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SEX, MARITAL STATUS AND FAMILY SETTING VARIABLES ON INNER MEANING FULFILMENT AMONG STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

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Abstract

The present study examined the influence of sex, marital status and family setting variables on Inner Meaning Fulfilment (IMF) on the students of the University of Ibadan. There were eight hundred and eighty five (885) with four hundred and forty nine (449) or 50% males and four hundred and thirty six (436) or 49.3% females. The mean age for the participants was 26.2 years with a standard deviation of 6.0 and age ranged from 15 to 60 years. The IMF Scale (Logotest), which is in form of a questionnaire format, was used for the data collection as a survey/Ex post-facto design were used with randomly selected students within University community.

A two independent group sample test statistics was utilized to analyse the data. While two of the three hypotheses stated were confirmed (Sex, $t(871) = 1.70, 3, P < 0.05$ and Family Setting = $t(729) = 2.431, P < 0.05$ the third hypothesis on marital status $t = 882 = 3.517, P < 0.05$ was not confirmed. based on these findings there is an urgent need for early psychological screening/assessment for the new student and provision of Special Counselling Services for all students especially those from polygamous setting, married student and female students. Implications and other recommendations were highlighted and discussed for relevance, in policy and planning for the Universities and other tertiary institutions.

Introduction

Inner Meaning Fulfilment is a variable that has not been attractive to Nigerian researchers. This is not the same with several researchers and clinicians outside Nigeria who have used logotest, which measures individuals' inner meaning fulfilment worldwide by: (1) translating the test into many languages, (2) standardizing it, and (3) using it for many researches. Although the logotest was developed from the Frankl's Logotherapy theory / concept by Lukas (1986), it has gone beyond Europe base via U.S.A. to other parts of

the South Africa, South American, Canada, Australia and beyond. For instance, Starck (1983) in her application of logotest found also that the presence of existential vacuum is with those who lack "inner meaning fulfilment," while Long (1982) found the presence of existential vacuum among the group of disabled individuals he studied. Also, Seaman and Seaman (1983) studies revealed that inner meaning fulfilment correlated highly with responsibility, psychotic and emotional well-being whereas helplessness/lack of inner meaning fulfilment has high correlation with the "morbidity and mortality, as in the case of incarcerated individuals in concentration camp Frankl (1963). Also, Addad (1987) and Frankl's (1978) studies on the college students found existential vacuum among those students who had lack inner meaning fulfilment in Vienna Austria.

Despite the fact that there is a very limited literature on the correlation of sex, marital status and family with inner meaning fulfilment, substantial correlations have been found with mental health. For instance, sex differences were found in psychological physical distress and psychiatric illness by Almyvist (1986), in psychopathology Chalaby (1986) in delusional disorder Redden, Swency, Frame, & Cuilmore (1983) in hospital admission.

Bankat (1999) and Ebigo (1986). Also, correlation has been found in the prevalence of marital illness Dohrebwend and Dohrebwend (1976) Anesheusel, Rutter, & Cachenbruch (1991) respectively.

Peschel (1988) used logotest in the study of 100 male alcoholics in a mental hospital and found out that about two third of the patients lack inner meaning fulfilment with existential vacuum while Schutzenhauer (1992) used logotest as part of the test battery for his Ph.D. work; 357 young males and females in Salzburg with age range of 15-16 years. The results showed that 73% of the cases fell into the good/normal range while 27% cases fell into bad inner meaning fulfilment. Also, a negative correlation was found between neurosis and meaning orientation but there was a weak positive correlation between extraversion and inner meaning fulfilment.

Marital status is found to be an important variable in mental health and illness in the epidemiological studies. For instance, Cockerham (1996) noted consistent findings on the married people who were mentally healthier than single people. Kandell (1978) also confirmed the general belief that greater social and emotional support from each other for better coping with daily hassles of life than single. While Aseltine and Kessler (1993) also made it known that family with marital conflict can create a source of stress, which might result in

abnormal behaviour. Poor marriage and divorce could result into depression in women. Odegaard in 1986 found marital status to be another demographic variable that correlated consistently with the incidence of personality disorder. By researching into all mental disorders in the mid town Manhattan Hospital study, highest rates were found among divorced persons. The next rate was found among single individuals, then the low rates were found among widows and widowers, while married persons were found to have the lowest incidence of personality disorders. Another interesting finding was that single men had higher rate than single women among the single respondents.

