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EXAMINATION PHOBIA, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF STUDENTS OF COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES, NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The link between academic performance and factors such as emotional situations and responses to such emotions among students of health sciences is an area currently attracting profuse empirical investigation. This study investigated the relationship between examination phobia, substance abuse and academic performance of undergraduate students of a College of Health Sciences, South-south Nigeria. Four research questions guided this study. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design, a questionnaire (the Students' Phobia and Substance Abuse Questionnaire - SPSQ) was used to collect data from 200 participants from the four faculties, selected via a combination of stratified random and convenient sampling methods. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test statistical measures). The results indicated that examination phobia and

substance abuse are inversely related to academic achievements of the students of College of Health Sciences. These are related to the socio-demographic variables of the students. Students should be therefore taught effective coping strategies to build confidence prior to exercises such as examinations while frequent continuous assessments should be encouraged. University authorities and other government and non-governmental agencies also need to be more proactive in the prevention and control of substance (drug) abuse.

Keywords: Academic achievements, Drop-outs, Examination phobia, Substance abuse,

Introduction

During examination periods, students tend to be faced with psychological and physical related factors and situations. Khatoon and Parveen (2016) in their study on factors contributing to examination outcomes, they identified examination phobia as the major cause of academic performance. Thakur and Mahavidyalaya (2016) corroborated this by stating that more than 50 of students suffer from examination phobia, irrespective of whether the student is intelligent or not. Kaberi (2012) views the fear of examination as a state of having considerable significance for academic performance; a self-damaging factor which negatively affects students and their performances. Examination phobia which is a kind of anxiety that interferes with a student's ability to prepare adequately for an examination may be due to lack of preparation for the examination, poor time management and poor study habits. Lack of confidence, fear of failure and other negative thought process may also contribute to examination phobia. Abba (1997) stated that pressure to perform well in examinations may be a great motivator unless it is so extreme that it becomes irrational perfectionism. Low esteem and feelings of unworthiness provide unreasonable goals to achieve through examination situations. Emotional problem can affect a person's confidence and self-esteem, affecting both the mind and the body causing the individual to doubt the achievement his/her goal or potentials (Jimba, 2017). According to Jayatunge (2010), students experience genuine, deep-rooted problems in examination usually have their mind goes blank, they get the shakes, their hands go numb and they suffer from any form of sudden disabilities. This usually leads to failures in examinations.

Kamal (2009) was of the view that the student who fails examinations is more likely to engage in subsequent health-impairing behaviour like smoking and drug

abuses due to examination phobia. He asserted in his study that about 68.8 of the participants who had examination phobia were engaged in drug abuses. The inability to handle this phobia may lead the individual to substance abuse such as abuse of alcohol, cigarettes, Indian hemp, kola nuts, cocaine, heroine, morphine, among others. Many young people sprout cocaine joints and take an overdose of these substances in order to forget their frustrations and relieve tension and nervousness (Okeiya, 2012).

Onyegolu (2013) was of the view that it is not unusual to find students taking overdose of particular drugs before going to the examination hall and others take it to keep awake all the nights prior to the examinations.

To McMahon (2010), there is a relationship between examination phobia and the use of alcohol by college students, stressing that physiological manifestations of anxiety associated with examinations were consistently related to substance abuse. In an earlier study, Olatoye & Afuwape (2017) had established a relationship between examination phobia, substance abuse and the level of academic performance, which is determined through examination. Khatoon & Parveen (2010) asserted that examinations are employed in order to bring about qualitative improvement in education which involves both internal and external, to change the thinking and behaviour of individuals in desirable direction or cause a voluntary change (Khatoon et al, 2010; Ahmad, 2012). However, the extent to which examination phobia and substance abuse relate to academic performances among College of Health Sciences in the study area is unsubstantiated empirically (Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015; Ojukwu, 2016). This study investigated the relationship between examination phobia, substance abuse and academic performance of undergraduate students of College of Health Sciences at the Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, South-South Nigeria. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the relationship between examination phobia and academic performance of undergraduate students of College of Health Sciences?
- ii. Is there a relationship between substance abuse and academic performance?
- iii. Is there any significant difference in examination phobia and substance abuse between genders of the students?
- iv. Is the socio-economic level of the students related to their examination phobia and substance abuse?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design which was carried out at the College of Health Sciences of Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State. The College has four faculties, namely: Basic Medical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Nursing Sciences and Pharmacy.

