The link between unemployment and mental health

ABSTRACT

Unemployment is recognized as one of the major challenges affecting both developed and developing nations. Its economic and socio-political impacts have been well documented. However, its impact either directly or through resultant aspects such as low income on mental health has less been researched and forms the core focus of this paper. The current study endeavors to unravel the link between unemployment and its consequences on the severity of mental health. The study uses primary data acquired from Kaggle.com, as published by Michael Corely, collected in 2018 via survey monkey. Using descriptive analysis and Chi-square tests of independence at a 5% level of significance, the study found no significant relationship between unemployment and mental health. However, the findings indicated the dominance of resultant impacts of unemployment like anxiety and other depressive indicators in young people aged 18-29. Therefore, it is concluded that unemployment should not be used as a direct predictor of mental health severity, but its associated challenges should. From the findings, the study recommends further research into the subject of population tied to spatial difference and other factors that will ensure a depth understanding of the linkage between employment and mental health.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research aims at exploring the impact unemployment has on the severity of mental health. The conditions elucidated by people lacking jobs have historically been associated with diverse socio-economic dynamics such as an increase in social crimes and domestic violence. However, the causal relationship between different resultant aspects of unemployment has received negligible focus. Lack of information on the linkage between the two back-peddles effectively manages the ever-increasing mental illness [14]. This paper, therefore, endeavors to bring to the spotlight linkages of unemployment aspects and their interactions on the mental health severity in the United States of America.

1. MOTIVATION

The unemployment rate is an important factor in any nation. It is a denominator of many social, political, and economic spheres [1]. One of the most important and less focused on the influence of unemployment is its association with mental health severity. Understanding the linkage between the two will inform the government and other policymakers to develop tailored solutions in the management of the two. It will also enhance the treatment and resources allocated to mental health hence stemming an exponentially growing social challenge. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed vulnerable members of society to unemployment and poverty [8]. Understanding the effects of such instances in society would aid in establishing reliable approaches to empower people. This study provides a lucrative avenue to address the impacts of social and economic dynamics on people's health.

1. BACKGROUND

Unemployment has been shown to contribute to crisis cutting across social, economic, and political spheres of life. Studies have also found a positive correlation between resultant impacts of unemployment rise to mental health, particularly in countries with high living standards [5]. Unemployed individuals have been found to have higher levels of weakened mental health as parametrized by depression, stress, and anxiety which mainly result from social perceptions and lack of financial capacity to meet the standards of living [3]. Other consequences of unemployment include but are not limited to; high mental health hospital admissions, development of chronic disease, and premature mortality.

Mental health is a quickly rising problem deemed to more than 50 million united states citizens [13]. National Institute of Mental Health defines it as challenges affecting "cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being." Mental illness has been shown to have a heavy impact on economic development equivalent to physical health problems. It is estimated that a single poor mental health day in a month may lead to a drop in income growth rate by more than 1.8% resulting in $53 billion less income annually [6]. On the other hand, unemployment refers to individuals actively searching for jobs and cannot find any. The latter definition encompasses individuals at work without a proper job.

Lack of an appropriate paid job is also associated with unhealthy deeds such as increased tobacco and alcohol consumption alongside reduced physical activity [11]. The mentioned deeds are primary causatives of mental health. On the contrary, a positive link has been established between employment and health attributes such as; enhanced self-confidence, better health, general happiness, and improved self-esteem. According to, Meri-Davlasheridze et al. 2018 [7] being employed gratify a psychological need that must be filled to sustain good mental health. Therefore, there is a need to understand the effects unemployment has on mental health. And using survey data from Kaggle.com, this study will try to establish the linkage between the two.

1. RESEARCH METHOD

The section below highlights the specific research questions, research methods utilized, and data analysis. The approaches are unique and specific due to the nature of the data utilized.

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will investigate the links between unemployment and individual mental health across age and gender. The research parameters will include the duration of unemployment as assessed by the resume gap, education level, household income, development of other health challenges, and the number of times an individual has been hospitalized for mental illness. This work takes unemployment as the basis of research and cuts across respondents with and without mental illness.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

The data required to answer the above research questions were obtained from the Kaggle.com website, collected by Michael Corely using a survey monkey questionnaire. The survey saw 334 respondents participate; 176 and 158 were women and men, respectively. Eighty of the respondents were denoted as mentally ill, according to their current medical records. The numbers correlate to national statistics and diagnostic estimates of various studies, indicating that about 20% of the population suffer from different forms of mental illness.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Collected data will be subjected to descriptive statistical analysis inform of frequencies, cross-tabulations, and averages. Chi-square test of independence will be used to establish the relationships between the test parameters. The findings are presented under the results section below.