Furthermore, admission into Manhattan hospital in 1981 report also showed high rate of disturbances among single divorce among both men and women. Married couples had the lowest rates of disturbance in all conditions, psychogenic and organic except personality difficulties related to the evolutionary period, or change of life, where the lowest rates of disturbance were found among single men and women.

Finally, many possible reasons, or hypotheses could be made for the marital differences in admissions to mental hospitals, which could be that single individuals who developed a personality disturbance might be more readily admitted into the hospitals than married persons who might have other partner to take care of them at home. The single person with disturbed personality might possess a particular personality prior to the marriage disability. It might be possible that there are particular stabilizing variables in married life that prevents the outbreak of mental disorder. It can be ascertained that the second reason appeals to be the best reasons for differences.

Family setting is another important variable that determines mental health Broon and Selzwich (1963) gave four functions of family as follows (1) Gratification of having an intimate and durable relationship; (2) Keeping the members of the society in working conditions by providing responsibilities physical and mental welfare; (3) Giving the individual a sense of belonging; (4) Other economic and social aspect. It was observed that many (1) Gratification of having an intimate and durable relationship; (2) Keeping the members of the society in working conditions by providing responsibilities physical and mental welfare; (3) Giving the individual a sense of belonging; (4) Other economic and social aspect. It was observed that many mental health that is, mental disorder is seen as a failure in the adjustment of the individual to his situation.

The family and other social groups are factors in the development of personality disorganization. Therefore, success or failure of a family member in his particular family role may be critical to the maintenance of mental health. Also, the family experience usually determines its first appearance and sometimes influences the form it takes. On the other hand these functions of nuclear family are different from the African family structure where the main emphasis is based on polygynous setting. The contemporary polygynous setting is quite different from the ones practiced before the missionary era. Many of the current polygynous settings could no longer provide those four functions to members, which the researcher already described by Broon & Selzwich (1963). This could lead to maladaptive behaviours in the children born into harsh and violent family settings. One could imagine such students coming from this kind of family setting.

It was in this light of this type of home setting, coupled with lack of attention to inner meaning fulfilment issues by counsellors and psychologists in Nigeria, and effect of meaningless or unfulfilled life among Nigerians, that motivated the researcher to investigate the issue among the university students in Ibadan. There is scanty literature on meaning fulfilment of individuals in Nigeria. In pursuing this study the researcher concentrated on three main variables, which are sex, marital status and family setting of the respondents. Three variables were stated as the main hypotheses for the study. The hypotheses are:

- (i) The University of Ibadan female students will report higher level of existential problems than their male students' counterpart.
- (ii) Married Students will report lower level of existential problems than single students.
- (iii) Students from the Monogynous family setting will score lower on IMF scale than students from the polygynous setting.

Methodology and Procedure

The Design

The study was a cross sectional survey research carried out to find the extent of inner meaning fulfilment among the students of the University of Ibadan.

Participants

The participants of the total number eight hundred and eighty five (885), four hundred and forty nine (449) or 50.7% males and four

hundred and thirty six (436) or 49.3% females were randomly selected undergraduate and post-graduate students of the University of Ibadan. The mean age of the respondents is 26.2 with a standard deviation of 6.0. Age of the respondents ranged from 15 to 60 years.

Instrument

The English Version of logotest was used as in the 1989 manual. The logotest is based on the theory of logotherapy and measures degrees of inner meaning fulfilment and existential frustration, except the demographical data, there was no modification of any items made since the language is clear enough for University Students to understand. The test consists of four sections with total of 18 statements and questions.

Section I

The section contained demographic variables such as sex, age, ethnicity, occupation, religion, marital status, family setting, level of education as well as the parents' income which were not in the original version, except sex and occupation.

