PREVALENCE OF DATING ANXIETY AMONG STUDENTS IN AL-HIKMAH UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA: ROLES OF COUNSELLING

BY

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Abstract
The study investigated the prevalence of dating anxiety (DA) among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was guided by a research question and 2 hypotheses. 454 undergraduates participated in the survey. The simple random sampling technique was used to select male and female students from different faculties, age level, and religious affiliations in the university. The Dating Anxiety Scale-Students - NGR (DAS-SN) was used as the instrument for collecting data. The data collected were analysed by percentages, standard deviation, mean, t-test and tables where appropriate. Results showed that the prevalence of DA among the students was very high; the prevalence rate of DA did not noticeably differ between male and female pupils;andno noticeable difference was found in the prevalence rate of DA between younger aged and olderaged students; and many (55%) of the participants sample signified interest to attend future remedial programmes aimed at reducing their DA. It was concluded that the prevalence rate of DA was high among students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin and this needs urgent professional attention. It was therefore recommended that counsellors should as a matter of urgency focus their attention on DA among the students; identify dating anxious students; and organise effective treatment (enlightenment) programmes for them.
Keywords: Dating; Prevalence, University; Undergraduate Students, Anxiety

Introduction

Aristotle was reported to have said that "Man is a social animal"; and that he cannot survive living in isolation (Al-Humaidhi, 2020). Thus, human beings engage in regular interactions that have a significant influence on one another's lives. These interpersonal interactions according to Ulya et al. (2023) are essential to human growth and developmental needs especially during early adulthood stage (between the ages of 20 and 40) and romantic partnerships in form of dating can help achieve this. Although there has been a continuous change in the nature and definition of dating (Psychology.iresearchnet.com, n. d); but generally it has been described as a stage of romantic relationships in humans whereby two people (usually a male and a female) meet socially with the aim of each assessing the other's suitability as a prospective partner in an intimate relationship or marriage (Glover, 2018).

Dating is the process of examining someone else to see whether you both share their interests and way of life (Crampton, 2023) usually with a view to settling down for marriage in Nigerian context. According to Healy (2023), people date when attempting to learn more about someone they have feelings for; in the hopes of establishing a serious relationship; or in anticipation of getting married to the person or people. Thus when people of different genders, according to Ulya et al. (2023) accept one another as partners and feel mutual affection for one another, they are engaging in a deep romantic engagement called dating. It is a form of courtship, consisting of social activities done by the couple, either alone or with others. Dating could be done face-to-face or online. Currently, there are more than 200 million who date online globally (Gupta, 2023). Dating is so important if we consider that it helps individuals in finding marriage partners with whom they would spend their entire lives. Studies (e.g. Ulya et al., 2023) have posited that dating offers several benefits to adolescents. It provides a means of social interactions function; an emotional support system for youth; an avenue for exploration of adolescents' morals and values; and a

means of establish personal identity. Moreover, it is used in promoting interpersonal competence and adult-like social behavior; recreation and entertainment; enhancement of status within the peer group; enhancement of independence by adolescents. In addition, dating provides the platform for separation from the family of origin; a scenario for experimentation with sexual activity and sex role behaviors; getting to know the opposite sex and creating comfort and increased skills in mate selection and courtship. Yet, a healthy dating could help promote happiness, relieve stress and physical pain; serve as a means of reducing mental disorders, provide socialization, entertainment and means of choosing marriage partners by daters and enjoyment and recreation (Iriani&Ninawati, 2005;Oliver, 2020). The protocols and practices of dating vary considerably from country to country and over time. With the use of modern technology, people can date via telephone or computer, social media or meet in person. In Nigeria, dating is a precursor to marriage and the beginning of a new family. Gerhard (2016) has noted that dating anxiety has been placed under social anxiety by American Psychiatric Association (APA). And that social anxiety is referred to as the fear that one will be negatively evaluated by others in one or more social or performance situations (Gerhard, 2016). Therefore dating anxiety is the fear an individual has that he or she will be negatively evaluated by others in dating situation (Gerhard, 2016). Dating or heterosocial situations usually trigger anxiety among adolescents especially college students and this is different from social anxiety experienced in other peer contexts (Gerhard, 2016; Bolton, 2018).

