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Mental Health Literacy for Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study explores the essential role of mental health literacy (MHL) in fostering economic growth within Nigeria. MHL includes understanding mental health disorders, recognizing their symptoms, and knowing how to seek help, all of which are essential for improving mental health outcomes and reducing stigma. In Nigeria, around 10% of the population suffers from mental health disorders; however, there is a significant lack of awareness and resources, which exacerbates negative outcomes and stigma. The study highlights that enhancing MHL can boost productivity by reducing absenteeism and presenteeism, improving leadership through better emotional intelligence and decision-making skills, and promoting social cohesion. Despite its importance, MHL is often lacking among key community figures, such as religious leaders, who are typically the first point of contact for individuals dealing with mental health challenges. This research employs a qualitative approach, conducting interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, including policymakers and mental health professionals, to understand the perceived impact of MHL on economic development. The findings indicate that while MHL is vital for economic advancement, challenges such as stigma, inadequate resources, and cultural beliefs hinder its progress. The study recommends the implementation of educational programmes, awareness initiatives, and policy reforms as essential strategies to improve MHL and support Nigeria's economic development.

Keywords: Mental health literacy, sustainable economic development, Nigeria, economic growth, suitability.

Introduction

Mental health literacy (MHL) represents an essential concept that involves understanding and beliefs regarding mental disorders, facilitating their identification, treatment, or prevention. This encompasses the capacity to identify disorders, pursue mental health information, comprehend risk factors, and be aware of available self-help and professional assistance, among other elements. MHL is linked to enhanced mental health practices, psychological well-being, and favorable outcomes concerning prevalent mental disorders (Hart et al., 2023; Ojelade et al., 2023). This literacy is necessary for enhancing mental health awareness, diminishing stigma, and fostering improved mental health outcomes. In Nigeria, mental health disorders are widespread, affecting an estimated 10% of the population (Abdulmalik et al., 2016). Nevertheless, there exists a significant deficiency in mental health awareness and resources within the country, which contributes to adverse mental health outcomes and perpetuates stigma (Corrigan et al., 2014).

Research indicates that mental health literacy significantly contributes to economic development through various mechanisms. To begin with, it enhances productivity by minimizing both absenteeism and presenteeism (Carhart-Harris et al., 2017). As well, mental health literacy fosters effective leadership by cultivating emotional intelligence and sound decision-making skills. Furthermore, it plays a critical role in diminishing stigma by fostering a greater understanding and acceptance of mental health challenges. Lastly, mental health literacy promotes social and community well-being by encouraging social cohesion and facilitating community development.

Studies show that mental health literacy (MHL) is often lacking among religious leaders, who are typically the first individuals approached by those seeking help for mental health concerns (Campos et al., 2022). This deficiency in MHL can pose challenges, given the influential role these leaders have in advising their community members on

mental health matters. Enhancing MHL among religious leaders could significantly improve their capacity to offer suitable support and guidance, which may result in more favorable mental health outcomes within their communities. Initiatives aimed at bolstering MHL have included public health campaigns and educational materials designed to raise awareness and comprehension of mental health issues (Korhonen et al., 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Mental health challenges are widespread in Nigeria, significantly affecting individuals, families, and the broader society (Wada et al., 2021). Despite the critical role of mental health literacy in fostering economic growth, there remains a considerable gap in understanding mental health issues, including the recognition of symptoms, comprehension of underlying causes, and the pursuit of assistance (Jorm et al., 1997). The Nigerian economy is currently grappling with substantial difficulties, such as falling oil prices, corruption, and insufficient infrastructure. These economic adversities profoundly influence the mental well-being of Nigerians, particularly manifesting as stress, anxiety, and depression (Ekeke et al., 2022). The deficiency in mental health literacy in Nigeria poses a significant challenge, leading to adverse mental health outcomes, including heightened morbidity and mortality rates; decreased productivity; heightened stigma; and insufficient support. The stigma surrounding mental health can foster social isolation, lower self-esteem, and hinder individuals from seeking help (Corrigan et al., 2014). Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the perceived effects of mental health literacy on sustainable economic development in Nigeria, emphasizing the identification of effective strategies to enhance mental health literacy and mitigate stigma.

