



EFFECT OF PERCEIVED INSECURITY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PRIVATE AND STATE OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined if perceived insecurity affects the psychological well-being of undergraduates. Questionnaires were shared with 300 participants from the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) and Renaissance University (RNU), Nkanu-West local government area, Enugu State, and a total of 230 filled the questionnaire properly, of which 118 (51.2%) were males, and 112 (47.7) were females, with a mean age of 21.97. This study made use of a cross-sectional survey design in the gathering of data. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to analyze the data statistically. The results showed that perceived insecurity significantly predicts subjective well-being. In contrast, Political and Economic PIS do not significantly predict subjective well-being. Communitarian PIS shows a weak but statistically significant negative relationship with subjective well-being. It is recommended that university managements prioritize incorporating various security measures to ensure the safety of their students.

Key words: Perceived insecurity, psychological wellbeing, undergraduate student,



Introduction

Youths' perceived insecurity has become a major issue in recent years, with severe consequences for their psychological health. Young people are especially vulnerable to the negative consequences of perceived insecurity on their mental health and overall quality of life as society experiences fast change and faces numerous problems. In accordance with a study by González Sanguino et al. (2020), young people's perceptions of insecurity have been associated to higher levels of anxiety and depression. The study emphasizes that kids' psychological wellbeing can be greatly impacted by their subjective sense of nervousness, regardless of their actual risk exposure. Insecurity and its impact on the psychological well-being of youths have gained increasing attention in recent years. Perceived Insecurity is the subjective feeling of being unsafe or vulnerable in a specific situation, influenced by individual beliefs and experiences. It does not necessarily reflect objective threat levels (Jackson and Gray, 2010). This perception can arise from various dimensions, including personal safety, economic instability, social unrest, and political volatility. Such perceptions can have profound implications for the psychological well-being of young individuals, causing significant levels of distress including symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (Gorman-Smith and Tolan, 1998). Numerous studies have highlighted the detrimental effects of insecurity on mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kopasker, Montagna & Bender, 2018; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015). Moreover, insecurity can disrupt normal developmental processes, potentially leading

to impaired self-esteem, academic performance, and social relationships (Rubio, 2007 as cited in Akbari & Javed, 2020). The effects of insecurity on psychological well-being are particularly pronounced during adolescence and emerging adulthood, as these developmental stages involve significant identity formation, autonomy-seeking, and exploration (Auerbach et al., 2018; Rudolph & Flynn, 2007). Insecurity during this critical period can hinder the acquisition of crucial skills and competencies necessary for successful transition into adulthood (Steinberg, 2014). Consequently, understanding the impact of insecurity on the psychological well-being of youths is essential for designing effective interventions and promoting positive youth development. While research on the topic has made significant progress, there is a need for continued investigation to inform evidence-based interventions. By understanding the complex interplay between insecurity and psychological well-being among youths, policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals can develop targeted strategies to mitigate the negative effects of perceived insecurity and promote positive youth development.

Statement of the problem: Perceived insecurity has over the years had a negative impact on young people's psychological health. Notwithstanding previous and existing studies on perceived insecurity and psychological wellbeing of youths, restricted movement (constant lockdown) caused by insecurity drove me into doing a research on the psychological wellbeing of people [undergraduates, especially those who are not from the eastern parts of Nigeria] living in an insecure environment. According to González-Sanguino et al. (2020), young



people's perceptions of insecurity were linked to higher levels of anxiety and sadness. Research by Holt, Buckley & Whelan (2008) demonstrates a strong correlation between exposure to violence and insecurity with increased risk of anxiety and depression among young people. Similarly, Gnanapragasam et al. (2023) find that an insecure environment contributes to chronic stress, which is associated with various mental health disorders. Ogle, Rubin & Siegler (2015) highlight that the constant fear and anxiety caused by insecurity may impede the formation of secure attachments and interpersonal relationships. Would perceived insecurity affect the psychological well-being of undergraduates? The main goal of this research is to discover if perceived insecurity will affect psychological well-being among undergraduate students.

- Perceived insecurity has a significant effect on the psychological well-being of undergraduate students.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis will be tested in this study:

Perceived Insecurity will not significantly predict the psychological well-being of undergraduates.

Method

Participants

This study used two hundred and thirty (230) students from two (2) different universities: Renaissance University and Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State, comprising 118 males and 112

females. A simple convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants, with a mean age of 21.97 and a standard deviation 15.26. The educational qualifications of the participants were FSLC, OND/NCE, HND/BSC and Postgraduate. The researcher selected the schools because they are the most affected by the periodic restricted movement (Lockdown/Sit-at-home) and other forms of insecurity in Enugu State.

