
COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS: AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION

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Abstract

This investigation sought to examine the impacts of the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic has on the Psycho-emotional behavior of academic researchers. In view of the above the study utilized five classic psycho-emotions measures; Depression, Anxiety, Joy, psycho-stress and self-assurance. Non-experimental research design; a survey randomly carried out on 43 academic researchers electronically for which data collated were subjected to inferential statistical test and all five null hypotheses were rejected showing correlation between Covid-19 pandemic and academics Psycho-emotional behavior. Specifically, findings revealed that COVID-19 pandemic is positive and significantly related to depression amongst academic researchers. Also, There is a positively significant link between Covid-19 pandemic and anxiety amongst academic researchers. However, There seems to be an inverse but significant correlation between Covid-19 pandemic and joyfulness amongst academic researchers. The study equally revealed strong positive significant link between the COVID-19 pandemic and psychological stress amongst academic researchers, but finally shows inverse relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and self-assurance among academic researchers. Sequel to the above findings the investigation recommends that to combat depression and anxiety, academic researchers should engage in fraternal discussion and seek help where necessary. In addition, Academic researchers should observe NCDC guidelines to abase the rise of deadly infectious diseases like Covid-19 and its kinds to boost their self-assurance, joy and reduce psycho-stress as evidence in the examination.

Keywords: Covid-19, Psycho-emotional Behaviour, Anxiety, Self-assurance, Depression

INTRODUCTION

The work nature of an academia is such that he barely has enough time to combine the rigors of career – academic exercise and other life domains. The work cycle of an average academia is characterized with intense hours of research in preparation to teach, examine and assess students, supervise students long essays vis-à-vis research projects, undertake counseling sections with students attending to their quandaries, perform spectrum of administrative responsibilities that are ardent. These does not elude the expectation on him to carryout researches for publication in reputable local and international peer reviewed journals couple with the need to attend seminars and execute community service which are integral for his promotional assessment. In most cases, these severities continue cyclically without leave period for rejuvenation due to the jumbled academic calendar where various graduate and postgraduate programs

in the institutions run concomitantly.

In view of the above background it's only archetypal to expect that the lockdown of institutions and stay at home order by the government amid of the novel global Corona virus (COVID -19) pandemic would have created an ample opportunity for the academia to engage rapaciously on research exercise which forms a foremost constituent of his career. Well, is that the case considering the socio-economic and psychological ordeal that comes with the pandemic? Bear in mind also that engaging in research exercise is so psycho-emotionally demanding and requires a whole lot of concentration. An academia must properly synchronize his emotions agilely to remain fit psychologically to embark on a strenuous exercise such as research enquiry.

The pandemic COVID-19 is a clinical name given to the novel disease caused by the Corona Virus by World Health Organization (WHO) on the 11th Feb. 2020 following its outbreak in Wuhan, China that made WHO declared the pandemic as Public Health Emergency of International Concern on the 30th January 2020 (WHO 2020). The pandemic brought the world to a halt as governments of various regions as effort to cushion its rapid spread announced either partial or complete lockdown which has brought severe social, economical and psychological quagmire globally. Following WHO's report as at 20th May, 2020 there are 4,789,205 **confirmed cases** of COVID-19 with **318,789 deaths tall spread across** 216 Countries and regions. The surge of the pandemic has left untold hardship and psychological tension not only on health workers but academic researchers and average human in the society at large. To this end, this research seeks to establish the empirical link between COVID- 19 pandemic and psycho-emotional behaviors of academic researchers in Nigerian Universities with specific focus on Niger Delta University.

Statement of Problem

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to academic researchers worldwide, necessitating an in-depth investigation into the psycho-emotional behaviors exhibited by this group. This research aims to identify and understand the psychological and emotional impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on academic researchers, including depression, anxiety, joy, self-assurance, and burnout. By exploring these dimensions, this study seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform support strategies and interventions to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on the mental well-being and productivity of academic researchers, ultimately ensuring the sustainability of academic research during and beyond the pandemic.