Supporting theories

The theoretical framework of the study is based on social cognitive theory, health belief model and economic development theory. Social cognitive theory proposes that behavior is influenced by observing others, receiving feedback, and experiencing reinforcement or punishment (Bandura, 1991). Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emerged from the Social Learning Theory (SLT) in the 1960s, developed by Albert Bandura. In 1986, it evolved into SCT, which posits that learning occurs within a social context defined by a dynamic and reciprocal relationship among the individual, their environment, and their behavior. A key feature of SCT is its emphasis on social influences, as well as the importance of both external and internal social reinforcements. SCT explores the specific ways in which individuals acquire and maintain behaviors, while also considering the social contexts in which these behaviors occur. The theory recognizes the influence of an individual's past experiences, which are vital in determining whether a particular behavioral response will occur. These experiences shape reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all of which affect an individual's choice to engage in certain behaviors and the motivations behind such actions. This theory suggests that mental health literacy can be promoted through education, awareness campaigns, and social support.

Also, Health Belief Model (HBM) provided theoretical support for this study. It is a psychological framework designed to elucidate and forecast health-related behaviors by examining the attitudes and beliefs held by individuals (Becker, 1974; Rosenstock, 1974). This model was established in the early 1950s by social scientists associated with the U.S. Public Health Service, aiming to comprehend the reasons behind individuals' reluctance to engage in disease prevention measures or to participate in screening tests for the early detection of diseases. The health belief model suggests that a person's perception of their health condition and related risk factors significantly influences their behaviors (Becker, 1974). This theory implies that improving mental health literacy can be accomplished by increasing individuals' recognition of the importance of mental health and the benefits of seeking help. In conclusion, this study is underpinned by Economic Development Theory (EDT). This theory posits that economic growth is shaped by various factors, including education, innovation, and the capacity of institutions (Becker et al., 2012; Schumpeter, 2021). It further asserts that enhancing mental health literacy can play a significant role in fostering economic development by boosting productivity, improving leadership capabilities, and mitigating stigma. The study's integrated framework amalgamates aspects of mental health literacy theory, social cognitive theory, the health belief model, and economic development theory. It posits that mental health literacy is essential for advancing sustainable economic development and can be effectively promoted through educational initiatives, awareness campaigns, social support systems, and strengthening institutional capacities.

Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative methodology to systematically examine the impact of mental health literacy on sustainable economic development in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study aimed to collect in-depth, nuanced data that would illuminate the intricate relationships between mental health awareness and economic advancement. Data gathering was achieved through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which facilitated an adaptable

exploration of the participants' perspectives and experiences. The participant pool comprised a varied array of key stakeholders, including policymakers (n=5), mental health experts (n=5), business executives (n=5), and community leaders (n=5), thereby ensuring a broad spectrum of viewpoints was represented. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, a technique that intentionally selects individuals likely to yield pertinent and substantial information for the research. The gathered data was subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique that focuses on identifying, examining, and reporting recurring patterns (themes) within the data. This method aids in uncovering the deeper meanings and insights expressed by the participants.

Furthermore, this study was anchored in a qualitative research paradigm, emphasizing a phenomenological approach. This framework was selected to examine the perceived impacts of mental health literacy on sustainable economic development in Nigeria, thereby offering a lens through which to comprehend the lived experiences and viewpoints of the participants. The qualitative research paradigm was chosen for its capacity to enable a thorough investigation of intricate social phenomena. This paradigm is particularly appropriate for studies of this nature, where the objective is to grasp the complex relationship between mental health literacy and economic development. By prioritizing qualitative methodologies, the research was able to document the subtle and personal experiences of individuals, which are frequently overlooked in quantitative studies. This approach empowers researchers to explore the context and significance of participants' experiences, yielding a holistic understanding of the pertinent issues. A phenomenological approach was utilized to attain a more profound insight into the lived experiences and perceptions of participants concerning mental health literacy and economic development. This method focuses on how individuals interpret their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them. By concentrating on the subjective experiences of the participants, the phenomenological approach aims to reveal the essence of their experiences and their connections to broader social and economic frameworks. The analysis involved a meticulous review of the data using techniques such as thematic analysis and coding, which facilitated the identification of significant themes and patterns. This methodology enabled the researcher to capture the depth of the participants' experiences and offer insights into the ways in which mental health literacy can impact economic development in Nigeria.

Findings

Research Questions

The objective of the study was to explore the following research questions:

- What is the perceived influence of mental health literacy on sustainable economic development in Nigeria?
- How do various stakeholders in Nigeria view the connection between mental health literacy and economic development?
- What challenges and opportunities exist for the promotion of mental health literacy in Nigeria?