Instruments

Perceived Insecurity Scale (PIS): Perceived Insecurity Scale by Wills-Herrera, Orozco, Forero-Pineda, Pardo, and Andonova (2011), is a 14-item scale that measures individuals' subjective experience of insecurity. It adopts a Likert-type scale, which means that respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). 300 copies of this questionnaire were distributed to Renaissance University and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The scale was found valid with a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS): Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) is a 5-item scale that measures global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction. The scale has been widely used in research on subjective well-being. The scale consists of five items that ask respondents to rate their agreement with statements such as "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal" and "I am satisfied with my life." The items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scores for each item are then summed to obtain a total



score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of life satisfaction. 300 copies of this questionnaire were distributed to Renaissance University and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The scale was found valid with a Cronbach's alpha of .87. The scale also correlates with other measures of well-being, such as positive affect, negative affect, and depression.

Procedure

The researcher administered the instrument with the help of his colleagues at both schools. The participants came from the two universities in Enugu and were chosen through simple random sampling. However, before administering the instrument, a student from each university assisted the researcher in gaining the attention of his

peers. The participants in the two universities that were chosen received the instrument. A total of 250 questionnaires were issued. 230 (76.67%) of the questionnaires that were distributed over the course of two days were correctly filled. Some were collected on the spot, while others were collected the following day. 25 (8.33%) were completely unfilled. Whereas 45(15%) were inadvertently filled. 230 (76.67%) copies of the questionnaire, filled out accurately in 90.90% of the cases, were used in the study.

Design and Statistics

The study used a Cross-sectional Survey Design (data was collected from a sample of individuals at a single point in time). In contrast, Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the stated hypothesis. Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to test the hypotheses. The data obtained from participants were analysed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS 25.0).

Result

Table 1: Correlation Matrix among Variables

s/n	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Gender			--							
2	Age	21.97	15.26	-.09*	--						
3	Educational Level			.08*	-.04	--					
4	Personal (PIS)	13.91	3.96	-.15**	-.17**	.06	--				



5	Political (PIS)	11.90	2.92	.03	-.07	-.10**	-.00	--		
6	Economic (PIS)	5.98	4.01	.06	.07	.05	.05	.05	--	
7	Communitarian (PIS)	8.76	2.97	-.03	.10**	-.12**	.00	-.05	.10**	--
8	SWLS	18.54	5.99	.00	.00	-.07	-.19**	-.01	.02	-.16** --

*p<.05, ** p<.001; Gender (dummy coded '0'- Male, '1'- Female); Educational level- 1-FSLC, 2- OND/NCE, 3-BSc/HND, 4- Postgraduate;

PIS- Perceived Insecurity

In Table 1, the data reveals several significant correlations in the context of subjective well-being (measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale or SWLS). The variable Personal Perceived Insecurity (PIS) shows a weak negative association with subjective well-being ($r = -0.19$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that higher levels of personal perceived insecurity are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being in this sample. In contrast, Political PIS and Economic PIS do not significantly correlate with subjective well-being, indicating that these aspects of perceived insecurity do not have a substantial relationship with subjective well-being in this sample. Communitarian PIS shows a weak negative association with subjective well-being ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that

individuals who perceive higher levels of insecurity in their community tend to report lower levels of subjective well-being. Lastly, the correlations between gender, age, and educational level with subjective well-being are not statistically significant, suggesting these demographic variables do not substantially influence subjective well-being in this sample. It's important to remember that these findings demonstrate correlations, not causation. Although Personal PIS and Communitarian PIS are significantly associated with subjective well-being, it doesn't conclusively mean that changes in these variables lead to changes in subjective well-being. Further research is necessary to understand these complex relationships better.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Model	Variables	Beta	t	ΔR^2
Model 1	Gender	-.05	-1.26	.008
	Age	-.01	-.28	
	Educational Level	-.07	-1.75	



Model 2	Personal (PIS)	-.27	-7.11**	.085
	Political (PIS)	-.06	-1.67	
	Economic (PIS)	.00	.06	
	Communitarian (PIS)	-.08	-2.16*	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$; Gender (dummy coded '0' - Male, '1' - Female); Educational level- 1-FSLC, 2- OND/NCE, 3-BSc/HND, 4- Postgraduate;

