

**PSYCHO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AS PREDICTORS OF DEPRESSIVE
REACTIONS AMONG ELDERLY WIDOWS IN ETCHE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
RIVERS STATE: A COUNSELLING MIRROR IMAGE**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent to which psycho-demographic variables as predictors of depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. Four research questions and four corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The research design for this study was correlational design. The estimated population for this study was 5,200 elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. This estimation was because as at the time of this study there was no accurate figure in any government department housing the population of elderly widows in Rivers State. The sample size of this study comprised 420 elderly widows. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Two instruments titled: "Psycho-Demographic Variables Scale" (PDVS) and "Depressive Reactions Scale" (DRS) was used for data collection. The instruments (PDVS) and (DRS) were validated based on face and content validities by experts. Cronbach alpha reliability statistics was used to compute the general reliability coefficient of (PDVS) to be 0.77 and (DRS) to be 0.80. Simple regression was used to answer research question 1-4 and their corresponding hypotheses was also tested at 0.05 Alpha level of significance. The findings of the study show that: family financial background, loneliness, self-esteem, anxiety significantly predicted depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State independently taken. Based on the findings of this study conclusion, recommendations and implications for counselling were made.

KEYWORDS: Psychological, Demographic Variables, Depression and Depressive Reactions

Introduction

In every human society, there are different individuals with different problems and age ranges. One of such categories of individuals is the elderly widow. However, the advancement in science and technology, as well as improvements in health services, have played an important role in increasing the number of the elderly in the world. Consequently, more and more people are surviving into old age with increased life expectancy. Factors such as decreased mortality rates, decreased birth rates, and migration trends contribute to changes in population structure and, thus, can be directly related to population ageing (Bloom & Luca, 2016). Defining the age of elderly persons has been challenging across low, middle, and high-income nations, compelling the

United Nations to establish the definition of elderly persons as those persons over the age of 60 years (UN, 2013), while the World Health Organization defines the elderly as those over the age of 65 years (WHO, 2016). In most gerontological studies, persons over 60 years of age are considered old and are taken to be the elderly segment of the population. However, in many high-income countries, the age of 65 is used as a reference point for older persons, as this is often the age at which persons become eligible for old-age social security benefits. This higher age category is less appropriate to the situation in developing countries, including Africa, where life expectancy is often lower relative to other regions (UN, 2013). Globally, the population is aging rapidly. Both the number and proportion of people aged 60 and above are increasing, although at different rates in different parts of the world. As the global population of older persons is estimated to increase from 11% in 2000 to 22% in 2050 (WHO, 2014), population aging will clearly transform all aspects of society, ranging from changes in economic security, employment opportunities, family structure, housing resources, and transportation services (UN, 2015). This imminent transition poses the challenge of effective delivery of healthcare services to older persons. The ratio of the elderly population (60 years and older) is now 10. By the year 2050, the ratio would have increased to 1 in 5. This older population will continue to age, and currently, people aged 80 and older represent 11% of the population aged 60 and above. By 2050, those over 80 will represent 27% of this older population (WHO, 2014). In Nigeria, the elderly segment of the population makes up about 4.3 percent of the total population, which was put at 140,431 [0.790 million] according to the 2006 population exercise [NPC, 2009]. The population of the elderly in Nigeria is increasing as the crude mortality rates are gradually decreasing (Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, 2003–2013). Asony (2018) stressed that elderly widows are women who have lost their beloved husbands through one difficult means or another, conclusively by an act of nature. This situation poses a lot of psychological problems for them, such as depressive reactions.