Generated Themes

The data analysis revealed several significant themes:

Theme 1: Significance of Mental Health Literacy

Participants highlighted the vital importance of mental health literacy in promoting economic development in Nigeria. They noted that increased mental health awareness can lead to enhanced workforce productivity and improved overall economic outcomes.

Theme 2: Obstacles to Mental Health Literacy

Various obstacles were identified, including stigma, insufficient resources, and cultural beliefs that impede the advancement of mental health literacy in Nigeria.

Theme 3: Opportunities for Advancement

Participants proposed multiple avenues for enhancing mental health literacy, such as educational programmes, awareness initiatives, and policy reforms aimed at diminishing stigma and bolstering mental health services.

Theme 4: impact on Economic Development

Participants expressed the view that mental health literacy has a beneficial effect on economic development by boosting productivity, improving leadership capabilities, and alleviating stigma within the workplace.

Participants' Quotes

The following statements exemplify the identified themes:

Significance of Mental Health Literacy:

"Mental health literacy is crucial for economic development in Nigeria. When individuals are mentally well, they can make significant contributions to the economy." (Policymaker)

"I am convinced that mental health literacy is fundamental to realizing the full potential of our workforce. It is vital for productivity and overall performance." (Business Leader).

"Stigma presents a significant barrier to the promotion of mental health literacy in Nigeria. Individuals hesitate to seek assistance due to concerns about societal perceptions."

Quotes from participants

The subsequent insights reflect the identified themes:

Significance of Mental Health Literacy: "Mental health literacy plays a crucial role in Nigeria's economic growth. When individuals maintain good mental health, they can significantly contribute to the economy." (Policymaker). "I contend that mental health literacy is vital for realizing the full potential of our workforce. It is fundamental to enhancing productivity and overall performance." (Business Leader)

Obstacles to Mental Health Literacy: "Stigma presents a significant barrier to advancing mental health literacy in Nigeria. Individuals often hesitate to seek assistance due to concerns about societal perceptions." (Mental Health Professional). "We are deficient in resources necessary for promoting mental health literacy in Nigeria. Increased funding and support are imperative." (Community Leader)

Prospects for Advancement: "Education is pivotal in fostering mental health literacy in Nigeria. It is essential to educate individuals about mental health from an early age." (Educator) "Awareness initiatives can effectively promote mental health literacy in Nigeria. We must elevate awareness regarding mental health issues and work to diminish stigma." (Community Leader)

Impact on Economic Development: "Mental health literacy can enhance productivity and performance within the workplace. When individuals are mentally well, they can make meaningful contributions to the economy." (Business Leader). "Mental health literacy can strengthen leadership in Nigeria. When leaders maintain good mental health, they are better equipped to make informed decisions and lead effectively." (Policymaker)

Coding Framework

The classification framework utilized in the analysis comprised the following categories:

- Significance of Mental Health Literacy (IMHL)
- Obstacles to Mental Health Literacy (CML)
- Prospects for Advancement (OPP)
- Influence on Economic Development (IED)

Coding Example

- "Mental health literacy is essential for economic development in Nigeria. When people are mentally healthy, they can contribute to the economy in a meaningful way." (Policymaker) - IMHL
- "Stigma is a major challenge to promoting mental health literacy in Nigeria. People are afraid to seek help because of what others will think." (Mental Health Professional) - CML
- "Education is key to promoting mental health literacy in Nigeria. We need to teach people about mental health from a young age." (Educator) - OPP
- "Mental health literacy can improve productivity and performance in the workplace. When people are mentally healthy, they can contribute to the economy in a meaningful way." (Business Leader) - IED

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research regarding mental health literacy and its impact on sustainable economic development in Nigeria align with earlier studies and offer significant insights into the challenges and opportunities present in this area. The subsequent discussion connects these findings with existing literature to emphasize the wider implications and contextual comprehension. The findings of the study highlight the essential importance of mental health literacy in fostering economic development. Participants noted that an increase in mental health literacy contributes to improved workforce productivity and overall economic performance. This observation is consistent with international research that demonstrates a positive correlation between mental health literacy, health outcomes, and economic productivity (Owoeye, 2024; Sweileh, 2021). Prior research indicates that enhancing mental health literacy can diminish stigma and encourage individuals to seek help, both of which are essential for sustaining a healthy and effective workforce (Carvalho et al., 2022; Sweileh, 2021). In Nigeria, where there is a lack of awareness regarding mental health, enhancing mental health literacy has the potential to greatly enhance economic development by empowering individuals to participate more effectively in the economy (Wada et al., 2021).