Dating anxiety may become a matter of great concern to psychologists, mental health practitioners, lecturers, university students, parents, guardians, researchers and other stakeholders involved in the education of students in Al-Hikmah University Ilorin, Nigeria.Dating anxiety (also known as heterosocial anxiety) refers to worry, distress, and inhibition experienced during interactions with dating partners or members of the opposite sex, that is, possible dating companions (Cronkleton, 2023). Dating may be difficult for many individuals (especially yet-to-marry undergraduates in early adulthood) regardless of how much they and the other person**s** have in common. Studies (such as Adamczyk &Segrin, 2016; Campbell et al., 2016; Ulya et al., 2023) have recorded that the incidence of dating anxiety is an almost a common occurrence in higher institutions that students that students may develop physical and somatic symptoms, such as increased heart rate, shaking, insomnia, rapid breathing, muscular tension, sweating and fatigue. It can cause fidgety behavior, an inability to concentrate or focus, as well as feelings of nervousness and impending panic or doom. It might be accompanied by physical symptoms such as blushing, trembling, sweating, palpitations or stammering. Dating-anxious individuals often fear being evaluated in a negative manner by prospective partners, or being embarrassed by one´s own action.

It has been reported that daters who experience dating anxiety tend to display social distress, fear of negative evaluation during dating and social avoidance (Bolton, 2018; Gerhard, 2016.). Anxious daters may find it difficult to avoid thinking about the bad or the dark side of dating. Furthermore, Rapee and Heimberg (1997) cited in Campbell et al. (2016) pointed out that the dread of receiving a poor assessment might make anxious individuals form a negative mental image of how they seem to other people in social settings, such as dating, and assume that other people are assessing them with disregard and dislike. For examples he or she may make self statement like "Am I good enough for him", "She may reject my proposal" and so on. Dating anxiety involves an unnecessary high degree of anxiety and discomfort around dating encounters, along with a widespread worry and anticipation that other people would react negatively. Dating anxious fellows also exhibit SAD. They behave in this manner with a view to diminishing the likelihood of social engagement in dating circumstances (Campbell et al., 2016). High dating anxious individuals may completely avoid dating situations or isolate themselves from others during heterosocial encounters by concentrating on their own emotions and well-being. The latter situation results in a person who is more preoccupied with their inner thoughts and feelings than with external signs, which makes them less socially aware and more dependent on their own skewed views while guessing about the opinions of others (Campbell et al., 2016). Therefore, such people usually show discomfort during parties, get-togethers, and or gatherings involving people of opposite sex. He or she may decide to sit alone, turn attention to his or her phone, or something else (just to withdraw or have social avoidance of the situation). Some anxious daters might completely

stay away from dating. Yet, others who summon courage could be stammering, fidgeting, loss composure, and or exhibit other distress related to in dating situations.

Dating anxiety has been placed under social phobia (American Psychiatric Association, as cited in Gerhard, 2016; Caridad, 2016); and most people with social phobia exhibit anxiety when dating. Based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Glickman & La Greca (2004), - 20% of those 14 years or younger, 35% of the 15- to 16-year-olds, and 60% of the 17- to 18-year-olds were involved in dating in America. Statistics shows that about 3.7 percent of the U.S. population ages 18 to 54—approximately 5.3 million individuals are diagnosed with a social phobia each year. In a study conducted at the University of Arizona (Arkowitz, et al., 1978), dating anxiety is a common occurrence among male and female college students, adolescents and adults (Glass et al., as cited in Gerhards, 2016). The problem behavior is common among adolescents who just are starting to date or those who do not date frequently, and older ones who have dated long time ago (Gerhard, 2016; & Bolton, 2018). High school adolescents experience tremendous emotions, and negative emotions make up around 42% of those feelings. This include despair, wrath, jealously and anxiety. And 25 to 34% of these emotions can be attributed to dating anxiety (La Greca & Mackey, 2007).

