

Socio-Demographic Variables as Correlates of Mental Health among Unemployed Youths in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between Socio-Demographic Variables and Mental Health among Unemployed Youths in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State. The study was guided by three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses while correlational research and expo facto designs were used to conduct the study. A sample of 305 unemployed youths was drawn using purposive sampling technique. The instruments for data collection were Social Support Network Questionnaire (SSNQ) adapted based on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the Mental Health Outcome Questionnaire (MHOQ). The instrument was validated using face and content validity. Reliability of the instrument was done using the Cronbach alpha to check for the internal consistency and the reliability indices as calculated were thus: mental health outcome had a reliability coefficient of 0.95 while the second scale containing the social support alongside demographic details like age, gender, educational attainment had a reliability coefficient of 0.94. The collected data was organized, coded and analysed with the SPSS software using descriptive statistics. Data were presented using simple regression, multiple regression, mean and standard deviation, t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Findings from the study revealed that Social support, educational attainment and gender, independently and jointly influence the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The study therefore recommends that government in collaboration with health professionals, counsellors, religious bodies, community organizations should organize regular workshops and seminars that provide educational information while developing and implementing age-specific interventions and support strategies, gender-sensitive mental health programs, creating awareness and organizing programs that target mental health support for low SES youth and address unique stressors for high SES youth. All these services should be tailored to address the specific needs and interests of unemployed youths.

Keywords: Social support, Educational attainment, Gender, Mental health

Introduction

Unemployment is a significant global challenge with profound implications for mental health especially among vulnerable populations such as the youths. The youths are those in the stage of adolescence and early adulthood. By this statement, one might say that youths are individuals who are essentially expected to take care of themselves. In the Nigerian environment, the expression "youth" is for the most part characterized as people between the

ages of 18 and 35. This is in line with the Nigerian National Youth Policy 2019-2023 which defined youths as those between 15 and 35 years old (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). The United Nations described youths as people matured, 15 to 24 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023). However this can change by nation and setting. This period is set apart by the change from youth to adulthood, covering conclusive phases of character arrangement, vocation advancement, and social mix. During these years, individuals are particularly sensitive to environmental factors, including socioeconomic conditions, educational opportunities, and social support, which can significantly impact their mental health (Harris et al., 2023). However, unemployment among youths presents a distinct set of mental health challenges.

Unemployed youths could be described as those young individuals who are actively seeking work but are unable to find employment. Youth unemployment could be describe as the share of labour force ages 15-24 without work but available for seeking employment (World Bank, 2023). This issue is particularly pressing in many parts of the world, including Nigeria, where high youth unemployment rates reflect broader socio-economic and structural issues. This transition from education to employment is a critical phase, as failure to secure stable employment can lead to psychological distress, anxiety, depression and even low self-esteem. This has not only paved way to the architect of other mischievous social problems in the world at large but has negatively impacted on the mental health of these youths. The stress associated with job searching, combined with financial insecurity and societal expectations, can exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Being unemployed opens these individuals up to considering and taking up opportunities that would put them in the risk of losing their lives and constituting societal nuisance just to meet up with their daily needs and demands. Many unemployed youths have missed out on securing their dream jobs not because they are not qualified but because of the determining factors that surround the job search as some jobs place restrictions on the gender they wish to employ, the age range they will consider, and ridiculous terms and conditions that can only be met by a few. Therefore, with the pressure from the society and expectations from the same society these group live in, many venture into jobs where they are practically drained of their intellectual and physical strength and at the same time are being underpaid which stresses them psychologically and eventually affect their mental health negatively. They eventually begin to question their self- worth, at times their confidence drops to a very low level thereby affecting their level of concentration and productivity even when they find something doing for the mean time before the much

sought after job arrives. Recent research highlights this psychological toll of prolonged unemployment on young people. For example, Smith and Jones (2023) found that unemployed youths often experience increased levels of anxiety and depression due to the prolonged uncertainty about their future and the pressures to achieve economic independence which can affect their mental health.