1. **Results**

The study found that 32% of the respondents were not employed, while 23.7% of them confirmed to have been identified as mentally ill patients. However, only 12.6% had been hospitalized before regarding mental challenges, as shown in Table 1 under the Appendices.

It was also found that 53.6% of the respondents had acquired a bachelor's degree and above, while 85% of the participants were 30 years and above, as shown in F**igure 1.**

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between employment status and mental illness. However, the relationship was not statistically significant, Χ2 (1, N = 334) = 1.676, p = 0.215 at 5% level of significance, as only 28.0% of the unemployed group had confirmed mental illness and only 21.6% of the employed respondents were mentally ill. Similar analysis between the respondent age and mental illness shows that the relationship is significant, Χ2 (3, N = 334) = 27.930, p = 0.00, indicating mental illness tends to dominate in the young respondents as highlighted by 42.3% and 33% of mentally ill persons with 18-29 and 30-44 years respectively.

The study also found that irrespective of mental health status, the respondents experienced related mental disorders that are key to depressive symptoms such as anxiety, tiredness, and lack of concentration. And there was no significant difference between the groups.

A difference in monthly income was observed between the mental healthy and ill participants; healthy individuals had a mean income of 36.97±30.79(SD) thousand US dollars while ill patients had an average monthly income 32.109±29.52(SD) thousand US dollars. Regarding employment, unemployed respondents recorded an average of 25.5±28.44(SD) thousand US dollars, while employed respondents had an average of 40.62±30.54(SD) thousand US dollars.

1. DISCUSSION

According to the study results, unemployment among the young population, particularly people who are socially meant to start taking up responsibilities, has more severe mental health problems than the old counterparts. This finding corroborates Pharr et al. (2012) [9], who found that age is an important determinant of employment/unemployment caused by mental health. They attribute the observation to the fact that the young population is faced with complex lifestyle and work-related demands that plunge the majority into stress and desperation. Furthermore, the unemployed population faces financial constraints which exacerbate other challenges, including lack of access to medical services [2]. The latter has been shown to contribute to depressive factors such as anxiety, lack of concentration, and compulsive behavior. Tiredness, panic attacks, depression, and anxiety are among the mental health challenges that affect employees in various working environments [12]. This study reveals that unemployment challenges make these mental health issues more prominent among individuals.

1. THREATS TO VALIDITY

The validity of the findings in this study is threatened by a wide range of factors ranging from sample identification to statistics parameters. For instance, the research did not classify the respondents as having voluntarily decided to stay unemployed, retired, or otherwise. The individual income is subject to the respondent's memory, and there is a need to provide lead options that can help the participants remember.

RELATED WORK

Some of the related studies to current include; Breslin and Mustard, (2003) [2], who investigate the relationship between unemployment and mental health problems in youth and old populations. Another closely related study is by Pharr et al., (2012) [9], whose findings support the claim that unemployment is associated with mental health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals lost jobs, resulting in adverse mental health challenges. Posel et al. (2021) [10] identify the extensive negative impacts of unemployment on the mental health status of individuals in South Africa. The study supports this research, affirming that unemployment results in depression, stress, and other mental health challenges. Farré et al. (2018) [4] explain the mental health impacts of the Great Recession and the subsequent massive loss of jobs. The work is directly related to our study because it identifies a positive correlation between job loss and mental health problems.

1. CONCLUSIONS

A wide range of factors causes mental health; however, unemployment cannot be used as a stand-alone descriptor of its severity. Other factors such as the workplace condition, family issues, and substance dependence need to be evaluated for their individual and collective contribution to the subject matter. Even though unemployment is a common socio-economic aspect in society, it results in extensive mental health impacts [15]. The study provided an extensive overview of data revealing the impact of unemployment on the respective individuals. However, various external and internal factors pose a significant threat to the validity of the study. The availability of related research by various scholars implies the seriousness of the issue in modern society. Therefore, addressing unemployment issues would extensively improve mental health status across the globe.

1. FUTURE WORK

Further research on the relation between unemployment and mental health should be conducted on a wide scale considering spatial differences.

1. APPENDICES

Table 1: Results from the analysis

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Test parameter** | **%Yes** | **%No** |
| Employment | 32 | 68 |
| Mentally ill | 76.3 | 23.7 |
| Hospitalized before for mental illness | 87.4 | 12.6 |

Figure 1: Age of the respondents

Figure 2: Graph obtained for the "ill" and "not ill"

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