Currently, there is no accurate statistics available on the prevalence of dating anxiety among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, and Nigeria as a whole.Causes of dating anxiety have been traced to many factors according to studies like (Gerhards, 2015; Dack, 2016, and Smith, 2018 among others).Dack (2016) opined that no matter how partners try to keep their relationship alive by their actions in the present, knowing that the future of the relationship is unpredictable and not guaranteed provoke anxiety and hard to process. If fear of intimacy or feeling of inadequacy should develop from any of the partner, it becomes difficult for them to close with each other. Dating relationships entail emotional closeness, vulnerability and partners accepting and knowing each other in very intimate ways. If anyone of them fear intimacy or feel inadequate, closeness becomes difficult and it may be overwhelming when a partner expresses love feelings towards the other. Any violations to the relationship, emotional or sexual infidelity or untrustworthy behavior (such as discovering that your girlfriend has been dating other men online or sending flirty texts to former boy-friends) may provoke dating anxiety. Core incompatibility; such as having different values, relationship and life goals and visions of the future of the relationship could create anxiety. Especially partners who usually fall into disagreements or differing perspectives about where they want to live, how many children they want, how to go about religion, money matters and so on could spark anxiety. This might lead to increase fighting between the couple. Incessant fighting itself is a predictor of dating anxiety (Dack, 2016).Perhaps there are sufficient numbers of students who are suffering from this problem in the study area. Then, a survey of this type becomes necessary. This study becomes more important if we want to know the root causes of some maladaptive behaviours among students apart from improving their well-being and development. If dating anxiety is capable of affecting negatively students' present and future lives, research of this nature becomes imperative. Last but not the least is academic achievement of students. How would a dating anxious student who suffers depression attend to rigorous academic activities in universities? No right thinking person would want the huge human and material resources allocated to education to be wasted. If dating anxiety persists among students, it could jeopardize academic achievement; then it merits the attention of psychologists and other stakeholders. Therefore this study investigated the prevalence of dating anxiety among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Many studies have reported the consequences of dating anxiety (Dattilo et al., 2022; Leonard, 2024; Meek, 2022; and Fraga, 2022 among others). From these studies, we observed that dating anxiety is affecting psychosocial development of university students negatively. Students who suffer dating anxiety may develop social phobia, engage in less dating, may never progress to more intimate relationship like marriage, and may have late marriage. Also, dating anxious students may suffer depression, loneliness, and result to substance abuse. Furthermore, it may lead the sufferer to develop feelings of internal distress, low self-esteem, non-assertiveness, and possibly heighten

their feeling of shyness. Moreover, they may suffer poor adjustment, sexual dysfunction (especially premature ejaculation among men).Asher and Aderka (2019) carried out a study titled dating with social anxiety: An empirical examination of momentary anxiety and desire for future interaction. The study aimed to examine initial, opposite-sex interactions of individuals with social anxiety disorder (SAD) and their interaction partners. The study investigated gender and social context (small talk vs. closeness-generating conversations) and their effects on momentary social anxiety during the interaction, as well as on participants' desire for future interaction. Results showed that men with SAD benefitted significantly from closeness-generating interactions such that levels of momentary social anxiety were greatly reduced and both members of the dyad reported increased desire for future interaction. This effect was not found in small-talk conversations and not found for women with SAD.