Mental health is described by the World Health Organization (2023) as a condition of success in which each individual understands their own true capacity, can adapt to the typical burdens of life, can work beneficially and productively and can make a commitment to their local area. In addition, Mohommed (2023) as cited in Isiguzo and Okolie (2024) described it as that which involves the cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing of an individual at all stages of human development. This mental health condition often goes with certain mental health outcomes, both positive and negative on an individual's thoughts, behaviours, feelings and overall well-being. With this, the mental health outcomes of these unemployed youths are shaped with some socio-demographic factors such as social support, educational attainment and gender which were the focus of this study.

Social support is a variable that influences the mental health of the unemployed youths. Cohen and Wills (1985) described it as that which consists of emotional, informational, and practical help from friends, family, and community members. According to Hsu (2015) the four main categories of social support could be emotional, instrumental, informational and companionship (appraisal). However, these types may vary. When unemployed youths receive ample emotional support, they report higher levels of life satisfaction and better mental health (Berkman and Glass, 2021). This shows that emotional support is positively correlated with enhanced psychological well-being and life satisfaction in unemployed youths. Furthermore, Berkman and Glass (2021) maintain that emotional support contributes to a better mental health outcome by fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth. Oyebode et al. (2019) cross-sectional survey showed that higher levels of social support were associated with better and healthier mental health with emphasis on the protective role of supportive relationships. Bowers (2023) also noted that strong social networks provide emotional and practical support, which can alleviate some of the stress associated with unemployment and improve mental health. Conversely, a lack of social support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and stress, leading to poorer mental health (Clark & Lewis, 2023). Unemployed youths with limited social support may experience increased anxiety and depression due to the absence of necessary emotional and practical resources.

The discussion above shows that positive social relationships can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, all of which are crucial for mental well-being (Adams & Smith, 2023). The presence of a supportive network can provide emotional and practical support, which can lessen the opposing effects of unemployment on mental health. Strong social support can buffer the stress associated with job loss, providing both emotional comfort and practical help (Rossi & Green, 2023). A study by Eze and Okafor (2023) also indicated that strong social support networks provide emotional and practical assistance that can help alleviate stress related to unemployment. Furthermore, Lee and Turner (2023) study highlighted that unemployed youths with robust social networks report lower levels of psychological distress, indicating the protective role of social support in managing unemployment stress, lack of social support can lead to feelings of isolation and exacerbate mental health. However, unemployed youths might pull out from social circumstances as a result of sensations of disgrace or insufficiency which comes from dread of judgment from others. This pulling out can prompt expanded dejection and deteriorate psychological wellness issues. For instance, a youth who can't find work could keep away from family get-togethers or get-togethers to get away from discussions about their pursuit of employment (Bello, 2024). This segregation can extend sensations of sadness and make it significantly harder to look for the help they need. In Rivers State, the strength and quality of social network among unemployed youths can vary expressively. Traditional family and community networks in Obio/Akpor LGA, might offer varying levels of support, of which the absence or/inadequacy of such networks among unemployed youths can considerably impact their mental health. Therefore, the quality and availability of social support can either cushion the negative effects of unemployment or worsen them, highlighting the importance of social relationships in mental health.

Research proposes that ladies commonly have bigger interpersonal organizations, which can assist with safeguarding their emotional well-being during unemployment (Nwankwo and Chukwuma 2022). Conversely, young ones might be more averse to look for basic reassurance because of cultural tensions that put weakness down (Akinwale et al., 2023). This distinction in status shows the significance of altering support methods to meet the particular requirements of various youth gatherings. Social factors likewise impact the connection between friendly help and emotional well-being among these youths. Monetary unsteadiness can restrict how much help families and networks can give. At the point when monetary assets are choked, families could battle to address their own issues, prompting pressures that can additionally

strain connections (Nigeria Journal of Psychiatry, 2023). In such circumstances, the emotionally supportive networks that are critical for mental wellness might go under huge tension, making it significant for interventions to fix both individual necessities. Strong social support can cushion the strain associated with job loss, providing both emotional comfort and practical help (Roberts & Green, 2022). Notably, lack of social support can also lead to feelings of loneliness and intensify mental health issues.