The Research Objectives

The major objective of this research is to examine the empirical link between COVID - 19 pandemic and Psycho-emotional agility of academic researchers in Nigerian Universities with specific purpose;

1. To establish the link between Covid-19 pandemic and depression amongst academic researchers
2. To ascertain the extent Covid-19 pandemic is related to anxiety amongst academic researcher's
3. To find out the extent Covid-19 is related to academic researcher's joy
4. To investigate the link between Covid-19 pandemic and psycho-stress amongst academic researchers
5. To establish the empirical link between Covid-19 and academic researcher's self-assurance

Research Questions

The research would proffer answer to the posed questions;

1. What is the significant link between Covid-19 pandemic and depression amongst academic researchers?
2. To what extent Covid-19 is significantly related to anxiety amongst academic researchers
3. What is the significant relationship between Covid-19 and academic researcher's joy
4. To what extent is Covid-19 related to psycho-stress amongst academic researchers
5. What is the significant relationship between Covid-19 and academic researcher's self-assurance

Research Hypotheses

The questions posed above are addressed hypothetically using the null form H_0

H_{0_1} There is no significant link between Covid-19 and depression amongst academic researchers

H_{0_2} Covid-19 pandemic is not significantly related to anxiety amongst academic researchers

H_{0_3} There is no significant link between Covid-19 and academic researcher's joy

H_{0_4} There is no significant extent Covid-19 is related to psycho-stress amongst academic researchers

H_{0_5} There is no significant extent Covid-19 is related to academic researcher's self-assurance

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

Reviewing literatures would be limited to the conceptual framework shown below

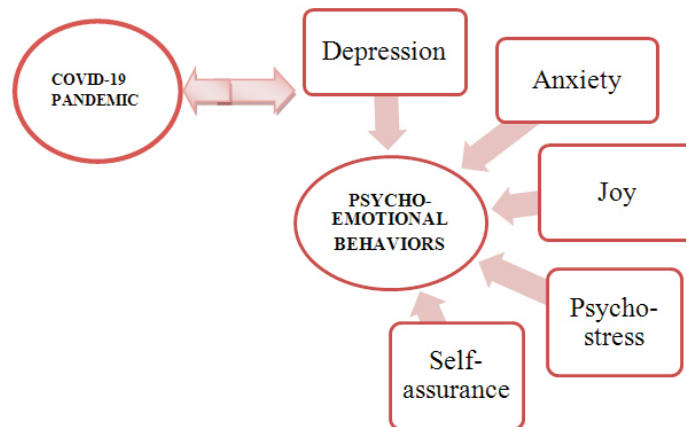


Fig. 1 conceptualized by researchers

COVID- 19 Pandemic

The world is currently facing an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered corona virus, a virus that has not been previously identified in human race with a devastating effect following its outbreak with Pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) 2020 announced the pandemic as public health emergency of international concern with its wide spread across 216 Countries with over 318,789 mortality rate. Only in Nigeria as at 2nd of June, 2020 recorded 10,578 confirmed cases of the pandemic with 299 death causalities (Nigerian Centre for Disease Control 2020).

Clinical evidences revealed fever, dry cough, fatigue, aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhea, loss of taste and smell with rash on skin, discoloration of fingers and toes as symptoms of the novel disease (WHO 2020). WHO further espoused that the pandemic is transmittable from person to person via small coughs or exhales droplets from the nose or mouth and even coming in contact with contaminated objects and surfaces around the person. Hence, maintaining social distancing, regular washing of hands with soap on running water, wearing of face mask, using hand sanitizer and staying at home are pragmatic measures ensued from NCDC and WHO's guidelines to contain the spread.

The damaging effect that comes with the pandemic is unwholesome; it cut-across

various sectors of human concern socially, economically, physically and even mentally. Sijia , Yilin, Jia , Nan, and Tingshao (2020) noted that the menace that exudes from pandemic does not only affects people's physical health, but both mentally; emotionally and cognitively. Behavioral Immune System (BIS) theory avers that people probably develop negative emotions such as aversion, anxiety, anger, sadness etc, when brazen out with ailment threat thereby resorting to negative cognitive assessment and consequently develops behaviors for self protection and precaution which are in conformity with professionally delineated guidelines (John, Natalie, Michael cited in Sijia et al 2020), as an obviously seen behavior amid the Covid-19 pandemic globally.

In a bit to ameliorate the psychological impact of the pandemic upon its declaration by WHO - its Department of Mental Health and Substance, fashioned series of timely messages communicated to sensitize and support mental well-being amongst different target groups (WHO 2020).

Psycho-emotional Behaviour

Psycho-emotion is a construct from two concepts “Psychology” - describing the cognitive mental state and action of a person that tend to form a person's mental profile, and “Emotion” – referring to the spontaneous state of mind of an individual (YourDictionary 2020). Psycho-emotional is the psychological interaction with one's emotion. According to Munshi (2018), The Psychology of a person is their individual trend and habits that tends to stay with them throughout life which forms their mental profile, whereas, emotions are temporal individual state of mind that comes and go and cannot form their mental profile. In bringing clarity to the concepts, Rangan (2018) noted that Psychology is the totality of a person's thoughts and actions ensuing from their intelligent mind based on logical decisions. While, emotions are actions ensuing from a sub-conscious mind free from one's control.