The target population for the study included all registered students of the four faculties, who constituted the bonafide participants of this study. A sample of 200 students were selected for the study i.e. 50 students from each faculty. Since all the faculties run a minimum of five-year programme so 10 participants were selected by simple random sampling technique using balloting where 'Yes'/'No' were written in pieces of paper and any students that picked 'Yes' from each level made up the participants for the study i.e. $10 \times 5 \times 4 = 200$ participants.

A questionnaire tagged Students' Phobia and Substance Abuse Questionnaire (SPSQ) was used to collect data. The instrument had three sections (A, B & C): Section A was on socio-demographic characteristics of the participants while Sections Band C elicited information on the major variables of the study. A Likert Scale was used for sections B and C where responses were either "Always" (A), "Often" (O), "Sometimes" (S), "Rarely" (R) or "Never" (N). Weight was apportioned to each response ranging from 5 to I respectively.

The researchers engaged the services of four research assistants who were trained on how to effectively administer the instrument as each one was allocated a faculty. Their services aided the study greatly as all the questionnaires distributed were retrieved and properly completed for analysis.

Official letter was written to all the Deans of the faculties for their permission to conduct the study, this permission was not difficult to obtain because the researchers were faculty members. A letter soliciting the cooperation and consent of the participants was attached to the questionnaire and they were assured of confidentiality of information afforded the researchers and that the information was for research only but the product will be made available for the College of Health Sciences Administration.

In analyzing the data, percentage, frequency counts and t- test statistics were used at 0.05 level of significance.

Examination	
Result	
Table 1: So	
Variable	
Sex	
	Male
	Female
Age	15-23
	24-31
	32-39
	40 and
Faculty	
	FBMS
	Clinic
	Nursi
	Pharm
Marital Sta	
	Single
	Marrie
Religion	
	Christ
	Islam
Table	
The particip	
years, 70 (35	
and 20 (10)	
singles and 8	
while their	
Christians w	
Research o	
What	
performance	

Result**Table 1: Socio-demographic data of the (N = 200).**

Variable	F	%
Sex		
Male	110	55
Female	90	45
Age		
15-23	80	40
24-31	70	35
32-39	30	15
40 and above	20	10
Faculty		
FBMS	50	25
Clinical Services	50	25
Nursing Services	50	25
Pharmacy	50	25
Marital Status		
Single	120	60
Married	80	40
Religion		
Christianity	185	92.5
Islam	15	7.5

Table I shows that 130 (65) were males as majority and 70 (35) were females. The participants' age distribution showed that 80 (40) were between 15 and 23 years, 70 (35) were between 24 and 31 years, 30 (15) were between 32 and 39 years and 20 (10) were 40 years and above. By marital status distribution, 120 (60) were singles and 80 (40) were married. 50 (25) from each faculty were used for the study while their religious distribution showed that 185 (92.5) and 15 (7.5) were Christians with IS (7.5) were Muslims.

Research question 1

What is the relationship between examination phobia and academic performance?

Table 2: Relationship between examination phobia and academic performance.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	P	Remark
Examination phobia	200	40.31	5.96				
Academic Performance	200	43.02	14.49	188	0.483	0.05	S*

S = Significant at 0.05 level of confidence*

Table 2 showed a positive significant correlation co-efficient between examination phobia and academic performance of the participants. This implies that a student who has high examination phobia is not likely to perform highly in his/her academics. $t(188) = 0.483$; $P < 0.05$

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between substance abuse and academic performance?

Table 3: Relationship between substance abuse and academic performance

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	P	Remark
Substance abuse	200	31.41	5.971				
Academic Performance	200	33.03	6.846	188	7.811	0.05	S*

Table 3 shows the result of the t-test for the relationship between substance abuse and academic performance of the students. The result indicates a significant relationship between substance abuse and academic performance ($t(188) = 7.811$, $P < 0.05$). This implies that the more the participants are involved in substance abuse, the less they will perform successfully in their academic pursuits.

Research Question 3:

Is there any significant difference in examination phobia and substance abuse between male and female students?