Section II

The section I of the logo-test contains nine Yes or No statements with potentials being peculiar to the respondents lives. The instruction allowed the respondents to leave the question unanswered in case of any uncertainty or refusal to agree with the question.

The following factors of each item are:

- (i) Owning well being (ii) Self actualisation (iii) Family (iv) Occupation
(v) Social Aspects (vi) Interests (vii) Experiences
(viii) Services distress.

Section III

Contains seven statements in which the respondents must answer with (i) "often" (ii) "Once in a while" (iii) "never". The statements were based on the reactions to existential frustration, which are specific to the following areas:

- (1) Aggression (2) Regression (3) (Over) compensation (4) Flight Reactions (5) A reasonable coming to grips with the situations (reverse scores) (6) Neurosis (7) Depression

Section IV

Is divided into subsections in which the first part briefly stated three different case histories and the respondents have to answer two questions. For example, "Which man or woman is the happiest / suffers most?" The second part of the section instructed respondents to describe their own case history from the previous format in the space left in the lower part of the last section of the questionnaire. The grand total scores of the above-mentioned will be compared with the result of the total score as indicated in the diagnostic profile of the logotest manual.

Since the logotest was developed in Europe and has been standardized in Europe as well as in America, a pilot study was undergone in order to determine the reliability of the total scores for all the respondents. A spearman brown $r = 0.63$ which is very significant for a widely used test in both America and Europe was obtained.

Procedure

Participants were randomly selected from all the halls of residence and faculties of the University of Ibadan. The participants responded to all the items in the logotest after the approval for data collection had been given by all the relevant authorities involved in the university.

Data Analysis

The responses were totalled for each respondent according to the instrument manual of Lukas and Preble (1989). After the scoring according to the logotest manual instruction a two independent group samples t-test statistics was used to analyse the scores and to test the hypotheses.

Result and Discussions

Hypothesis One

It was stated in this hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between female and male in their inner meaning fulfilment, the analysis of the response was done, as the result presented in Table 1

Table 1 Summary of the T-test for Independent Sample as Determined by the Level of Existential Problem of the Female and Male Students.

| Gender Group | N | X | SD | DF | T | P |
|-----------------|-----|-------|------|-----|--------|-------|
| Female Students | 439 | 13.41 | 5.21 | 871 | -1.705 | <0.05 |
| Male Students | 434 | 14.11 | 5.02 | | | |

As shown on the above table, the female students report existential problems significantly different from their male counterparts. Thus, the predicted hypothesis one was confirmed.

Hypothesis 2

Table 2 Summary of the t-test for independent sample as determined by the level of existential problem of marital status, married and single students

| Marital Status | N | \bar{X} | SD | DF | T | P |
|----------------|-----|-----------|------|-----|-------|------|
| Married | 165 | 14.76 | 5.36 | 808 | 3.517 | <.05 |
| Single | 645 | 13.23 | 5.11 | | | |

As shown above, the result revealed a significant difference between the two groups but failed to confirm the hypotheses that married students will report lower level of existential problems than single students. The married students reported higher score $X = 14.76$ & $SD = 5.11$ while single students reported lower scores $X = 13.23$ and $S.D. = 5.1$, this difference was however statistically significant, $t=882 = 3.517$, $p < 0.05$.

Hypothesis 3

The focus of this hypothesis is on the family setting which stated that students from the polygynous family setting was supported and confirmed in the predicted direction.

Summary of the T-test for Independent Sample Test as Determined by the Level of Existential Problems on IMF Scale by the Students from the Two Family Settings (Polygynous and Monogynous)

| Family Setting | N | X | SD | DF | T | P |
|----------------|-----|-------|------|------|--------|-------|
| Monogynous | 491 | 13.11 | 4.73 | 7.29 | -2.431 | <0.05 |
| Polygynous | 232 | 14.06 | 5.31 | | | |

As shown in the above table, there was a significant difference between the two family settings. That is, the students from monogynous family setting ($X = 13.11$ & $SD = 4.73$) scored lower than the students from the polygynous family setting ($X = 14.06$ & $SD = 5.31$), $t(729) = 2.431$, $p < 0.05$. The third hypothesis is retained for the family setting differences.