Depression is the most prevalent mental health problem among older adults. It is associated with distress and suffering and can lead to impairments in physical, mental, and social functioning. The presence of depressive disorders often affects the course and complicates the treatment of other chronic diseases. Although the prevalence of depressive symptoms in adults increases with age, depression is not a normal part of aging (Mental Health Foundation, 2013; Kinanee, 2018). There are symptoms that are more typical in older people; they often do not actually complain of low mood but become anxious, fearful, and lacking in confidence. Anxiety is a warning sign for depression in the elderly. Older people may also express their low mood through complaints about physical symptoms, especially pain. Confusion and forgetfulness are other common symptoms of depression in old age. Social factors often underlie depression in older people, especially losses and difficulties in socialization that lead to isolation and sometimes even boredom after retirement (Baldwin et al., 2002; Blazer, 2003). The risk of suicide is very high among older men in almost all cultures (WHO, 2013). The risk factors for late-life depression as seen in the elderly were determined to be related to advancing age, being a female, living alone, divorcement, a low education level, functionality disorders, comorbid physical illnesses, low-level cognitive dysfunction, and cigarette and alcohol use. In the majority of cases, depression in older people is a treatable condition. As with younger people, treatment consists of a combination of antidepressant drugs and supportive counseling or other forms of psychotherapy. It is also important to rule out physical causes of depression and avoid

other treatments able to cause depression (Baldwin, Chiu, & Katona, 2002). There are a lot of factors that could negatively influence depressive reactions among elderly widows, including family factors, psychological factors, social factors, and environmental factors. But of all these factors, the researcher feels that family and psychological variables play a major role in relation to depressive reactions among the elderly widows.

One of the most important variables in the demographic factors that could influence depressive reactions among elderly widows either positively or negatively is family financial background. Ogah (2013) stated that when there is poor finance in a family, it poses a lot of consequences on the elderly widows, especially on the female members of society. Money is needed for the daily running of family affairs, especially during bereavement. Loneliness is a psychological variable that is concerned with the isolation or distancing of people from one another as a result of unhappiness, death, personal decisions, etc. Adams (2018) noted that bereavement imposes a natural loneliness on the affected individual, but its consequences are much greater during old age because of low mobility and a lack of active functioning in social events. Due to the loss of their husbands, widows experience loneliness, especially during old age, which in most cases triggers depressive symptoms such as low mood, inactivity towards events, helplessness, etc. Self-esteem is central to influencing depressive reactions among the elderly either positively or negatively in society. Colman explained in Opurum (2017) that self-esteem is one's attitude towards oneself or one's opinion or evaluation of oneself, which could be negative or positive. Oba (2019) claimed that most times, widowhood imposes negative self-assessment during old age and also negatively affects the feeling and thinking dimensions of the affected person, leading in most instances to inactivity, low mood, and suicidal attempts. Anxiety in the elderly is a state of hyper-alertness in which excessive autonomous arousal results in diminished coping strategies. Anxiety, panic, and phobias disrupt the lives of 100% of older persons. Fear is a normal emotion, but sometimes it gets out of control and interferes with the ability to do even simple things. Anxiety is also often a sign of depression in older people and can amplify the physical symptoms related to low mood (Vasiliadis, Dionne, Preville, Gentil, Berbiche, and Latimer, 2013). Cognitive-behavioral therapy and drug treatments, including some that work on both anxiety and depression, can also be useful (Vasiliadis Dionne, Preville, Gentil, Berbiche, and Latimer, 2013). Sampson (2012), in his study on the correlates of anxiety among the elderly, noted that millions of the elderly in the world are passing through various psychological problems that need to be properly examined and solutions proffered. It is against this background that the researcher conceived the idea to investigate psycho-demographic variables as predictors of depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Review of Literature

The condition of the elderly widows in Nigeria is a very pitiable one. Even though the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Section 14 (20b)] indicates that "the security and welfare of the people (including the elderly) shall be the primary purpose of the government," the senior citizens seem to be left out of any welfare plans of successive governments at all levels. For instance, Section 16(2)(d) stipulates that "suitable and adequate shelter and food, a reasonable minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, unemployment, sick benefits, and the welfare of the disabled are

provided for all citizens," yet that provision has not been felt significantly by the elderly. In the light of the constitutional provisions mentioned above and in spite of other international instruments dealing with the welfare of the older population, to which Nigeria is a signatory, there appear to be little or no concrete plans in place for taking care of this group of citizens. Beers and Berkow (2004) and Berman, Snyder, Kozier, and Erb (2013) were in agreement that in rendering care for the older adults, certain guidelines must be taken into cognizance, as stated below.:

- Consider individuality of these clients. Never attempt altering their lifelong character and behaviour.
- Be patient, kind and empathic while rendering care. Ensure they are handled gently and maintain privacy while providing care.
- Effective communication: Ensure they hear you.
- Encourage independence as much as possible.