Social skills deficiency could lead to development of anxiety among partners in dating situations. Dating situation requires some elements of social skills like eye contact, verbal and non-verbal communication, listening, concentration in the discussion, and so on. Dating anxiety may be part of a larger picture of distress and dysfunction in social situations and this might impact negatively on dating relationships. In addition, an individual who is deficient in interpersonal skills, communication, and problem-solving might suffer dating anxiety. Social skills are essential ingredients for processing social adjustments and functioning of individuals (Turner et al., cited in Gerhards, 2015). Therefore, social skills are parts of dating requirements. Individuals suffering from social anxiety disorder might show socially inadequate behavior within social and dating situations (Clark et al.; and Rapee et al., as cited in Gerhards, 2015),.It is common to see an individual who had had disappointment in past dating to exhibit anxiety in new dating situation due to the past experience. Such individuals may suffer from depression, social anxiety, generalized anxiety disorders, PTSD and other forms of psychological disorders that might be exhibited in dating situation. Individuals who suffer from these and other forms of psychological disorders are liable to exhibit anxiety in dating situations (Kolakowski, 2014; Smith, 2018).Muhweziet al. (2020) conducted a study titled dating stress, depression and anxiety symptoms: A study among university students in Uganda. The study described the occurrence of dating-related stress and its association with psychological state aspects of depression and anxiety among students in a Ugandan University. Results showed that the prevalence rate of dating-related stress was at 88%. Students who had ever experienced dating related stress were more than five times likely to suffer from depression compared to those who have never experienced dating related stress. Students who had ever experienced dating related stress were more than four times likely to suffer anxiety than those who have never experienced dating related stress. Arkowitz et al. (1978) carried out a study on dating anxiety treatment methods for college men based on real-life practices. The study aimed at determining the prevalence of dating anxiety among Arizona University undergraduate students. The results showed that almost one-third (31%) of the sample as a whole assessed themselves as either "somewhat" or "very" anxious about dating. On further inquiry if any of the students would like to participate in a future programme aimed at helping them increase their comfort and activity in dating situations, fifty percent (50%) of the total sample expressed interest. Further findings revealed that dating anxiety was found in thirty-seven percent (37%) and twenty-five percent (25%) of male and female respectively. Moreover, fifty-six percent (56%) male and forty-three percent (43%) female respectively indicated their interest to participate in future programme aimed at reducing dating anxiety.

Jonathan (2017) carried out an empirical analysis on dating and academic performance among undergraduate students of Babcock University in Ogun state, Nigeria. Findings revealed that a significant difference do exist between male and female undergraduates' dating behaviour (t-cal = 11.309 > t-crit. = 1.96, < 0.05); and a statistical difference do exist between the academic performance of those involved in dating and those who do not (z-cal = 3.543 > z-crit. = 1.96, < 0.05). Further finding showed that a positive significant relationship between undergraduates' dating behaviour and academic performance (r = .671; p>.05); while dating behaviour accounted for 27.1% of the variability in the undergraduates' academic achievement (R = .538; R = .289; Adj. R = .271; F(1,287) = 21.501; p <.05).Adamczyk, et al (2021) conducted a study on psychometric analysis of the Dating Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (DAS-A) in samples of Polish and U.S. young adults: Examining the factor structure, measurement invariance, item functioning, and convergent validity**.** The study explored whether the DAS-A, which

was originally developed in the United States to assess dating anxiety in adolescents, is appropriate for use in samples of young adults from Poland and the United States. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported the original three factor measurement model of the DAS. Invariance tests revealed factor loadings and item thresholds that differed across subgroups, supporting partial metric and partial scalar invariance. The MIRT analysis showed that all items adequately discriminated participants with low and high anxiety. Dating anxiety latent factor correlations with mental health and interpersonal competence were significant in the expected negative directions.Adamczyk and Segrin (2015) investigated the mediating role of romantic desolation and dating anxiety in the association between interpersonal competence and life satisfaction among Polish young adults. This study investigated the role of romantic desolation on life satisfaction in young adulthood. Results revealed that single individuals reported lower life satisfaction and higher romantic loneliness than did partnered individuals. There was no difference between single and partnered individuals in dating anxiety or interpersonal competence. Structural equation modeling results showed that low interpersonal competence has an indirect effect on romantic desolation through higher levels of dating anxiety. Also, dating anxiety had an indirect effect on lower life satisfaction through increased romantic desolation.La Greca and Mackey (2007) conducted a research on adolescents' anxiety in dating situations: The potential role of friends and romantic partners. The study examined how successfully adolescents interacted with others, particularly the features of their closest friendships and romantic relationships, as a predictor of dating anxiety. Most adolescents were found to be in romantic relationships, with girls being more prone than boys to engage in such partnerships.Adolescents who had fewer friends of the opposite sex and those who experienced more negative interactions than positive ones with their closest friends reported high levels of anxiety when it came to dating. In addition, adolescents with higher levels of dating anxiety were those who had never been in a romantic relationship, and were not at that time having romantic partners, and had more negative than positive interactions with their partners. Variations were observed in the various dimensions of dating anxiety. The results show that there may be a number of distinct and independent relationships between various facets of adolescents' social interactions and anxiety in heterosocial or dating contexts. The social interactions that adolescents form can either facilitate or obstruct the growth of fulfilling love relationships.