Psycho-emotional behaviors therefore describe how an individual accepts and manages their extemporaneous and conscious state of mind to exhibit actions that are consistent with their ideals and intentions. David (2016) similarly opined of emotional behavior as individual's strategy in accepting and addressing the seven basic dimensions of emotions; joy, anger, surprise, fear, contempt and disgust as they manifest and ensuring to live in ways that align with one's intentions and values.

Karen and Simon (2013) revealed how the academics work nature is peculiar and psycho-emotionally laden. Such emotions are either expressed exaggerative or suppressed to cope with work requirements like research, administration, student's management and counseling (Ogbonna and Harris 2004). Maslach and Jackson (1981) further identified burnout as syndrome linked to academics emotional exhaustion. Consequently, Baitukbaeva (2013) argued that high level emotional intensity amongst academics hinders their professional development and effectiveness. Baitukbaeva further noted that the academic researcher works in

conditions that are socially frustrating and stressful impacting on their mental agility.

Psycho-emotions can fall into the spectrum of positive and negative emotions.

The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology defines positive psycho-emotions as pleasant or desirable situational responses to stimuli in our environment. Conversely, negative emotions are those usually not pleasurable to experience, they are unpleasant emotions stirred up in an individual to put across a negative effect towards an event or person (Pam, 2013; Ackerman n.d). Ackerman further states that emotions that dampens and pull one down are mostly possible a negative emotion. Albeit, Rowe and Fitness (2018) has contrary perspective as they avers that distinct negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, boredom, sadness, shame, hopelessness, guilt and embarrassment are proven to have great importance in academics exercise.

However, the range of positive and negative psycho-emotional dimensions have been categorized into four dimensions according to Sandeep (2012), they include; 1) Valence, which has emotions raging from pleasant to unpleasant such as joy and sadness. 2) Arousal, which has attentiveness/love as passive emotions and anger/hostility as active emotions. 3) Dominance – from interest/self assurance to fear or anxiety. 4) Predictiveness which express emotions such as surprise, quilt/disgust.

In a bit to manage the enumerated emotions to stay-true with one's values and intentions David (2016) enumerated emotional coping practices drawn from the original Action and Commitment Therapy (ACT) proposed by Steven C. Hayers; 1) Recognize your thoughts pattern 2) Labeling of thoughts 3) accepting of thoughts and 4) acting on your values.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts non-experimental research design; a survey randomly carried out on 43 academic researchers electronically. Questionnaire adapted from General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7), Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS), Oxford Happiness Scale (OHS) and Self-confidence Scale (SCS) was used as instrument for data collection. Data generated was descriptively and inferentially tested. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the strength of the relationship between the variables.

RESULT

Descriptive Results

The descriptive results of the study and the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Results and Reliability Analysis

S/N	Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Alpha	No. of Items
1	Depression	1.4186	.58686	.711	7
2	Anxiety	1.3488	.51339	.707	7
3	Joyful	1.3488	.61271	.904	7
4	Psycho-Stress	1.5581	.62877	.865	7
5	Self-Assurance	1.3488	.48224	.865	7
6	COVID-19	1.9302	.98550	.715	3

Source, Survey Data, 2020.

Information contained in table 1 above indicates that the mean scores for all variables are below the median score. This is suggestive of a general disagreement among respondents to the questionnaire items. The possible reason for this disagreement is because the scales are negatively worded. Therefore, disagreeing with the items in the instrument portrays respondents' genuine emotions at the time the study was conducted. This is further supported by the low standard deviation scores as it indicates a narrow spread of the data around the mean, which shows that respondents responses does not vary significantly.

The reliability scores are also shown in table 1 above. Malhotra (2004) reported a satisfactory internal consistency if the instrument produces a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.60, while Burns and Bush (1995) suggested an alpha of 0.65 as a satisfactory and reliable instrument. The alpha coefficients as shown in the table above are all above the benchmarks presented by Malhotra (2004) and Burns and Bush (1995) and are therefore taken to be reliable.

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

The demographic distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demo Variable	Options	Freq.	Percent
Sex	Male	29	67.4
	Female	14	32.6
Career Designation	Asst. Lecturer / Graduate Asst.	8	16.2
	Lect. I & II	21	47.7
	Senior Lect.	12	27.3
	Professor/Ass. Prof.	3	6.8
Employment duration	1-5 years	9	20.9
	6-10 years	13	30.3
	11 - above	21	48.8
Educational qualification	B.Sc./ HND	3	7.0
	Masters	25	58.1
	Ph.D./ Post-doctoral	15	34.9

Source, Survey Data, 2020.