Depression is the most prevalent mental health problem among older adults. It is associated with distress and suffering and can lead to impairments in physical, mental, and social functioning. The presence of depressive disorders often affects the course and complicates the treatment of other chronic diseases. Depression is a more intense and persistent state than sadness, which is less intense and very short-lived. Osundu (2019) investigated correlates of depression among the elderly in Imo State. The study adopted four research questions and corresponding hypotheses. A correlational research design was used for the study. A sample of 400 elders was drawn through accidental sampling techniques. Pearson product moment correlation was used for data analysis. It was found, among others, that there is a significant relationship between family level of income and depression among the elderly in Imo State. Omeriu and Udoh (2016) carried out a study on self-concept and age in Delta State. The study used three research questions and three hypotheses. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. It was found that self-concept significantly influences age based on gender.

Statement of the Problem

Human life develops sequentially from conception, birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and death. Each of these stages has its own unique challenges. However, the problem associated with old age or the elderly period, as experienced by widows in Rivers State, seems more devastating than other stages, as observed by the researcher in recent times. This is because widowhood poses a lot of psychological problems for affected individuals in addition to problems resulting from old age. Elderly widows face challenges of low self-esteem that negatively affect their feeling and thinking dimensions; anxiety and loneliness result from their age and lack of life pattern; and the economic nature of the family. All these could contribute to depressive reactions such as inactivity, low mood, suicidal attempts, a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness, and a loss of enthusiasm for life. However, there is a need for every individual in all spheres of life to always contribute positively to the total wellbeing of elderly widows in society, considering their age and the situation they are in. The problem of this study, therefore, is to examine the extent to which psycho-demographic variables predict depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which psycho-demographic variables predict depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The objectives are to:

- (1) Examine the extent to which family financial background predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- (2) Find out the extent to which loneliness predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- (3) ascertain the extent to which self-esteem predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- (4) Investigate the extent to which anxiety predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide this study.

- (1) To what extent does family financial background predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- (2) To what extent does loneliness predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- (3) What is the extent to which self-esteem predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- (4) To what extent does anxiety predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance were used to guide this study.

- (1) Family financial background does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- (2) Loneliness does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- (3) Self-esteem does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- (4) Anxiety does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Methodology

The research design for this study was correlational design. The estimated population for this study was 5,200 aged widows in Rivers State. This estimation was because as at the time of this study there was no accurate figure in any government department housing the population of elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample size of this study comprised 420 elderly widows. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Two instruments titled: "Family and Psychological Variables Scale" (PDVS) and "Depressive Reactions Scale" (DRS) was used for data collection. The (PDVS) comprised 49 items which (DRS) comprised 54 items. All the items were structured based on the four point modified likert rating scale of Strongly Agree = SA, agreed = A, disagree = D and Strongly Disagree = SD which were assigned numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 for positively keyed items and 1, 2, 3 and 4 for negatively keyed items. The instruments (PDVS) and (DRS) were validated based on face and content validities by three experts; one in guidance and counselling and two others in measurement and evaluation. Using a sample of 30 elderly widows who were not part of the sample for this study cronbach alpha reliability statistics was used to compute the general reliability coefficient of (PDVS) to be 0.77 and (DRS) to be 0.80. The researcher engaged the services of (youth leaders) in each community who were properly guided on what to do and the instruments were retrieved immediately after administration. Simple regression was used to answer research question 1-4 and their corresponding hypotheses was also tested at 0.05 Alpha level of significance.