Dating is an exciting and important part of human life especially during our interaction with people to whom we are sexually attracted. It is expected that undergraduates would date with a view to choose life partners. However, dating anxiety could pose a great threat to students.Muhweziet al. (2020) have noted that dating anxiety has become a global problem. It has been found to be influencing stress and negatively affecting mental health among students. The phenomenon has ignited public health (and of course educational) concern. Despite the worrisome situation, research is still on dating anxiety especially in Nigeria.Dating anxiety could lead to diminished life, psychological distress, low self-esteem, depression, and non-assertiveness, poorer adjustment, inability to marry or late marriage, and or sexual dysfunction like premature ejaculation in men (Dattilo et al.. 2022; Muhweziet al. (2020). Thereforedating anxiety could truncate undergraduates' health and psychosocial development if left untreated. Students grappling with dating anxiety may face considerable difficulty in cultivating healthy and supportive relationships, driven by their apprehension of potential negative judgment from others. Larson et al. (1999) suggest that dating anxiety contributes to a significant portion (25–34%) of the intense emotions experienced by high school students, with negative feelings like anger, jealousy, anxiety, and despair comprising approximately 42% of these emotions.

Research Question
1. What is the prevalence of dating anxiety among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no noticeable difference between dating anxiety of male and female undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

H$_{O2}$: There is no noticeable difference between dating anxiety of younger and older undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The research question and two hypotheses were developed to direct the investigation. A well-structured questionnaire was used to survey the prevalence of dating anxiety among the participants. Four hundred and fifty-four (454) undergraduate students of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria participated in the survey. The participants were selected by means of simple random sampling technique. They included male and female students from different faculties, age, and religious affiliations in the university. Out of the 454 participants, male students were 260 (representing 57.3%) while female students were 194 (representing 42.7%). Faculty of Education had 94 students (representing 20.7%); Faculty of Health Science had 53 students (representing 11.7%); Faculty of Management Science had 53 students (representing 32.4%); Faculty of Humanity and Social Science had 103 students (representing 22.7%); and Faculty of Natural and Applied Science had 57 students (representing 12.6%). In terms of age bracket, participants between 16-18 years were 23 students (representing 5.1%); 19-21 years were 104 students (representing 22.9%); 22-24 years were 194 students (representing 42.7%); and 25-27 years were 133 students (representing 29.3%). On the basis of religious affiliation, Christian students were 31 (representing 6.8%); while Muslim students were 423 (representing 93.2%).The instrument used for this study was tagged Dating Anxiety Scale-Students - NGR (DAS-SN). It came into being after contact with past studies and the instruments used in related empirical studies (such as Bolton, 2018; Glickman & La Greca, 2004; La Greca & Mackey, 2007; and Stevens & Morris, 2007, among others). The statements in the instrument were reframed with a view to fit Nigerian context.