Discussion/Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate inner meaning fulfilment among the students of the University of Ibadan. Therefore, three hypotheses we have stated from the result presented in Table 1 – 3, it was concluded that two were retained while other one was not confirmed.

For instance, in hypothesis one, our prediction that the University of Ibadan female students will report higher level of existential problems than their male student's counterparts was supported, and this was highly significant. The result is in line with the common beliefs and studies that females have more healthy concern than men. The result showed a significant difference between female and male students on inner meaning fulfilment and health concerns which do not support of some previous researches such as Lukas (1986), Lukas & Preble (1989), Stanich and Ortengren (1990) reported no sex differences in existential problems. But in other psychological problems, for instance, Almyvist (1986) and Chalaby (1986), found sex differences in psychopathology, while Redden, Swency, Frame, & Cuilmore, (1983) found a difference in delusional disorders. Gurin (1980), Robin, Helzer, Weissman, Orraschel,

Gruenberg, Burke, & Eregler, 1984; Ebigbo (1986); Bankat (1999) Leighton (1961) Dohrebwend and Dohrebwend's (1974 & 1976) findings indicated consistently significant differences in mental health or maladjusted behaviours between females and their males counterpart. Although, in overall for both Western culture and Nigeria, more males are admitted in the mental hospitals than females, but females reported more often mental disorders than males. It could be ascertained that cultural beliefs on reporting symptoms might be the reason for the lower rates of reports for males, that is, the expectation of men's strong behaviour against women's weakness behaviour.

The second hypothesis which predicted that married students will score lower on the IMF scale than the single students was not confirmed. Contrary to our expectation that married students will score lower on the IMF scale than the single students, the result showed lower score on the IMF scale by the single students. This was based on several studies which had demonstrated consistently that marital status is an important variable in mental health / illness in the epidemiological studies. Cockerham (1996) and Vandell, Ramanan, & Lederberg (1991) postulated consistent findings on the married people who were better in mental health than single people. Although, Aseltine & Kessler, (1993) noted that family with marital conflict could create a source of stress, which might result in abnormal behaviour. Therefore, married people had been found consistently to be weakly adjusted individuals. More studies on the inner meaning fulfilment/marital status are needed to confirm this finding.

Hypothesis three which stated that students from monogynous setting would report lower existential problems than students from polygynous family setting was supported. That is, students from monogamous family setting would be better adjusted than students from polygynous family setting. Since there are present scarcity of literature on this issue it is plausible that changing traditional values, economic and political changes could be inferred to be the reason for the students from monogynous family setting to have better inner meaning fulfilment. That is, they might have better parental care and economic advantage and more attention because of the few number of children than larger ones in case of the polygynous setting. There is need of more studies to ascertain this issue.

At present, there are few diagnostic tools, used mainly for the University students in the counselling center and other departments for all students. Instead, they wait until psychiatric problems are suspected in the University medical clinic (Jaja clinic) or in the University College Hospital, which should not be the case.

The study demonstrated the urgent need of battery test that is different diagnostic tool that tap all the areas of psychopathology and mental health in all our tertiary.

Institutions followed up by counselling and psychotherapy. Not only as the freshman orientation programme but all as part of continuous assessment of the student's in order to help those students that exercise these maladaptive behaviour. Furthermore, the implication of the study in the literature review revealed that negative cognition, especially the crumbled tradition of today's generations, to which the present students belong are not only perpetuating many types of existential problems which can be eradicated through sufficient education, counselling, psychotherapy, seminars, lecture rooms and therapeutic settings either during casual visit to health clinic and counselling centre or during psychotherapy sessions. This is the reason why all stakeholders, relevant authority, and policy makers should come with relevant policies that favour the use of early psychology screening / assessment intervention and preventive programmes in all the tertiary institutes across the country.

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