Educational attainment is another crucial factor. Education and/or literacy, closely tied to employment opportunities are critical factors that can affect mental health, especially among the youths in Rivers State. It is not just a factor of employment but also a factor in shaping cognitive and emotional flexibility. Educational attainment among youths is flexible, with many young people facing obstacles to accessing quality education. According to Anderson and Martin (2023), youths with higher educational levels generally have better coping mechanisms and are more likely to access employment and in turn, displaying a level of good mental health. On the other hand, those with lower educational attainment are likely to struggle more with mental health issues due to lack awareness and limited problem-solving skills. In line with this Eze and Opara (2023) noted that low levels of education and literacy often limit job predictions, extending unemployment and its associated factors. Educational attainment affects mental health by influencing employment opportunities and self-efficacy. Therefore, higher educational levels are generally associated with better job prospects and lower stress levels, while lower educational attainment can restrict employment opportunities and increase feelings of frustration (Johnson & Patel, 2023). Unemployed youths with lower educational qualifications may experience heightened mental health issues due to perceived lower employability and the additional stress of job searching with inadequate qualifications (Williams, 2022). As a result of the fact that lower levels of education are often linked to higher unemployment rates and can further compound mental health challenges, unemployed youths with lower educational qualifications may feel a greater sense of failure and frustration, which can lead to more severe mental health problems (Johnson & Patel, 2023). Although Idowu et al. (2020) study revealed that higher educational attainment was linked to improved mental outcomes as education facilitates improved coping mechanism development among the unemployed youths, the findings of Johnson and Patel (2023) observed that higher educational levels might come with increased expectations and pressure, leading to distinct stressors, frustration and lower mental health distress among postgraduate youths. Significantly, educational attainment is a contributing factor to mental health of youths.

Gender is another factor that may influence mental health of unemployed youths. Gender is defined by United Nations as cited in Kaufman et al. (2023) as those roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women, socially constructed and are learned through socialization process. Research indicates that gender roles and expectations can influence mental health differently for men and women, with men potentially facing stigma around seeking help, while women might experience different social pressures and emotional burdens (Mojtabai, 2010). These young men may face pressures related to traditional masculine roles, which can lead to increased feelings of inadequacy and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression when they are unable to secure employment (Miller & Thomas, 2022). Furthermore, unemployed young men may face unique mental health challenges due to societal expectations around masculinity and economic success as social norms that emphasize economic success as a measure of masculinity can also intensify these challenges. This pressure can also increase the risk of maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, as a way to manage these emotional stresses (Clark & Lewis, 2023). On the other hand, young women may experience additional stressors related to balancing job searches with traditional gender roles and responsibilities such as household duties which can exacerbate mental health issues (Roberts & Green, 2022). Furthermore, females reported higher risks of depression and anxiety, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive interventions that will cut across mental health. This is consistent with Roberts and Green, (2022) who found that women are more vulnerable to mental health issues during periods of unemployment due to additional societal pressures and expectations. Generally, it could be seen that gendered expectations and societal stigma related to unemployment and gender roles can also affect self-esteem and contribute to unique mental health issues. This dual burden can exacerbate feelings of stress and depression (Davis & Moore, 2023). Therefore, gender plays a critical role in shaping mental health among unemployed youths.

The understanding of this discussion so far is crucial for addressing the complex interplay between socio-demographic conditions and mental well-being of unemployed youths which trap them in an unending cycle of disadvantage, especially in the area of study. Obio/Akpor Local Government Area due to its unique social challenges and demographic characteristics serves as an important context for examining these dynamics as the background provides an overview of the relationship between social demographic determinants and mental health

among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, exploring how factors such as social support, education and gender contribute to mental health disparities.

Statement of the Problem

Unemployment among youths in Obio/Akpor LGA has reached alarming levels, with major consequences for their mental well-being. Despite the serious nature of this issue, there is a notable lack of inclusive research that scrutinizes how various social and demographic determinants relate to influence the mental health of this youthful but helpless population. This gap in the literature underscores the urgent need for an in-depth inquiry into the specific social factors contributing to mental health differences among unemployed youths. Furthermore, it is well known to all that obviously, there is an increase in crude oil theft, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, internet fraud, commercial sex practice and other social vices in our society today due to the fact that many people especially able bodied men and women (youths) are not gainfully employed. Aside the already mentioned social problems, there is also a rise in suicide attempts lately by these young folks who are frustrated from their challenging situation of being unemployed. The economic situation of the country on its own bites deep into the fabrics of every member of the society as there is generally, limited availability of needed resources and evident high cost of living where the employed cannot comfortably carter for his needs and that of his household with the remuneration that he receives at the end of each working month as it is so little and insufficient to do so, the senior citizens (retired) are being owed their pensions thereby increasing the workload of the younger working class in the society. The underemployed are frustrated knowing very well that they would have been in better positions while maximizing their potentials, making and maintaining the right connections for the future and earning in good figures if they were opportune to. These factors and more that were not listed aggravates psychological stress on a different level in the lives of this category of people while lastly, the unemployed have this feeling of their being failures and burdens to families, friends and significant others thereby resulting to severe negative mental health outcome which might end up in suicidal ideations if not detected early enough and attended to in a proper manner.