Results

The results of this study were presented in the tables as follows:

Research Question One: To what extent does family financial background predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1: Simple regression on the extent family financial background predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.153 ^a	.023	.021	6.59928

a. Predictors: (Constant), family financial background

Table 1 shows that there is a low positive relation between family financial background and depressive reaction of elderly widows R=0.153. The adjusted R square value=0.021. This implies that 2.1% of the variation in depressive reactions of elderly widows can be explained by family financial background of elderly widows while the remaining 97.7 % can be due to other factors not included in this model

Research Question Two: To what extent does loneliness predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 2: Simple regression on the extent loneliness predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.146 ^a	.021	.019	6.60654

a. predictors: (constant), loneliness

Table 2 shows that there is a very low relationship between loneliness and depressive reactions of elderly widows (R= 0.15) The Adjusted R square value=0.019 shows that only 19% of the variation in the depressive reactions of elderly widows can be explained by loneliness. The remaining 81% in the variation in their depressive reactions can be attributed to other factors not included in the model.

Research Question Three: What is the extent to which self-esteem predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 3: Simple regression on the extent self-esteem predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.626 ^a	.392	.390	5.20740

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-esteem

Table 3 shows that there is a positive moderate relationship between self-esteem and depressive reactions among elderly widows (R= 0.63). With an Adjusted R-square value of 0.392, it implies that 39,2 % of the variation in depressive reactions can be explained by self-esteem of elderly widows while the remaining 60.8 % can be due to other factors not included in this model.

Research Question Four: To what extent does which anxiety predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 4: Simple regression on the extent to which anxiety predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.327 ^a	.107	.105	6.31009

a. predictors: (constant), anxiety

Table 4 shows that there is a low positive relationship between anxiety and depressive reactions among elderly widows (R= 0.32). With an Adjusted R-square value of -0.105, it implies that 10.5% of the variation in the depressive reactions be explained by the anxiety while the remaining 89.5% can be due to other factors not included in this model.

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Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Family financial background does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 5: ANOVA associated with simple regression on the prediction of Family financial background on depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State

Table 5a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	416.979	1	416.979	9.575	.002 ^b
	Residual	17333.113	418	43.551		
	Total	17750.093	419			

a. Dependent Variable: depressive reactions scores

b. Predictors: (Constant), family financial background

Table 5a shows that the prediction is significant (F=9.56, DF=1, 418, p<0.05), hence H02 which state that family financial background does not significantly predict depressive reaction is rejected.

Table 5b

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	56.234	2.240		25.107	.000
	Family financial background	.266	.086	.153	3.094	.002

a. Dependent Variable depressive reactions scores

Table 5b shows that for every increase by 1SD in the family financial background score, there will be a increase of 0.15 SD in the depressive reactions score of the elderly widows.

Hypothesis Two: Loneliness does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 6: ANOVA associated with simple regression on the prediction of loneliness on depressive reactions among elderly widows

Table 6a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	378.825	1	378.825	8.679	.003 ^b
	Residual	17371.267	418	43.646		
	Total	17750.093	419			

a. Dependent Variable: depressive reactions scores

b. Predictors: (Constant), loneliness

The ANOVA table shows that the prediction is significant ($F=8.68$, $DF=1$, 418 , $p<0.05$). Therefore, H_01 is rejected, implying that loneliness significantly predicts depressive reaction among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 6b

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	54.101	3.069		17.631	.000
Loneliness	.273	.093	.146	2.946	.003

a. Dependent Variable: Depressive reactions scores

Table 6b shows that for every increase by 1 SD in the loneliness scores, there will be an increase of 0.15 SD in the depressive reactions score of elderly widows.

Hypothesis Three: Self-esteem does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 7: ANOVA associated with simple regression on the prediction of Self-esteem on depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State

Table 7a:

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6957.532	1	6957.532	256.575	.000 ^b
	Residual	10792.560	418	27.117		
	Total	17750.093	419			

a. Dependent Variable: depressive reactions scores

b. Predictors: (Constant), self-esteem

Table 7a shows that the prediction is significant ($F= 256.58$, $df=1$, 418 , $p<0.05$), hence H_04 is rejected. This implies that Self-esteem significantly predict depressive reactions

Table 7b

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	43.690	1.239		35.269	.000
Self-esteem	.767	.048	.626	16.018	.000

a. Dependent Variable: depressive reactions scores

Table 7b shows that for every increase by 1 SD increase in the self-esteem, there will be an increase of 0.63 SD in the depressive reactions score of elderly widows.

