

Assessment of public stigma towards mental illness among Nigerian graduates^{1,*}Usman H. T., ^{2,*}Akande Y., ^{3,*}Muhammad A. and ^{3,*}Abiola T.¹Department of Information and Protocol Unit; ²Department of Research and Training;³Department of Medical Services; *Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Kaduna.

Corresponding Author:

Abiola T., Department of Medical Services; Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Kaduna. Email:

abiolatob@yahoo.com**Abstract**

Background: Public stigma towards psychiatric disorders is a disadvantaged social portrait describing people with mental illnesses cutting across all spheres of life. Such collective unhelpful mindset has been described as the outcome triad of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination. Commonly, the stigma towards mental illness in Nigeria are high especially among healthcare providers, professionals in academics and adults in working in factories. None of these studies has accessed fresh university graduates' stigma towards mental disorders. Considering the paucity of data on stigma towards the mentally ill among these group of people in Nigeria, the present study accessed public stigma level among fresh graduates that are currently undergoing the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme.

Methods: A socio-demographic questionnaire was developed and attached to Stig-9 instrument. The participants filled the study instruments and analyzed to access the level of public stigma and associated variables among graduates engaged in the NYSC scheme.

Results: The social demographic variables revealed the mean age of participants was 25.87 years (SD = 2.88). Most participants were male and not married. Overall, stigma was found to be significantly higher in female gender and those unmarried as at the time of data collection.

Conclusion: The researchers concluded that public stigma towards mental illness is high among fresh graduates undergoing orientation for the NYSC scheme. The stigma is significantly high among the female gender and those who are not married. This pinpoints the need for the promotion of mental health and anti-stigma campaigns among youths.

Keywords: Public stigma; mental illness; graduates; NYSC

Introduction

Public stigma towards psychiatric disorders is a cross-cultural phenomenon that described individuals with mental illness as immature savages lacking autonomy.¹ This disadvantaged social portrait description of people with mental illnesses are common in the social discuss of individuals in all spheres of life.¹⁻³ Such collective unhelpful mindset has been described as the outcome triad of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination.⁴

Commonly, the stigma towards mental illness in Nigeria are high especially among healthcare providers, professionals in academics and adults in working in factories.^{2,3,5,6} None of these studies has accessed fresh university graduates' stigma towards mental disorders. Considering the paucity of data on stigma towards the mentally ill among these group of people in Nigeria, the present study accessed public stigma level among fresh graduates that are

currently undergoing the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme in Kaduna State, North Western Nigeria using the validated English version of Stig-9.²

Methodology

The participants were graduates engaged in the NYSC scheme during the “Batch C” 2018 NYSC orientation camp in Kaduna. They were approached to fill the study instruments comprising of socio-demographic questionnaire and Stig-9. The sociodemographic consisted of age, gender and marital status. Stig-9, a nine-item measuring scale, was used to accessed the negative social expectations on mental illness as reported by the participants.⁷ The Stig-9 has been used in Nigeria with sound internal consistency and consisting of three factorially derived subcomponents of “perceived loss due to stigma,” “emotional reaction expressed as a result of stigma” and “preoccupations with labeling.”² Informed consent was obtained from the participants before filling the study instruments.

Results

A total of 346 fresh graduates participated in the study. As shown in table 1, the participants’ mean age was 25.87 years with a standard deviation of 2.88 yrs. Most of the participants were male (55.5%), unmarried (92.2%) and belong to the Christian faith (53.5%). The test of internal consistency of Stig-9 is moderately high (0.792). Table 2 reported that the overall stigma was found to be significantly higher in the female gender ($t=3.0993$; $p<0.05$) and in participants currently unmarried ($t=2.171$; $p<0.05$).

Table 1 – Sociodemographic variables of participants (N=346)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
<=25	163	47.1
>25	183	52.9
Mean = 25.87		Standard deviation = 2.88
Gender		
Male	192	55.5
Female	154	44.5
Religion		
Islam	161	46.5
Christianity	185	53.5
Marital status		
Married	27	7.8
Not married	319	92.2

Table 2 – STIG-9 mean score according to participants' sociodemographic variables

Variables		Mean scores Stig-9 Scores			
		Overall [14.83 (6.28)]	Perceived	Emotional reaction	preoccupation
Age (years)	<=25	15.20 (6.30)	7.79 (3.96)	3.84 (1.80)	3.57 (1.90)
	>25	14.49 (6.26)	7.64 (4.03)	3.41 (1.98)	3.44 (1.76)
	t-test	1.051	0.353	2.106*	0.650
Gender	Male	13.90 (5.91)	7.19 (3.82)	3.35 (1.91)	3.36 (1.78)
	Female	15.98 (6.55)	8.36 (4.12)	3.94 (1.86)	3.68 (1.87)
	t-test	3.0993**	2.745**	2.843**	1.638
Religion	Islam	14.63 (6.15)	7.72 (3.92)	3.00 (1.91)	3.43 (1.86)
	Christianity	14.95 (6.39)	7.66 (4.05)	3.72 (1.91)	3.57 (1.80)
	t-test	0.637	0.901	0.263	0.471
Marital status	Married	14.61 (6.23)	7.54 (3.93)	3.60 (1.91)	3.48 (1.82)
	Not married	17.33 (6.39)	9.74 (4.30)	3.81 (1.92)	3.78 (1.85)
	t-test	2.171*	2.774**	0.573	0.815

*=p<0.05; **=p<0.01; Stig-9 Cronbach's alpha = 0.792

Discussion

The high stigma rates among the younger age group in this study is similar to previous studies in Nigeria.^{2,3,5,6} The finding is however, not significant on the overall score, but, on the subscale of negative emotions expressed to fuel stigma, our study reported significant finding. This underscores the possibility of an underlying psychological mechanism that fuels the ignorance, prejudice and discrimination of public stigma.⁴

Another significant finding in this study is gender, specifically the female gender. Our finding is similar to previous studies in Nigeria.^{2,3,5,6} A suggested psychological mechanism propelling public stigma more in

the female gender might be inferred from the significant two subcomponents of: mental illness-related perceived loss and expressed emotions fueled by stigma due to psychiatric disorders. Such speculations are possibly related to the three most common public belief causation of mental illnesses. These are supernatural causation, moral ineptitude due to substance use and weak-mindset in the face of psychological trauma.^{6,8}

The other significant variables in this study is being unmarried. This is instructive considering that the state of being married is representative of high social support by enriching the non-individualistic nature of Nigerians.² Hence, suggesting that high

social support might be helpful in rolling back stigma due to mental illnesses.

The mean score of Stig-9 in this study is 14.83. A finding similar to a previous study among adults working in a factory in Northern Nigeria. This is interesting considering that all our participants are educated and being similar to those with formal education. Hence, suggesting that there is low mental health literacy in our educational settings.

With the above noted, this study has some limitations as the findings cannot be generalized to the multiethnic nature and varied adult age groups in Nigeria. This is because the participants in this study are fresh graduates, belonging to the younger age group and cannot represent the diverse adult age group across Nigeria.

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that public stigma towards mental illness is high among fresh graduates undergoing orientation for the NYSC scheme. The stigma is significantly high among the female gender and those who are not married. All these suggested some variables for possible intervention in rolling back stigma among graduates in Nigeria. This pinpoints the need for the promotion of

mental health and anti-stigma campaigns among youths.

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Conflict of interest: Nil