In Rivers State, especially Obio/Akpor LGA, the high unemployment rate is compounded by socio-economic challenges, including weak social support network, low educational attainment, and gender issues. These factors collectively worsen mental health issues, creating a cycle of poverty and mental distress that is difficult to break. The lack of targeted research on the interplay of these determinants highlights a critical gap in understanding the full extent

of their impact on mental health. This study therefore aimed to investigate the socio-demographic variables correlates of mental health among unemployed youths in Rivers State.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent does social support relate to mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State?
- To what extent does educational attainment influence mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State?
- To what extent does gender influence mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. Social support network does not significantly relate to mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA.
2. Educational attainment does not significantly influence mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA.
3. Gender does not significantly influence mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA.

Methodology

The correlational research and expo-facto designs were used for the study. The study was conducted in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population of the study consisted 320 unemployed youths in Obio-Akpor LGA, Rivers. The sample of the study consisted of 305 participants drawn randomly and independently using purposive sampling technique from the communities in Obio/Akpor local government area of Rivers State. The instruments used for data collection were two structured questionnaires -Social Support Network Questionnaire (SSNQ) and the Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ). The SSNQ was divided into two parts A & B. Section A dealt with the demographic information of respondents such as age, gender, family type, size of family, marital status and educational status while Section B SSNQ which was adapted based on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) contained three sub-sections each measuring Family support (5 items), Friend support (5 items), Significant others support (5 items). The Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ) which measured quality of life has (20 items). Both questionnaires were designed on 4 point Likert scale (Very low Extent 1; Low Extent 2; High Extent 3 and Very High Extent 4) as

each questionnaire was divided into sections to provide context for understanding quality of life. The instruments for the study were validated by three experts in Educational psychology, Sociology of Education and Measurement and Evaluation from the University of PortHarcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach alpha technique. The mental health Questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.95 while the second scale containing the social support alongside demographic details like age, gender, educational attainment had a reliability coefficient of 0.94. These high reliability coefficients established that the instruments were reliable to yield consistent measures. The instruments were administered on the respondents by the researchers and trained assistants. The research questions 1-2 were analysed using simple regression and question 3 using mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses 1-2 were tested using the independent sample t-test associated with simple regression and hypothesis 3 using ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does social support relate to mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State?

Table 1: Simple Regression Analysis of the relationship between social support and mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
-.892	.769	.795

Table 1 shows that the R value which represents the correlation coefficient, is reported as -0.892. This indicates a strong negative correlation between social support and mental health among unemployed youths. In this context, a higher level of social support is associated with better mental health (lower mental health distress), while lower levels of social support are linked to poorer mental health (higher distress). The strength of the negative correlation suggests that social support is a crucial factor in shaping the mental health of unemployed youths in the region.

The R Square value of 0.769 indicates that approximately 76.9% of the variance in mental health of unemployed youths can be explained by the level of social support they receive. This is a substantial proportion, suggesting that social support is a dominant factor influencing mental health. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.795, slightly higher than the R Square, accounts for the number of predictors in the model and adjusts for the potential overestimation of variance explained. This further reinforces the conclusion that social support has a

substantial and reliable impact on mental health in this population. The slight increase in the Adjusted R Square suggests that the regression model is well-suited to predict the relationship between social support and mental health, indicating that the influence of social support is stable and consistent across the sample of unemployed youths. Therefore, social support plays a significant and powerful role in influencing the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. The regression analysis shows that social support accounts for a large portion of the variance in mental health, indicating that it is one of the most important protective factors for this population. Youths who have access to a robust network of support are more likely to experience better mental health, while those without adequate social support face an increased risk of mental health deterioration.