The instrument has three (3) sections (that is; A, B, and C). Section "A" contained demographic data like gender, faculties, age, and religious affiliations of participating students. Section "B" consists twenty-five (25) items bothering on social distress, social avoidance, and fear of negative evaluation in dating situations. The instrument has a four Likert-scale responses **VTM** (Very True of Me**); RTM (**Rarely True of Me**); NTM** (Not True of Me**), and NVTM** (Not Very True of Me**).** Scoring **VTM** (4**); RTM** (3**); NTM** (2**), and NVTM** (1**).** Participants could score between the range of 25 and 100 points. Those who scored sixty (60) points and above were considered as dating anxious students. And Section "C" seeks the opinion of participants (whether **"YES"** or **"NO")** if they will like to attend if there is any programme organized to reduce anxiety when in dating situations in the future.The validity of the instrument was ascertained by four senior lecturers and Professors of Counselling Education from University of Ilorin and the Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. They adjudged it as having face and content validity. Their observations and suggestions were taken into consideration in the final production of the instrument. The questionnaire was subjected to a test-retest method with a view to determining its reliability. Twenty (20) undergraduates from Ladoke Akintola University, Ogbomosho - Oyo State were given the questionnaire for their responses. The questionnaire was collected and scored. Two weeks later the same group of students was given the same instrument for their responses. The scores of the first and the second responses were compared using Pearson Moment of Correlation Reliability Co-efficiency statistics. The reliability co-efficiency was 0.84.The participants (who are also returning) students at Al-Hikmah University, in Ilorin were approached at points of registration by trained research assistants who solicited for their cooperation in filling the DAS-SN. The data collected were analysed by means of percentages, mean, standard deviation, t-test and tables where appropriate.

Results

Research Question One: What is the prevalence of dating anxiety among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria?

Table 1:
Population t-test Analysis of Prevalence Level of Dating Anxiety among Students of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin,Nigeria

Variable	N	Sample Mean	Sample SD
Dating Anxiety	454	72.69	11.45

Table 1 above reveals that the mean score obtained is 72.69 with standard deviation of 11.45. This implies that the prevalence of dating anxiety is high among undergraduate students of Al-Hikmah University at Ilorin, Nigeria.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: "There is no noticeable difference in the prevalence rate of dating anxiety between male and female students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria."

Table 2:
An Independent t-test on the Difference in the Prevalence Rate of Dating Anxiety between Male and Female Students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Male	260	72.43	11.74			
				-.575	.566	NS
Female	194	73.05	11.05			

Table 2 is an independent samples t-test conducted to compare the Dating Anxiety prevalence rate between male and female students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The results as indicated in Table 2 shows that there is no statistically noticeable difference in the Dating Anxiety of male students (M = 72.43, SD = 11.74) compared to their female counterparts (M = 73.05, SD = 11.05), $t(452)$, -.575, p = .566. The magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = -.624, 95% CL: -2.76 to 1.51) was very small (eta squared = .000). With the results of this analysis, the second null hypothesis was thus supported and hence retained. This implies that there is no noticeable difference in the prevalence rate of Dating Anxiety between male and female undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

Hypothesis Two: There is no noticeable difference in the prevalence rate of dating anxiety between younger and older students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Table 3:
An Independent t-test on the Difference in the Prevalence Rate of Dating Anxiety between Younger and Older Students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

Age Level	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Younger Age	127	73.50	9.24			
				.940	.348	NS
Older Age	327	72.39	12.19			

Table 3 above is an independent samples t-test conducted to compare the Dating Anxiety prevalence rate between younger and older aged students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The results as indicates in Table 3 shows that there is no statistically noticeable difference in the prevalence rate of Dating Anxiety of younger aged students (M = 73.50, SD = 9.24) compared to their older age students (M = 72.39, SD = 12.19), $t(452)$, .940, p = .348. The magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = 1.124, 95% CL: -1.23 to 3.48) was very small (eta squared = .001). With the results of this analysis, the third null hypothesis was thus supported and hence sustained. This implies that there is no difference in the prevalence rate of Dating Anxiety between younger and older aged students in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Table 4:
Frequency Distribution on Expression of Interest to Participate in Programmes aimed at Reducing Dating Anxiety

Expression	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
YES	250	4%	55.1%	55.1%
NO	204	5%	44.9%	100%
TOTAL	454	100%	100%	

Table 4 above shows the frequency distribution of participants' expression of interest to participate in future programmes aimed at helping people to reduce dating anxiety. Out of 454 participants, 250 (representing 55%) filled "YES" indicating their interest or willingness to participate while 204 (representing 45%) participants filled "NO" indicating their lack of interest or willingness to participate. This implies that many of the participants want to participate in programmes that could help them reduce dating anxiety.

