

Social Media and Depression among Adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria: Counselling Implications

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Abstract:

*The number of adolescents experiencing symptoms of depression and depressed seems to increase in Ekiti State, Nigeria despite the devastating effects. Many of these people seem addicted to the use of social media at the expense of other activities at home, school and community at large. This seems to put them at risks thus affecting their health leading to depressive symptoms and depression. This study explored the association of exposure to social media and depression among the adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria. The study was a descriptive survey. A sample of 600 adolescents were selected using multi-stage sampling technique from the 16 local government areas of Ekiti State from a population of 5000. A self designed questionnaire – Social Media and Depression Scale (SMDS) ($r= 0.75$), was used to collect data. Data were analysed using frequency and percentage to find out the level of depression. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and *t*-test were used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results show that there was evidence of depressive symptoms and even depression among adolescents. Exposure to social media was not significantly related to the development of depression among adolescents. There was statistically significant difference in the incidence of depression among male and female adolescents on the use of social media in Ekiti State of Nigeria. It was recommended among others that school counsellors should design effective methods for detecting, assessing and treating adolescent depression in schools where most of the adolescents are found*

Key Words: Social Media, Depressive Symptoms and Depression, Exposure to social media.

Introduction

It is not uncommon to find many adolescents feeling sad and down for a number of reasons different from adults. For example, some of them might feel sad because of their non performance in school or for failing examinations. Some might have experienced strained romantic relationship or lost a parent, friend or a loved one. They might also feel disappointed and lose interest in activities they once found pleasurable. In some instances when adolescents are sad or withdrawn emotionally and socially, their parents or teachers might think they are simply playing some pranks or just acting out poor behaviour for a purpose while in actual sense, the adolescent might be suffering from depression.

Depression is described as a mood disorder that lies on one extreme of mood or affect and characterized by lowered self-esteem, changes in sleep pattern, changes in appetite or weight and inability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability and anxiety (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2013; Krucik, 2013; Smith, Saisan & Segal, 2014). Researchers at the Black Dog Institute (2012) have also identified some other signs of depressive mood to include varying emotions throughout the day, reduced capacity to experience pleasure (that is, inability to enjoy what one used to enjoy in the past), reduced pain tolerance for minor aches and pains, changed sex drives, poor concentration and memory, reduced motivation to carry out usual tasks and lowered energy level.

The number of adolescents experiencing these symptoms of depression and even depression seems to be on the increase across the world despite its devastating effects. Depression is widely acclaimed as potentially life threatening and Adeniyi, Okafor and Adeniyi (2012) warned that it might rank second after heart diseases worldwide by the year 2020 as a killer disease. In other words, given the nature of depression, its signs and symptoms, it could impact negatively on their development socially, physically and emotionally. For example, depression could be attributable to the changes in their emotions, their ability or inability to interact with their peers and even their school performances. Adolescents who are depressed might be at increased risk of having problems with school work and not getting along well with their teachers, peers and parents. They might even develop decreased interest and involvement in most of their daily activities and responsibilities. Depressed adolescents might also manifest increased health complaints such as headaches, fatigues, general weakness of the body, abdominal pains, among others. Attempt by some of them to get out of the blue might make some of them to turn to risky internet sites and blogs for help which might promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, aggressive or self-destructive behaviours that might impact negatively on their health.

It is important to note that the adolescents' use of social media occurs simultaneously with their development while developing identity, emerging physical sexual characteristics and moral consciousness. It is not uncommon to find many male and female adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria, using cell phones to call and access the internet and facebook, e-mails, 2go, whatsapps, instagrams, video games, among others, to gather information and communicate with each other indiscriminately. These provide the adolescents with the powerful means of understanding themselves and their environment to enhance their personal development. They access online information on many issues without any hindrance. Apart from the apparent benefits derived from these social media, their limited capacity for self-regulation could make the adolescent at some risks as they increase their use. While the benefits of the internet are well known, the relationships between the use and adolescents' mental health have been a source of concern to researchers. Studies conducted by Campbell, Cumming and Hughes (2006) and Lam and Peng (2010) revealed that students with depressive symptoms used the

internet much more than those without symptoms.

Excessive online video viewing (Kim, LaRose, & Peng, 2009; Langley, 2010), social networking (Michael & Michael, 2011), late-night Internet use (Gangwisch, Malaspina, Posner, Babiss, Heymsfield, Turner, Zammit, & Pickering, 2009) and online chatting (Bonetti, Campbell, & Gilmore, 2010) have also been associated with symptoms of depression among young people. With excessive internet use, researchers have found out that students replace real-life interactions with online socializing, leading to increased social rejection, cyberbullying, depression, exposure to inappropriate content, social isolation and other negative consequences (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009; Stevens & Morris, 2010; O'Keefe, Clarke-Pearson, and Council on Communication and Media, 2011).

In a study to find out the association between media use in adolescence and depression in young adulthood, it was discovered that large amounts of advertising which are usually promoted on social media could impact on the mental health of the adolescents. This is because the contents most often present adolescents with unattainable images, role models that exhibit high degrees of risk taking behaviours, stereotypical characters that may affect self-image and anxiety-provoking shows, are potential contents that can lead adolescents to depression (Primack, Swanier, Georgiopoulos, Land, & Fine, 2009).

