




## Depression Among Pharmacy Students in Nigeria: Is It a Neglected Issue?

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### Dear Editor,

Depression is the foremost cause of disability and contributes very significantly to the disease burden worldwide. Globally, the incidence of depression and depressive symptoms has been on the rise in recent years (1). Depression has also been discovered to be the most potent single risk factor for attempted or accomplished suicides (2). This mental state cuts across all races, age groups, genders and professions. Worldwide, depression and anxiety symptoms are revealed to be common among university students. This has affected qualities of life and academic achievement over the years (3). Speaking of pharmacy education globally, the mental state of pharmacy students has been an important issue to be considered as it is very likely to be affected by a number of stressors which could lead to a series of outcomes personally and professionally (4). A recent study carried out on 164 students in the Faculty of Pharmacy in Alexandria University revealed that 29.3%, 20.1% and 28% students suffered from mild mood disturbance, borderline clinical depression and moderate depression respectively while 3% suffered from severe depression (5). Furthermore, from a research carried out on 433 undergraduate pharmacy students in Pakistan, the prevalence of depression observed in male and female students was 59.49% (51.40% - 67.22%) and 64% (58.91% to 68.86%) respectively for a 95% confidence interval (6).

Globally, studies on the mental health literacy of adults are on the increase. However, there has not been a corresponding interest in the mental health literacy of the youth in Nigeria (2). A few studies carried out on Nigerian youth in tertiary institutions in recent years have shown

that depression is a major global mental health challenge among youth in Nigeria today. A recent study carried out in Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria revealed that according to the patient health questionnaire scoring system using a cut off score of five, 58.2% of students were suffering from depression with 37%, 15.7%, 3.9% and 1.6% having mild, moderate, moderately severe and severe depression respectively (7). A previous study carried out in western Nigeria using the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale showed a prevalence rate of 25.2% and 7% for moderate to severe depression and severe depression respectively (7, 8) Another study showed a prevalence of depression of 8.3% among Nigerian university students with 5.6% of them having mild-moderate depression and 2.7% having severe depression (8). From the studies above, it is clear that depression is not uncommon among Nigerian undergraduates and, as a matter of fact, it is a mental health challenge beckoning for attention.

It is important to note that while these studies project depression among Nigerian university students, they provide no information about Nigerian pharmacy students in particular. Pharmacy education in Nigeria has undergone series of changes and development over the years. As at April 2019, there are more than twenty pharmacy schools in Nigeria accredited by the Pharmacists Council of Nigeria. Pharmacy schools in Nigeria have been known to always train future pharmacists for competence nationally and internationally. Reports from literature have also shown that Canadian and Nigerian pharmacy graduates ranked the highest in the Foreign Pharmacy Graduate Equivalency Examination in the USA (9). This lends cre-

dence to the quality of training received by Nigerian pharmacy students.

The school performance of students in the medical fields are affected by numerous factors ranging from stress, examinations anxiety to poor sleep quality (10). With the aforementioned facts, it can be safely said that; in the midst of quality and rigorous training will be environmental, individual, economic and social factors that would impact on mental health positively or negatively. However, there is still no extensive study on depression peculiar to pharmacy students in Nigeria at the moment.

Could it be said that depression among Nigerian pharmacy students is hence a subject matter that has been neglected over the years? With no specific journal article evaluating depression among pharmacy students in Nigeria, little or nothing is known about how an average pharmacy student in Nigeria copes with the stressors and rigours pharmacy school puts him/her through. General studies carried out in Nigerian universities have demonstrated significant levels of depression among university students. However, there is no study peculiar to pharmacy students. It will be beneficial to have data on this topic for the purpose of advancing knowledge in this important aspect of mental health and formulating and implementing policies to favour pharmacy education in Nigeria.

#### Footnotes

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