PIS- Perceived Insecurity

In Table 2, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis examined the predictors of subjective well-being, as measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The first model considers demographic variables: gender, age, and educational level. In this model, gender, coded '0' for males and '1' for females, shows a weak, nonsignificant association with subjective well-being ($\beta = -0.05$, $t = -1.26$). Likewise, age ($\beta = -0.01$, $t = -0.28$) and educational level ($\beta = -0.07$, $t = -1.75$) are not significantly associated with subjective well-being. This model accounts for 0.8% of the variation in subjective well-being ($\Delta R^2 = .008$). The second model incorporates measures of Perceived Insecurity (PIS) into the analysis. Personal PIS shows a moderate and significant negative association with subjective well-being ($\beta = -0.27$, $t = -7.11$, $p < .001$). This suggests that individuals with higher levels of personal perceived insecurity tend to report lower levels of subjective well-being. Political PIS and Economic PIS, however, do not show significant associations with subjective well-being ($\beta = -0.06$, $t = -1.67$ and $\beta = 0.00$, $t = 0.06$, respectively).

Communitarian PIS shows a weak but statistically significant negative relationship with subjective well-being ($\beta = -0.08$, $t = -$

2.16, $p < .05$). This implies that individuals who perceive higher levels of insecurity in their community tend to report lower levels of subjective well-being. In summary, after controlling for demographic factors, the perceived insecurity measures of Personal and Communitarian PIS significantly predict subjective well-being. In contrast, Political and Economic PIS do not significantly predict subjective well-being.

Discussion

This study aimed to research if perceived insecurity affects the psychological well-being of undergraduates. The hypothesis stated that "Perceived Insecurity will not significantly predict the psychological well-being of undergraduates". The result proves the hypothesis wrong; by showing that perceived insecurity is a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being. Ugwu and Asogwa (2017) did a study to investigate the moderating effects of mindfulness on the connection between psychological well-being and perceived job insecurity. It was expressly stated that those with low mindfulness will significantly and negatively relate to employees' psychological well-being, as opposed to those with strong mindfulness. According to the results of



multiple hierarchically moderated regression analyses the perceived high job insecurity was significantly and negatively associated to psychological well-being; however, the negative association between perceived high job insecurity and psychological well-being was weaker when mindfulness was high than when it was low.

Implication of the findings

The implications of this study are significant for both families and society, especially for undergraduates. The study found that perceived insecurity can have a negative impact on psychological well-being, which suggests that it is important for families and society to prioritize safety measures and address issues related to insecurity and violence. This is particularly important for undergraduates, who may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of insecurity and violence. The study highlights the need for universities and other institutions to provide support and resources to help students cope with feelings of insecurity and maintain their psychological well-being. Additionally, this research provides valuable insights into the relationship between perceived insecurity and psychological well-being, which can inform policies and practices aimed at promoting safety and security for all individuals. Overall, this study has important implications for families, society, and undergraduates, and underscores the value of prioritizing safety and well-being for all.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, due to time constraints and logistical challenges such as the long distance between the school of the researcher and the target

audience, the study was not able to include as many participants as desired. Additionally, the high levels of insecurity in both the location of the researcher and the target population made it difficult to recruit participants and conduct the study in a safe and secure manner. Finally, the increase in fuel price leading to an increase in transportation expenses may have limited the ability of some participants to participate in the study, which could have affected the representativeness of the sample. Overall, while this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between perceived insecurity and psychological well-being, it is important to consider these limitations when interpreting the results and generalizing the findings to other populations.

Recommendation

Based on the limitations of this study, there are several recommendations for future research on perceived insecurity and psychological well-being. Firstly, future studies should consider using alternative methods of data collection, such as online surveys or interviews, to overcome logistical challenges associated with participant recruitment and data collection. Secondly, future studies should consider using a larger sample size and a more diverse sample to increase the generalizability of the findings. Thirdly, future studies should consider using a longitudinal design to examine the relationship between perceived insecurity and psychological well-being over time. This would allow researchers to better understand the causal relationship between these variables and how they may change over time. Overall, these recommendations can help to improve the quality of research on perceived insecurity and psychological well-



being and provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence mental health in different populations.

Conclusion

The study aims to examine if perceived insecurity has a significant effect on the psychological well-being of undergraduates. The study found that age and gender are not significantly associated with subjective well-

being. Personal Perceived Insecurity and Communitarian PIS have a significant negative effect on subjective well-being, as an increase in perceived insecurity leads to a decrease in subjective well-being. The outcome of this study can help people realise the importance of adopting measures that can help improve mental health/ psychological well-being and protect themselves from exposure to insecure situations that can lead to traumatic experiences.

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