Research Question 2: To what extent does educational attainment influence mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the influence of Educational Attainment on mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

Educational Attainment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Primary	15	38.0000	.00000	.00000
Secondary	60	57.0000	11.88932	1.53490
Tertiary	194	58.0670	11.19542	.80378
Post Graduate	36	42.8333	6.42540	1.07090
Total	305	55.0721	12.26119	.70207

Based on the data presented, Table 1 shows that educational attainment has an influence in shaping the mental health among the unemployed youths. The table reveals distinct differences in the mean mental health across various educational levels: primary, secondary, tertiary, and postgraduate.

Youths with only primary education (N = 15) have a mean mental health score of 38.0000, with a standard deviation of .00000, indicating that all individuals in this group reported the same mental health. This homogeneity suggests a shared experience of poorer mental health among unemployed youths with primary education. The consistently low score points to a heightened vulnerability in this group to mental health.

Youths with secondary education (N = 60) have a significantly higher mean mental health score of 57.0000, with a standard deviation of 11.88932. This group exhibits a relatively wide range of mental health, as reflected by the standard deviation, indicating variability in how these individuals experience and cope with unemployment. The higher mean score suggests that youths with secondary education fare better in terms of mental health compared to those with only primary education. Youths with tertiary education (N = 194) have an even higher mean mental health score of 58.0670, with a standard deviation of 11.19542. This indicates that unemployed youths who have attained tertiary education experience somewhat better mental health than those with secondary or primary education. The small standard error of .80378 further suggests that the sample mean is a reliable estimate of the true population mean. The higher scores in this group could be attributed to the advantages associated with higher education. Interestingly, unemployed youths with postgraduate education (N = 36) report a mean mental health score of 42.8333, with a standard deviation of 6.42540. This lower score suggests that, despite having the highest educational attainment, these individuals experience poorer mental health outcomes compared to those with secondary and tertiary education. The relatively small standard deviation indicates that most individuals in this group have similar mental health experiences.

The overall mean for the total sample (N = 305) is 55.0721, with a standard deviation of 12.26119. This reflects the average mental health outcomes for unemployed youths across all educational levels, suggesting a moderate level of mental health distress in the population. However, the clear differences between groups point to the influential role that educational attainment plays in shaping these outcomes. Thus, educational attainment has a considerable influence on the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. Youths with primary education experience the poorest mental health. Those with secondary and tertiary education fare better. However, youths with postgraduate education appear to face unique mental health challenges.

Research Question 3: To what extent does gender influence mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the influence of gender on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mental Health	Male	126	56.7619	10.56139
	Female	179	53.8827	13.22802

Table 3 shows that male unemployed youths (N = 126) have a mean mental health score of 56.7619, with a standard deviation of 10.56139. In contrast, female unemployed youths (N = 179) have a slightly lower mean score of 53.8827, with a standard deviation of 13.22802. These findings suggest that while both genders face mental health challenges due to unemployment, there are noticeable differences in how these challenges manifest. The higher mean score for males (56.7619) indicates that unemployed male youths tend to experience better mental health compared to their female counterparts. The relatively moderate standard deviation (10.56139) suggests that, while there is some variation in mental health among males, many of them experience similar levels of mental health distress, indicating that unemployment is a common stressor but affects them in more consistent ways.

On the other hand, the lower mean score for females (53.8827) suggests that unemployed female youths experience somewhat poorer mental health compared to males. The higher standard deviation of 13.22802 indicates that there is more variability in mental health among females, reflecting a wider range of experiences in coping with unemployment. The differences in the standard deviations between males and females also suggest that females may be more vulnerable to fluctuations in mental health, with some experiencing significant distress while others manage to maintain more stable mental health. The greater variability in the female group may reflect a diversity of coping strategies and support systems, or a broader range of stressors that different women face. Generally, the total mean score across both genders suggests that unemployment negatively impacts the mental health of youths in general, but the impact is slightly more pronounced among females. Thus, gender plays a role in influencing the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. Male youths tend to experience slightly better mental health compared to female youths. However, the higher variability in mental health among females suggests that unemployment affects them in more diverse ways.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between social support and mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