Discussion

This study has revealed that there is a high prevalence of dating anxiety (DA) among undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria with 72.69 mean score established as the total sample exhibited DA. The finding of the present study differs to that of Arkowitz et al (1978) who found that 31% of their survey was dating anxious. Although the exact reason for this difference might not be known. However, the result of the present study agrees with that of Muhwezi et al. (2020) who found prevalence of DA as 88% among university students in Uganda (another African country). Perhaps, time and culture could be attributed to the difference. Though it is important to identify factors that contributed to this; but it is more important to first of all identify students that are dating anxious as well as. Moreover, the extent or level at which the affected students exhibit the maladaptive behaviour is still important. Furthermore, the results have shown that male and female students are not different in the prevalence rate of DA. This implies that male and female students experience DA in the same manner. DA was rampart among students irrespective of their gender. This finding disagreed with the position of Glickman and La Greca (2004) who found that high school boys experienced DA than their girl counterparts. This finding could also be attributed to culture. Perhaps future empirical investigations may probe into the causes of the disparity rather than guessing.

Moreover, the study has revealed that there isno noticeable difference in the prevalence rate of DA between younger aged and older aged students at Al-Hikmah University in Ilorin, Nigeria. This implies that younger aged and older aged students experience DA in the same manner. This finding disagreed with the position of Glickman and La Greca (2004) who found that younger adolescence reported more DA than the older ones. Ordinarily we would expect experience of old age to count, but empirical finding in the present study has refuted this claim. The issue of social skill may be vital than age in this dispensation. If the younger ones are better in social skills, they would be less anxious in dating or vice-versa.

Additional finding has revealed that 55% of the sample signified interest to attending future programmes aimed at reducing their DA. This finding has a striking resemblance to that of Arkowitz et al. (1978) who found that 50% of

their sample expressed interest to attend such programme if advertised. Arkowitz et al (1978) reported that findings of surveys (such as Bryant & Tower; and Zimbardo et al.) shared resemblance with their work. And by extension, all of them are in agreement with this finding. Perhaps most people who realize that they are dating anxious are always interested to attend remedial programmes.

Role of Counselling

This study has a serious implication for counsellors, (and other mental health experts), school managements, students, parents, and other stakeholders involved in the university's activities. This study has made it very clear that counsellors cannot continue to ignore DA among the undergraduate students. Counsellors would have to give professional attention to dating anxious students; identifying and organising premarital counselling and other psychosocial educational programmes for them. Yet, counsellors might disseminate information on DA to students regularly. Moreover counselling interventions such as social skills and other cognitive behavioural counselling techniques could be treated during workshops with students exhibiting DA. There is a need for counsellors to seek all necessary support from the school management and other stakeholders for taking care of DA among students.

Conclusion

According to the study's findings, undergraduate students at Al-Hikmah University in Ilorin, Nigeria, had an extremely high incidence of DA; there is no noticeable difference between the prevalence rate of male and female students; there is no noticeable difference between the prevalence rate of younger and older students; and a large number of the participants have signified their interest to participate in future programme aimed at remediating DA. The high prevalence of dating anxiety and its relationship with mental health of our undergraduates make it paramount for counselling psychologists, mental health experts and other professionals to conduct more research works in this area with a view to promoting health, social and educational growth of university students. Despite the contribution of this study, future studies should consider religious affiliation, or combine two or more universities in a single survey.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the study's findings:
1. Counsellors should as a matter of urgency focus their attention on DA among students (as this hitherto ignored area could be the root of their other psychological discomforts.
2. Counsellors should identify dating anxious students so that they could receive help. In order to facilitate this, instruments like the one utilised for this study and others developed by other authors could be used or modified to suit that purpose. Yet new instruments should be developed to meet specifications.
3. Effective instruments (like the DAS-SN) for identification and treatment programmes for dating anxious students should be developed.
4. Counsellors should liaise with the school management, students and other stakeholders with a view to getting time, facilities, finance, materials and other necessary support towards organising remedial programme on DA.

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