Self-Esteem, Gender, and Psychological Health Among Nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Psychological health has been linked to effective and efficient human functioning across various facets of human endeavour. However, not much is known on the psychological health of nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State. This study examined self-esteem, gender and psychological health among nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, in which 132 nurses, comprising 103(78.0%) females and 29(22.0%) males, whose ages ranged from 22 – 58 (Mean age =39.39, SD=9.26) served as participants. A questionnaire containing a demographic section, the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and the General Health Questionnaire-12 were used in data collection. Statistical analysis involved the use of Multiple Linear Regression and Independent Samples t-test. Findings showed that, Self-esteem had a significant positive influence on psychological health, and accounted for 11.2% of the variance observed in psychological health among the nurses. Furthermore, there was significant gender differences in psychological health among the nurses, with male nurses showing higher Mean scores compared to their female counterparts. The study recommended that, managements of General Hospitals in Benue State should put in place measures to improve self-esteem deficits, amidst other recommendations to improve psychological health among the nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State.

Keywords: *Self-esteem, Gender, Psychological Health, Nurses, General Hospitals*

Introduction

The importance of psychological health to everyday living, effective and efficient functioning in the various fields of human endeavour can hardly be overstated. In the healthcare sector, healthcare delivery system relies heavily on the nursing workforce, which represent the frontline of patient care and hospital operations. Nurses often confront challenging clinical environments characterised by heavy workloads, long shifts, and high-stakes clinical decision-making. In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward the internal resources and mental state of

healthcare workers, as psychological health and self-esteem are critical drivers of nursing performance, professional identity, and overall quality of care. When psychological health is compromised, it manifests as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy, ultimately degrading patient safety and institutional health outcomes (Aluh, et al. 2020). Historically, nursing has been a female-dominated profession, deeply intertwined with societal expectations of gendered caregiving roles. However, the demographic landscape of nursing is shifting. Demographic variables particularly gender, play a vital role in shaping how individuals perceive work-related stress, encounter social prejudices, and maintain their psychological balance. For instance, male nurses frequently face unique socio-cultural prejudices and stereotypes regarding their career choice, which can negatively impact their self-esteem and trigger psychological distress. Conversely, female nurses often juggle demanding occupational roles with traditional domestic responsibilities, exposing them to distinct stressors (Chirico, et al. 2021).

Furthermore, self-esteem acts as a fundamental psychological buffer against these stressors. High self-esteem reinforces professional identity and mitigates anxiety or depression, whereas low self-esteem leaves individuals vulnerable to psychological distress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction (Wu, et al. 2023). Understanding the intersection of self-esteem, gender, and psychological health is therefore imperative for sustaining an effective healthcare workforce.

In Nigeria, and specifically within Benue State, public healthcare facilities bear the brunt of an overstretched healthcare system. Nurses working across General Hospitals in the state's distinct geopolitical zones face acute operational challenges, including systemic understaffing, infrastructural deficits, and inadequate organizational support. These systemic stressors hold potentials for severely threatening the psychological health of nursing staff. While local research has explored external workplace dynamics, such as perceived organizational support, there remains a critical empirical gap regarding how intrinsic factors like self-esteem interact with gender to influence the psychological health of nurses in Benue State's General Hospitals. Without empirical data addressing these dynamics, the Benue State Hospital Management Board may lack the targeted framework necessary to deploy effective mental health interventions, risking increased nursing turnover and diminished patient care. It is against this background that this study examines self-esteem, gender, and psychological health among nurses working in General Hospitals across Benue State.

Literature Review

Psychological Health

Psychological health is a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (Buresove, et al. 2020). According to the World Health Organisation (2014), psychological health includes subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualisation of one's intellectual and emotional potential. Cultural differences, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how one defines psychological health (Galderisi, et al. 2017).

Furthermore, the Public Health Agency of Canada defined psychological health as an individual's capacity to feel, think, and act in ways to achieve a better quality of life, while respecting the personal, social, and cultural boundaries (Canada Public Health Agency, 2020). Impairment of any of these is a risk factor for mental disorders, which are components of psychological health (Lanza, et al. 2023). Psychological health is associated with lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, stress, drug abuse, social connections and interactions (Manger, 2019).