Table 4: Independent samples t-test associated with Simple Regression analysis of the relationship between social support and mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Social Sup	-922	.027	-.892	34.33	.000

The results presented in Table 4 shows the unstandardized coefficients (B), standardized coefficients (Beta), t-value, and the significance level (Sig.). The unstandardized coefficient (B) for social support is reported as -0.922. This indicates that for each unit increase in social support, there is a corresponding decrease of 0.922 units in the mental health score. The negative value of B suggests that higher levels of social support are associated with better mental health (lower mental health distress). In practical terms, as the level of social support increases, mental health challenges among unemployed youths tend to decrease. This highlights the protective role that social support can play in mitigating the psychological effects of unemployment. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is -0.892, which signifies the strength and direction of the relationship between social support and mental health. A Beta value of -0.892 reflects a strong negative correlation, indicating that social support has a substantial influence on mental health. This means that as social support increases, mental health improves significantly.

The t-value is 34.33 with a p-value (Sig.) of .000, which is far below 0.05 for statistical significance. That is $t=34.33$, $p=.000$, <0.05 . A p-value of .000 indicates that the probability of obtaining the observed results if the null hypothesis were true is virtually zero. This provides overwhelming evidence against the null hypothesis, allowing a rejection. Given these results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the conclusion is that social support has a significant influence and prediction on the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of educational attainment on mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

Table 5: ANOVA analysis of the influence of educational attainment on mental health among unemployed youth in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11727.284	3	3909.095	34.632	.000
Within Groups	33975.129	301	112.874		
Total	45702.413	304			

The table reveals that the computed $F(2, 302) = 34.632$, $P < .05$, i.e. $p = .000$, i.e. $p = .000$ is less than 0.05 and this is statistically significant at the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of educational attainment on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State is rejected and the alternate accepted. This implies that there is a difference in the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA between those with primary, secondary, tertiary and post graduate educational attainment and this difference is statistically significant. By rejecting the null hypothesis, it is concluded that educational attainment does have a significant influence on the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. The substantial difference between groups, as indicated by the high F-value and low p-value, demonstrates that youths with different educational attainment experience significantly different mental health.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant influence of gender on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

Table 6: Independent samples t-test Analysis of the influence of gender on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	p	Sig
Male	126	56.7619	10.56139				
Female	179	53.8827	13.22802	303	2.030	.043	.05

Table 6 shows that the t-value, which measures the difference between the two group means relative to the variability in the scores, is 2.030. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mental health of male and female unemployed youths. The degrees of freedom (df) are 303, representing the total number of participants minus the number

of groups being compared (males and females). The table reveals that the computed $t(303) = 2.030$, $P > .05$, i.e. $p = .043$, i.e. $p = .043$ is less than 0.05 and this is statistically not significant at the chosen alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of gender on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA, Rivers State is rejected and the alternate accepted. This implies that the difference in the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA between male and female is statistically significant. Therefore, we have sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that gender has no significant influence on mental health. Given these results, the null hypothesis is rejected and concludes that gender has a significant influence on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. The slightly higher mean score for males suggests that they tend to experience statistically significant better mental health than females in this context.

Discussion of Findings

The result in hypothesis one showed that social support had an overwhelming significant relationship with mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. It is found in this study that unemployed youths with active and robust network of support are more likely to experience better mental health, while those without adequate social support face an increased risk of mental health deterioration. The support from friends, family and significant others have a way of ameliorating the psychological stress that unemployment poses as these group of persons as they feel wanted and cared for even in the face of seeking a means of livelihood that can be frustrating and draining in a failed society such as ours. Therefore, ensuring that these individuals have access to supportive relationships and community resources can make a substantial difference in their overall mental well-being. This finding is consistent with the research of Wang et al (2022) who found that strong social support networks significantly mitigate mental health distress among unemployed individuals. Social support is a powerful and influential factor in determining the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. The regression analysis clearly shows that a robust network of social support can significantly reduce mental health distress, while a lack of support is associated with greater mental health challenges. This is overwhelming evidence that social support has a significant influence and prediction on mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening social support systems as a critical component of mental health strategies for unemployed youths. This supports the work of Olaniyan and Adeyemi (2023), which emphasized that social support is a crucial buffer against mental health challenges. However, our study's strong correlation ($R = -0.892$) suggests that

social support's impact is even more pronounced in this context than previously documented. This might reflect a specific characteristic of the unemployment experience in Obio/Akpor LGA, highlighting the urgent need for support networks. This study denotes that active and robust social support has a substantial and reliable impact on mental health among unemployed youths.