Four demographic variables of the respondents were examined. The results as presented in Table 2 above reveal that 67.4% of the respondents are male academics while the rest 32.6% are female academics.

Results collected for career designation indicate that 16.2% of the respondents are either assistant lecturers or graduate assistants, 47.7% are either lecturer 1s or lecturer 2s, 27.3% are senior lecturers and the remaining 6.8% are in the professorial cadre. This shows that a larger percentage of the respondents are below the rank of professor.

On duration of employment, the results indicate that 20.9% of the respondents had been in academics for not more than 5 years 30.3% had been lecturing for not more than 10 years and the rest 48.8% had been in academics for more than 11 years.

The results gathered for the last demographic variable – educational qualification reveal that respondents with B.Sc. or its equivalent accounts for only 7% of the respondents, those with a Master's degree account of a whopping 58.1% and the rest 34.9% have a Ph.D. or post-doctoral degree.

		Depression	Anxiety	Joyful	Psycho-Stress	Self-Assurance	COVID-19
Spearman's rho	Depression	1.000	.824**	-.469**	.817**	-.197	.809**
	Corr. Coef.						
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.002	.000	.205	.000
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
Anxiety	Corr. Coef.	.824**	1.000	-.382*	.690**	-.106	.798**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.012	.000	.499	.000
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
Joyful	Corr. Coef.	-.469**	-.382*	1.000	-.412**	.250	-.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.012		.006	.105	.000
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
Psychological stress	Corr. Coef.	.817**	.690**	-.412**	1.000	-.291	.870**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.006		.058	.000
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
Self-Assurance	Corr. Coef.	-.197	-.106	.250	-.291	1.000	-.315*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.205	.499	.105	.058		.040
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
COVID-19	Corr. Coef.	.809**	.798**	-.528**	.870**	-.315*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.040	
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation results for the relationship between psycho-emotional behaviors of academic researchers and the COVID-19 pandemic are shown in Table 3 above. As shown in the table, results for the relationship between depression and the COVID-19 pandemic reveal that $r = .809$ indicating a strong positive relationship and is significant at $p = .000 < .01 < .05$. Given this result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

As shown in the table, results for the test of hypothesis two H_{o2} reveal that correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and anxiety of academic researchers is $r = .798$ indicating a strong relationship between the variables which is significant at $p = .000 < .01 < .05$. Given this result, the null hypothesis (H_{o2}) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The third hypothesis examined the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and joy among academic researchers. As shown in the table, results for the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and joy of academic researchers revealed an inverse relationship of $r = -.528$ which is significant at $p = .000 < .01 < .05$. Given this result, the null hypothesis (H_{o3}) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Again the result for the correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and psychological stress among academic researchers reveal a correlation of $r = .870$ indicating a strong positive relationship significant at $p = .000 < .01 < .05$. Given this result, the null hypothesis (H_{o4}) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The final hypothesis examined the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the levels of self-assurance of academic researchers. As shown in the table, results reveal that $r = -.315$ indicating a weak negative relationship between the variables that is significant at $p = .040 < .05$. Given this result, the null hypothesis (H_{o5}) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

FINDINGS

The inferential statistical analysis revealed results as thus;

1. COVID-19 pandemic is positive and significantly related to depression amongst academic researchers. The implication of this finding is that, the higher the fears associated with the pandemic, the higher the levels of depression among academic researchers.
2. There is a positively significant link between Covid-19 pandemic and anxiety amongst academic researchers. This result suggests that levels of anxiety of academic researchers increase with a rise in fears associated with the pandemic.
3. There is an inverse but significant correlation between Covid-19 pandemic and joyfulness amongst academic researchers. This implies that a rise in fears associated with the COVID-19 pandemic decreases joy among academic researchers.
4. A percentile increase in the pandemic necessitates increase in psychological stress among academic researchers. This is due to the strong positive significant link between the COVID-19 pandemic and psychological stress amongst academic researchers.

5. There is an inverse relationship between the pandemic and self-assurance among academic researchers i.e., an increase in COVID-19 related fears lead to a decrease in self-assurance. This means that there is a significant link between the COVID-19 pandemic and self-assurance amongst academic researchers

RECOMMENDATION

1. To combat depression and anxiety, academic researchers should engage in fraternal discussion about their fears and seek help where necessary.
2. Academic researchers should observe NCDC guidelines to abase the rise of deadly infectious diseases like Covid-19 and its kinds to boost their self-assurance, joy and reduce psycho-stress as evidence in the examination.

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