Meanwhile, the researcher's experiences and interaction with some youths during the course of counselling seems to show that some of the adolescents have symptoms of depression. Would adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria manifest symptoms of depression? Would this be associated with the use of social media as found with some adolescents in the advanced countries of Europe and America? And if this can be affirmed, what is the counselling implication?

Research Question

The following research question was formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the level of depressive behaviour of adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between exposures to social media depression among adolescents in Ekiti State.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in the incidence of depression between male and female adolescents based on their use of social media.

Methodology

Descriptive survey was used as the design for the study. The survey design was considered appropriate and adopted because it provides information on the exposure of adolescents to the use of social media as well as the symptoms of depression among adolescents in Ekiti State.

The population for this study estimated at 5000 consisted of all the adolescents, both male and female, in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria, comprising of 16 local government areas. The state is majorly agrarian and populated by the Yoruba ethnic group with similar language and dialect. The secondary schools used included all the government and privately owned schools as well as coeducational and non-coeducational schools in the state. The age group of adolescents that participated in the study was between 12 – 18 years.

The sample for this study consisted of 600 adolescents (male and female) and the method adopted for their selection was multistage sampling technique. The first stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique by balloting system to select three local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts of the state.

The second stage entailed the use of purposive selection to select the government owned and private owned secondary schools in the states. The third stage also involved the use of simple random sampling technique by balloting system to select the sample from the schools selected. In all a total of 600 adolescents participated in the study.

A self designed questionnaire titled “Social Media and Depression Scale” (SMDS) was used to elicit information from respondents. The questionnaire consisted of four sections A, B and C. Section A contained information on demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as, sex, age and location.

Section B contained item on types of social media that the adolescents are exposed to. These include making calls, text messaging, Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, cell phone games, online films, online games and Youtube. Respondents were required to rate their use of each medium on a scale of 1 to 10 and those that rate themselves 5 and above in two or more of the media were regarded as being exposed to social media.

Section C is a modified form of Beck’s Depression Inventory which has been found to have high validity rating of 0.77 and reliability of 0.93 (Farinde, 2013). It consisted of 21 groups of statements on different symptoms of depression such as sadness, pessimism, failure, loss of pleasure, guilty feeling, self-dislike, and so on. Each statement is rated on a modified 4-point Likert Scale 1 – 4, with the respondents picking which of the statements best describe the way he or she is feeling in recent time and at the moment. Respondents were expected to pick just one out of the options. The items were summed up to form a total score of 84. Respondents were categorized as ‘Low’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘High’ levels of depression based on percentile formula. Low (21.00 – 27.97), Moderate (27.98 – 55.97) and High (55.98 – 84.00).

The SMDS was subjected to Face, Content and Construct validity and the reliability coefficient was 0.75 and found significant at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument was administered to 620 respondents by the researcher and 2 trained research assistants. However, a total of 600 copies of the questionnaire were collected and analysed for this study. Hypotheses 1 was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation while

hypotheses 2 was tested using student's t-test. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question: What is the level of depressive behaviour of adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

In answering this research question, scores on depressive symptoms among adolescents were computed using items 1-21 in Section C of "Social Media and Depression Scale". The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Manifestation of Depressive Symptoms among Adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria

<i>Level of Depressive Symptoms</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Low (21.00-27.97)	256	42.7
Moderate (27.98-55.97)	332	55.3
High (55.98-84.00)	12	2.0
Total	600	100.0

Results from Table 1 shows that 256 respondents representing 42.7% of the total sample manifest low level of depressive symptoms, 332 (55.3%), had moderate level while 12 (2.0%) had high level of depressive symptoms. This implies that a random sample of adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria manifest moderate depressive symptoms.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H_1 : There is no statistically significant relationship between exposures to social media and depression among adolescents in Ekiti State.

In testing the hypothesis, scores relating to exposures to social media and development of depression among in-school adolescents were computed using items in Section B and items 1-21 in Section C of the "Social Media and Depression Scale". These scores were subsequently subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of Exposure to Social Media and Depression among Adolescents.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r_{cal}</i>	<i>r_{table}</i>
Exposure to social media	600	5.89	2.07	-0.036	0.062
Depression among in-school adolescent	600	31.71	9.85		

$p > 0.05$

Data from Table 2 revealed that exposure to social media will not significantly relate to depression among adolescent ($r = -0.036$, $p > 0.05$) though the relationship between exposure to social media and depression among adolescents is low, it is also negative and statistically insignificant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that exposure to social media is not significantly related to depression among adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

H_2 : There is no statistically significant difference in the incidence of depression between male and female adolescents based on their use of social media.

In order to test the hypothesis, scores relating to the incidence of depression among male and female adolescents were computed using items 1-21 in Section C of the "Social Media and Depression Scale" and compared for statistical significance using t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' T-test Showing Comparison of Depression by Gender

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t_{cal}</i>	<i>t_{table}</i>
Male	240	31.96	9.93	1623	2.924*	1.960
Female	360	33.56	12.04			

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that $t_{cal}(2.924)$ is greater than $t_{table}(1.960)$ at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is statistically significant difference in the incidence of depression among male and female adolescents. Female adolescents had higher mean score of 33.56 than their male (mean=31.96) counterparts. This implies that the incidence of depression is higher among female adolescents.

