joint influence on psychological wellbeing. When combined problem focused coping, emotional focused coping and avoidance focused coping accounted for 43% of the change observed in the self-report psychological wellbeing. This revealed that the collective presence of problem focused coping, emotional focused coping, avoidance focused coping have significant influence on psychological wellbeing. The result further revealed that problem focused coping, emotional focused coping and avoidance focused coping have significant independent influence on psychological wellbeing. The result indicated that physically challenged student with high problem focused coping, significantly reported high psychological wellbeing, also, physically challenged student with high emotional focused coping, avoidance focused coping significantly reported low psychological wellbeing.

On the other hand problem-focused coping failed to predict psychological wellbeing, and only emotion-focused coping predicted psychological wellbeing. This is in contrast to past findings. This study found emotion-focused coping to be a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing, instead of problem-focused coping. However, the relationship between emotion-focused coping and psychological wellbeing is a negative relationship. This outcome indicates that if emotion focused coping increases, psychological wellbeing would decrease (or psychological distress would increase). This result supports the study by Van Herrevelde and colleagues (2007) who investigated the relationship between coping strategies of inmates and their psychological well-being. The result shows positive correlation between coping strategies of inmates and their psychological and physical well-being. This result indicated that general affective states such as

optimism were related to both psychological and physical well-being and inmates who experience specific negative emotions such as regret, anxiety and sadness reported more psychological and physical complaints.

They emphasized further that inmates who used active emotion-focused coping strategy were in better health than inmates who inclined to keep their negative feelings to themselves. In addition, the result also corroborates the study by Sinha, Willson and Watson (2000) and Cattan, White, Bond and Learmouth (2005) that emotional-focused coping strategy is associated with lower levels of psychological well-being, and that problem-focused coping strategy are more effective and adaptive (Holahan, Valentiner & Moos, 1997). Similarly, Holmbeck (2011) found that caregivers who use emotion-focused coping strategy have higher levels of depression than those who use problem-focused coping.

Another study by Moeller and Richards (2011) reported that emotion-oriented coping strategy positively correlated with depression in both men and women. However, task-oriented coping strategy was negatively related to depression for women only. Also, Perlin, Mullan, Semple and Skaff (1990) in a study of 171 American immigrants, found that men and women did not differ significantly in terms of the rate of depressive symptoms, but they did differ in the sources of stress and coping associated with depressive symptoms for men and women in terms of coping responses. That is, the link between avoidance coping and depression seem to be similar for both men and women.

Also, Onyeizugbo (2014) examined the roles of age, gender and alcohol abuse as factors in coping behavior of 384 Nigerian adults. The finding showed that of the three variables, only alcohol abuse correlated with poor psychological health.

The result from the third hypothesis shows that male students significantly reported higher scores on psychological wellbeing compared to female students. Male students significantly reported higher Psychological wellbeing than female student. This implies that gender significantly influences psychological wellbeing among physically students in University of Lagos. This supports the study by Khan (2012) who found that Gender, socio-economic status, marital status and religious beliefs of the students were significantly influencing the outcome variables. Significant positive relationship was found between positive psychological strengths and subjective well-being and mentoring from teachers and educational encouragement from parents, siblings and friends. This result is contrasted by Bhupinder and Rakhi Udainiya (2009) who found that gender had no significant effect on the measure of well-being. Also, a study by Sood and Gupta (2012) showed that gender has no influence on subject well-being but revealed that age has an impact on well-being.

Conclusion

The paper examined the relationship between social support, coping styles, gender and psychological well-being among physically challenged students in university of Lagos. The result reveals that there is a significant relationship between social support, coping strategy, gender and the psychological well-being of the students who are physically challenged in the University of Lagos.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is imperative for the school authority and the family members associated with student with physically challenged students to be more diligent in responding to the psycho-social needs of individual experiencing physical disability more especially the female students who are physically challenged as the result of this study revealed that social support coping strategy and gender have significant relationship with psychological wellbeing.
2. It is also recommended that government and non-governmental organisation should endeavour to implement an ecological-based support programme in order to support, educate and enlighten physically challenged students, their family members and society on how to help the disabled students deal with life situation.
3. The findings of the study can be used to design programs and strategies to boost the academic performance of students who are physically challenged as the findings could be of help in managing, and handling psychological problems arising from disabilities thereby improving their wellbeing.

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