Table 4: Comparison of male and female participants' examination phobia and substance abuse

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	P	Remark
Male	110	36.343	5.437				
Female	90	45.112	8.113	188	3.296	0.05	S**

*S***: significant at 0.05 level of confidence

The result as contained in Table 4 shows a t-value of 3.296 at 0.05 level of confidence indicating a significant difference in examination phobia and substance abuse between male and female participants. The result showed that female participants exhibit more examination phobia and substance than their male counterparts [$t(188) = 3.296, P < 0.05$].

Research Question 4

Is the socio-economic level of the participants related to their examination phobia and substance abuse?

Table 5: Relationship between socio-economic level and examination phobia with substance abuse

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	P	Remark
Low socio-economic level	140	46.181	14.03				
High socio-economic level	60	32.314	11.47	188	5.071	0.05	S**

Table 5 shows the t-test result, indicating a significant relationship between

the participants' socio-economic level with examination phobia and substance abuse ($t(188) = 5.071, P < 0.05$). The result showed that participants with low socio-economic status are likely to have examination phobia and involve in substance abuse than those with higher socio-economic status.

Discussion and Findings

Examination phobia is an emotionally related phenomenon. The findings from this study have shown that students who have higher levels of examination phobia are less likely to perform well in their academic achievements. Glatt (2012) in his study asserted that students that performed poorly in their academics had examination phobia and they took some substances to make them active and to suppress their fears. Fritscher (2011) asserted that examination phobia could have its origin from negative childhood influences and chronic childhood adversities such as violence from one or more adults including verbal aggression from parents due to failure of examination (in early schools), and other events that threaten or results in physical harm to the girl child. These can trigger phobia and substance abuse and incidentally to lack of academic performance.

Similarly, the findings of our study show that; the more students get involved in substance abuse prior to examination, the less they will perform in their academic pursuits. Jimba (2017) in his study asserted that emotional problem can affect one's confidence and self-esteem, thereby leading the individual to engage in substance abuse to make up and this can ultimately lead people being held back from achieving their goals or fulfilling their full potentials, including performances at examinations. The findings of this study further confirmed the study of Kamal (2009) that students that fail examinations are more likely to engage in substance health impairing behaviour like smoking and drug abuse due to examination phobia.

It is also found that participants with low socio-economic status are likely to have examination phobia and involve in substance abuse than those with higher socio-economic status prior to examinations (Onyegolu, 2013). On the gender analysis, it is found that female participants exhibit more examination phobia and substance than their male counterparts. This study finding that gender difference in the examination phobia and substance abuse where female students exhibited more involvement are also found by many studies elsewhere. Wang et al (2014) in their study also found out that in U.K., the ratio of females to males in alcohol abuse in 5:1 as alcohol related problems are significantly higher among females.

Some authors justify this finding, for instance, Afolayan and Afolayan,

Onasoga, Durojaiye & Ibitoye (2017) identified the reasons why more females now indulge in substance abuse at the school age including lack of self-confidence. However, this finding contradicts some previous studies. Ugodulunwa (2016); Omotosho (1999); Olawande (2017) and White et al (2018) had found out that gender was not significant to examination phobia. Similarly, Adisa, Adejumo and Tijani (2010), in their studying relationship between gender and substance abuse found out that male adolescents were more engaged in substance abuse than their female counterparts. The disparity in our present study could be explained to some extent by the socio-cultural environment in which this study was carried.

Conclusion

Academic performance and achievements are related to undergraduate students' behaviours prior to examinations. These behaviours include phobia for examination and its subsequent coping strategy, substance abuse. These negatively affect performance at examinations. This has become a problem Nigeria's higher institutions of learning. Examination phobia and substance abuse are coincidentally associated with gender and socio-economic differentials with negative correlation to academic achievements of the students of health sciences.

Recommendations

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

- i. Healthy competitive environment among the students must be created.
- ii. Students should be given frequent tests/continuous assessment to build confidence in them before the examination day.
- iii. Parents should always encourage their wards for better performance.
- iv. Teachers must give appropriate rewards to the students so that all of them can be motivated for better performance.
- v. A complete portfolio of each student may be prepared by the class coordinator to include attendance, behaviour, tests, and extra-curricula activities.
- vi. Counselling units must be created to assist in behaviour modification.
- vii. Healthy interaction should be encouraged among the students, students/lecturers.

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