Result from hypothesis two reveals that educational attainment impacts on mental health significantly. Youths with primary education reported the lowest mental health scores, while those with tertiary education fared better. Interestingly, postgraduate youths experienced lower scores than those with secondary and tertiary education, suggesting unique challenges despite advanced education. The findings of the study postulates that, those with only primary education have the poorest of mental health due to getting little or no opportunities to be gainfully employed, followed by those with just secondary level of education who exhibit an improved mental health much better than those of their primary educational level counterparts with better chances of securing jobs which they can make a living out of, then comes those with tertiary educational level of education whose result show that they have higher mental health based on having the benefits of attaining tertiary educational levels as they have learnt and have developed coping mechanisms that will help them through the phase of unemployment, then lastly those with post graduate educational level despite having the highest level of educational attainment, battle with low mental health compared to those with secondary and primary levels of education as their challenges tend to be more complex and unique. This might be due to increased expectations and pressures that come with having advanced degrees, which can amplify the stress of unemployment. It is not surprising to the researcher to note from the work that educational attainment significantly influences the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. This is because it is normal that the more matured one becomes (to an extent maturity comes with age and experience) as one furthers his/her educational pursuit, one gets in contact with various challenges in life which they also build some form of resilience to overcome. While higher education generally offers some protection against mental health issues, it's clear that it doesn't completely shield individuals from the challenges of unemployment. These findings align with studies such as those by Anderson and Martin (2023), which emphasize that higher educational attainment is generally associated with better mental health due to better job prospects and coping skills. Conversely, the lower mental health scores among postgraduate youths reflect the findings of Johnson and Patel (2023), who observed that higher educational levels might come with increased

expectations and pressure, leading to distinct stressors. Significantly, educational attainment is a contributing factor to mental health of youths.

Result from hypothesis three showed that gender had a significant influence on mental health among unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA. The result of research question three showed that male unemployed youths (mean score of 56.76) generally reported better mental health compared to female unemployed youths (mean score of 53.88). The variability in mental health is higher among females, indicating a wider range of experiences and potentially greater distress. The data indicates that female unemployed youths experience poorer mental health compared to males, with greater variability in their mental health scores. The study suggests that females respond differently to unemployment stress compared to their male counterparts as they are more vulnerable and tend to display a high level of psychological distress such as anxiety, depression and finally, suicide as a result of societal expectations and pressures while others manage to maintain more stable mental health due to the level of social support that they get from family, friends and significant others. On the other hand, the male youths with the challenge of unemployment tend to cope better as they have right from time had problem solving abilities inborn in them. These rationally thinking beings develop different coping skills to help them navigate this phase in life and as a result of this, show positive mental outcomes. This is consistent with Robert and Green (2022) which revealed that women are more vulnerable to mental health issues during periods of unemployment due to additional societal pressures and expectations. In variance, the findings of Clarks and Lewis (2023) suggest that males face greater mental health risks of maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance abuse as a way to manage this emotional stress. This variability in the study calls for the need for gender-specific approaches to mental health support. Gender is significant in the mental health of unemployed youths in Obio/Akpor LGA as it shows the different ways in which each gender respond to their unemployment challenge.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the work concludes that certain Social Demographic variables (social support, educational attainment, and gender) significantly influence Mental Health among Unemployed Youths in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State. This could be attributed to the different stressors that each gender encounters and their uniqueness in their ability to manage these stressors effectively.

Recommendations

Recommendations for this study are based on the results of the findings which are as follows:

1. Family, friends and significant others should strengthen social support networks and create community-based programs to enhance support systems for the youths.
2. Government should offer support tailored to educational levels, with specific programs for postgraduates to manage their unique pressures.
3. Government in conjunction with NGOs and Social Workers should implement gender-sensitive mental health programs to better support female youths and address the broader variability in experiences. Families should also be made to see how the pressure can be reduced on the part of the female youths.
4. Societal and cultural expectations should be reduced if not eradicated completely to have a society comprising of female youths with better mental health.

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