Hypothesis Four: Anxiety does not significantly predict depressive reactions among aged widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State

Table 8: ANOVA associated with simple regression on the prediction of anxiety on depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 8a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1902.809	1	1902.809	47.789	.000 ^b
	Residual	15847.283	418	39.817		
	Total	17750.093	419			

a. Dependent Variable: depressive reactions scores

b. predictors: (constant), Anxiety

Table 8a shows that the prediction is significant ($F= 47.79$, $df=1, 418$, $p<0.05$), hence H_03 is rejected. This implies that anxiety significantly predict depressive reactions.

Table 8b:

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	50.981	1.780		28.647	.000
	Anxiety	.448	.065	.327	6.913	.000

a. Dependent Variable: depressive reactions scores

Table 8b shows that for every increase by 1 SD in the anxiety score, there will be a decrease of 0.33SD in the depressive reactions score of elderly widows.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study are summarized as shown below:

1. It was shown that family financial background significantly independently predicted of depressive reactions of elderly widows.
2. It was found that loneliness significantly independently predicted of depressive reactions of elderly widows.
3. The study showed that self-esteem independently predicted of depressive reactions of elderly widows.
4. It was found that anxiety independently predicted of depressive reactions of elderly widows.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings was based on summary of the findings of this study:

The finding of research questions one and its corresponding hypothesis one revealed that family financial background significantly predicts depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. This means that lack of money by widows during old age negatively affects their mood, hope in life, and

activeness in events. This finding is in agreement with that of Osundu (2019) who found that there is significant relationship between family level of income and depression among the elderly in the society.

The finding of research question two and its corresponding hypothesis two shows that loneliness significantly predict depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. This also implies that loneliness as a result of bereavement during old age negatively affects the feeling and thinking dimensions of elderly widows. This finding is in agreement with that of Edem (2016) who found that there is significant relationship between loneliness and depressive feelings among aged people.

The finding of research questions three and hypothesis three indicates that self-esteem significantly predict depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. This means that negative self-evaluation affects the mood and activeness of elderly widows in the society. This finding is in line with that of Omeriu and Udoh (2016) who found that self-concept significantly influences aged based on gender.

The finding of research question four and hypothesis four revealed that anxiety significantly predict depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. This implies that apprehension during old age has a tremendous negative impact especially in instigating depressive reaction among elderly widows. This finding is in line with that of Miller and Collier (2018) who found that there is significant relationship between anxiety and depression among the aged.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that family financial background, loneliness, low self-esteem, and anxiety significantly predict depressive reactions among elderly widows in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. Therefore, psycho-demographic variables play an important role in the depressive reactions of elderly widows.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study.

- (1) Government and non-governmental organizations at all levels should always provide constant grants for the support of the elderly widows in society. As this will help to alleviate the plight of the Pilate widows.
- (2) Government and private agencies should always provide housing and a home for handicapped elderly widows in society.
- (3) Guidance-counsellors should always render constant personal-social counselling to the elderly widows by visiting them in their homes, churches, mosques, etc.
- (4) The society should always treat the elderly widows in a special way by showing them love and care and also helping them with financial support and other psychological needs that may help their lives positively.

- (5) The families of elderly widows should always encourage them in areas where they may need their support.
- (6) Elderly widows should always have a positive disposition towards life and always see their present conditions as not the end of life.

Implications for Counselling

The following are the counselling implications of the findings of this study:

- (1) There is a need for the provision of free and gerontological or geriatric counselling by guidance-counsellors in our society.
- (2) Counselling services should be tailored towards the management of depressive reactions among elderly widows.
- (3) Counselling services should always be provided to the immediate families of elderly widows in our society.
- (4) Counselling services should be provided to members of the general public on the best ways to recognize and positively accommodate the elderly widows in the society.

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