The challenges recognized in advancing mental health literacy, including stigma, insufficient resources, and cultural beliefs, are extensively documented in existing literature. Stigma continues to pose a considerable hindrance to the utilization of mental health services, as highlighted in numerous research studies (Ganasen et al., 2008; Owoeye, 2024). The stigma associated with mental health continues to pose a considerable obstacle in Nigeria. Many individuals view mental health issues as indicators of weakness or deficiency, which results in hesitation to seek assistance or share their experiences. Additionally, the notion that mental health disorders stem from supernatural forces or witchcraft exacerbates the problem. Such misunderstandings impede efforts to diminish stigma and encourage candid conversations regarding mental health. The belief that mental health disorders are the result of supernatural influences or witchcraft adds an additional layer of complexity to the initiatives aimed at enhancing mental health literacy in Nigeria (Owoeye, 2024). This clash of perspectives fosters confusion and skepticism, which can deter individuals from pursuing professional assistance and contribute to the continuation of myths and misunderstandings.

The study also highlights various opportunities for enhancing mental health literacy, including educational and awareness campaigns, which are corroborated by existing research. Evidence indicates that educational initiatives can significantly enhance mental health literacy, especially in adolescents, ultimately resulting in improved mental health outcomes (Carvalho et al., 2022; Kutcher et al., 2016a). Awareness campaigns play a crucial role in diminishing stigma and enhancing public comprehension of mental health issues, as highlighted in earlier research. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms for mental health education and support presents a promising opportunity, as digital health can improve access to mental health services in resource-limited environments such as Nigeria (Carvalho et al., 2022; Wada et al., 2021). The use of digital platforms for mental health education and support is another promising avenue, as digital health can enhance access to mental health services in resource-constrained settings like Nigeria. These strategies are consistent with global research recommendations that support integrated approaches to mental health literacy, which encompass education, policy formulation, and community involvement (Carvalho et al., 2022).

Lastly, impact of mental health literacy on economic development, as noted by participants, is supported by research indicating that such literacy can enhance productivity, foster effective leadership, and diminish workplace stigma (Khumbuzile Yvonne Ngubane, 2023; Owoeye, 2024). Evidence suggests that mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, have a profound effect on economic productivity, resulting in losses amounting to trillions of dollars globally each year (Khumbuzile Yvonne Ngubane, 2023). By advancing mental health literacy, Nigeria has the opportunity to optimize its workforce's potential, thereby promoting sustainable economic growth and development. This finding highlights the necessity of incorporating mental health literacy into comprehensive economic and development strategies, as underscored by international studies (Kutcher et al., 2016). Enhancing mental health literacy can result in considerable decreases in healthcare expenditures. The financial impact of mental health disorders is considerable, influencing both household spending capacity and the overall economic stability of a nation. By fostering mental health literacy, individuals become more adept at identifying early symptoms and pursuing suitable treatment, which may diminish the necessity for more comprehensive and expensive interventions (Agboola et al., 2018). This forward-thinking strategy can ease the financial burden on both individuals and the healthcare system, as demonstrated by research that underscores the economic advantages of early intervention and preventive measures.

Implications

The findings of the study present numerous implications for policy formulation, practical applications, and subsequent research endeavors. To begin with, it is essential for policymakers to emphasize mental health literacy as a fundamental

aspect of economic advancement in Nigeria. This objective can be realized by dedicating sufficient resources to mental health education and awareness initiatives. Additionally, mental health practitioners should concentrate on initiatives aimed at reducing stigma and enhancing awareness to foster mental health literacy. Lastly, future research should aim to create effective mental health education programmes and awareness campaigns that are culturally appropriate and specifically designed to meet the needs of the Nigerian population.

Limitations

This research is subject to some limitations. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, and participants were chosen using purposive sampling methods. Secondly, the study was confined to a single region, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to other nations. Future investigations should focus on obtaining a larger sample size and expanding the study across multiple regions to enhance the generalizability of the results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, enhancing mental health literacy is vital for promoting sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. However, the progress in this area encounters considerable challenges, such as stigma, lack of resources, and entrenched cultural beliefs. To address these issues, it is essential to establish educational programmes, awareness initiatives, and supportive policy frameworks. Policymakers, mental health professionals, and emerging researchers should recognize mental health literacy as a critical component of Nigeria's economic development.

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