Discussion

The result of the study revealed that depression is being manifested by a number of adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria. Though the level of occurrence is moderate among most adolescents and the number of adolescents experiencing severe depression is low, this should be a cause of concern to the counsellors. This might be due to the varying daily and developmental challenges the adolescents were facing both at homes and in schools. The finding is consistent with the findings of Adeniyi, Okafor and Adeniyi (2012), Fatiregun and Kumapayi (2014) and Ibimiluyi (2017) which established the prevalence of depression among adolescents in southwest Nigeria.

The results of this study also showed that there is significant difference in the incidence of depression among male and female adolescents based on their use of social media in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This agreed with various findings in the literature which have shown that gender difference is a significant factor in the development of depressive symptoms and depression (Mule, 2003; Ryba, Derek & Hopko, 2012; Ryba & Hopko, 2012 and Mayo Clinic, 2013). Though researches have long advanced that boys and girls have similar depressive symptoms before adolescence ((Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994), adolescents that participated in this study seem to be responding in similar ways to the various causal factors of depression. However, the emerging gender difference tending towards more females manifesting depressive symptoms than their male counterparts might have been caused by individual vulnerability, differential responses to life stress hormonal changes that bring about mood changes during adolescence and increasing pressure to excel in all spheres of life. Also, experiences of female adolescents as regards their assisting the family to hawk wares to augment the family's income, joining their parents on the farm and other social challenges might have possibly exposed them to more stress and vulnerability to depression than their male counterparts. These agree with the findings of Mule (2003) which found out that many stereotypes placed upon females make them more prone to depression than males and Nolen-Hoeksema (1987) who found out that the way a person responds to depressed mood contributes to the severity, chronicity and occurrence of depressive episodes.

The study further revealed that exposure to social media is not significantly related to the development of depression among adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria. This contradicts the findings in the western world that video viewing, social networking, late night internet use and on-line chatting, which are also common among adolescents in Ekiti, are associated with symptoms of depression among the young people (Langley, 2010; Bonetti, Campbell & Gilmore, 2010 and Michael & Michael, 2011). This might be due to the fact that social media assessment by some adolescents in Ekiti State is still beset with a lot of teething problems such as parent censors, expensive cell phones with internet facilities, poor internet facilities and connection, among others. However, the internet use is becoming more indispensable for various instrumental purposes such as school work and information gathering as well as for communication purposes. The tendency to over depend on social media more than real life situation seems to be on the

increase and could be dangerous to the health of the adolescents and might be pathways to the development of depressive symptoms and full blown depression if not curtailed.

Implications for Counselling

Counselling is generally aimed at producing well adjusted individuals who would function fully in their environments. The findings of this study revealed that moderate occurrence of depression are found among adolescents in Ekiti State. This is an indication that there could be increase in the number of students who would experience full blown depression if immediate and long-term measures are not put in place. On this strength, school counsellors should be concerned about this development as depression can negatively interfere with the students' learning process causing noticeable and in the extreme, untoward behaviour leading to suicide. This would definitely impinge on their efforts to become effective and well-adjusted adults if they do not suffer untimely death. There is also the tendency for depression to co-exist with other emotional and behavioural problems such as anxiety, conduct disorders or substance abuse. The school counsellor could therefore design programmes in conjunction with the authorities, on awareness and understanding of depression among adolescents as these would sensitise the youths themselves, the school authorities and the parents on the debilitating effects of depression with the aim of nipping the development in the bud.

Though the study revealed that social media is not significantly associated with depressive symptoms and depression, care must be taken as more adolescents are becoming addicted to the use of the various social media at the expense of other significant activities at home, school and their community at large. This might put them at risk of social isolation. This is because with excessive internet use, these adolescents might replace real life interaction with online socializing which might increase social isolation and anxiety in their physical environment. Many of them might even turn to risky internet sites and blogs for help which might promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, aggressive or self-destructive behaviours. If these would not meet their expectations, they might make them susceptible to depression. School counsellors should therefore be at hand to counsel the youths on the appropriate use of social media.

Conclusions

The study concludes that there is evidence of depressive symptoms and depression among the adolescents in Ekiti State of Nigeria. The study findings also showed that exposure to social media does not significantly relate to depressive behaviour. Majority of the adolescents used for the study showed moderate depressive symptoms. Again, there was statistically significant difference between males and females on depressive behaviours among the adolescent and that females showed more depressive behaviour than the males.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommended among others that school counsellors should design effective methods for detecting, assessing and treating

adolescent depression in schools where most of the adolescents are found. In essence, counselling interventions should readily be made available in schools, like cognitive behaviour therapy, rational emotive behaviour therapy, interpersonal therapy, psychodynamic therapy and hopelessness theory of depression, which have been found helpful in preventing, reducing and managing depression and depressive symptoms among adolescents, must be adopted and made available for the adolescents' well-being.

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