Global reports on nurses across various countries of the world, reveal that, there is a steady decline in the psychological health of nurses. According to the report, 49% of nurses in Brazil show symptoms of anxiety, while 25% have depression. In Croatia, 24% of nurses have symptoms of anxiety, while 26.8% have depression; in Germany 16% of nurses suffer from anxiety, while 29.3% have depression; in Poland, 46.7% show signs of anxiety, while 9.21% have depression. Other statistics show that, in Russia, 6% of the nursing population have anxiety, while 50.4% have depression; in Italy, 41.9% have anxiety, 37.2% have depression, 27.7% have stress, while 39.5% have insomnia, in Jordan, 64.1%) of the nurses have depression, while 79.5% have anxiety (Varghese, et al. 2021). Moreover, the report indicated that, in China, 68.5% of the nurses suffer from depression, 19.5% have anxiety, 46% have stress, 60% suffer from insomnia, in Vietnam, 11.1% have anxiety, 2.2% have depression, while 11.1% have stress; in Turkey, 46.5% of the nurses suffer anxiety. The report also indicated that, in Singapore, 33.5% of the nurses suffer anxiety, while 31.6% have stress; in the Philippines, 37.8% of the nurses have anxiety; in Oman, 11.4% have anxiety, while 58.7% suffer from depression; in Iran, 38.7% of the nurses have anxiety, while 37.4% have stress, in India, 21.8% of the nurses suffer anxiety, 80% have depression, while 14.5% suffer from stress (Varghese, et al. 2021).

In Africa, of 255 nurses in a Tertiary health facility in Kenya, depression, anxiety, insomnia, distress, and burnout were reported in 45.9%, 48.2%, 37.0%, 28.8% and 47.9% of all nurses. In South Africa, Hoque, et al. (2021) reported that, the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression among health workers in a rural primary health care setting in South Africa out of which 69.2% were nurses showed that: 97.5% had stress, 97.5% had anxiety, while 44% had depression respectively. In a systematic review on the prevalence of burnout among nurses in sub-Saharan Africa in seven countries, Owuor, et al. (2020) reported that, the prevalence of emotional exhaustion was 66%, 60% for depersonalization, and 49% for low personal achievement.

In Nigeria, Chirico, et al. (2021) reported that, the prevalence of psychological health disorders was high among healthcare workers. In specific terms, the report stated that, the percentage of healthcare workers with anxiety ranged from 9% to 90% with a median of 24%. For depression, the percentage ranged from 5% to 51%, with a median of 21%. For sleep problems, the percentage ranged from 34% to 65%, with a median of 37%. For distress, the percentage ranged from 7% to 97%, with a median of 37%. The review also reported a pooled prevalence for anxiety of 27% among nurses in Nigeria (Chirico, et al. 2021). In Benue State, not much is known on the psychological health of nurses, nevertheless, there are complains of errors, impaired judgments, accidents, reduction in patients' care, treating patients as objects rather than human beings and becoming emotionally depleted among nurses. Considering evidence that, the psychological health of nurses is linked to the way they deliver services (Torkula, 2020), and based on the fact that the state of psychological health of nurses in General Hospitals in Benue State is not scientifically well understood, this study examines psychological health and associating variables among nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself (for example, "I am unloved", "I am worthy") as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame (Moris & Brown, 2019). Psychologists usually regard self-esteem as an enduring personality characteristic (trait self-esteem), though normal, short-term variations (state self-esteem) also exist. Synonyms or near-synonyms of self-esteem include: self-worth, self-regard, self-respect, and self-integrity (Perterson, 2021).

The concept of self-esteem has its origins in the 18th century, first expressed in the writings of the Scottish enlightenment thinker David Hume. Hume posits that it is important to value and think well of oneself because it serves a motivational function that enables people to explore their full potential (Orth, et al. 2021). The identification of self-esteem as a distinct psychological construct has its origins in the work of philosopher, psychologist, geologist, and anthropologist William James (1892). James identified multiple dimensions of the self, with two levels of hierarchy: processes of knowing (called the "I-self") and the resulting knowledge about the self (the "Me-self"). The observation about the self and storage of those observations by the I-self creates three types of knowledge, which collectively account for the Me-self (Psychology Practical, 2023). These are the material self, social self, and spiritual self.

The social self comes closest to self-esteem, comprising all characteristics recognized by others. The material self consists of representations of the body and possessions and the spiritual self of descriptive representations and evaluative dispositions regarding the self. This view of self-esteem as the collection of an individual's attitudes toward itself remains today (Wu, et al. 2023). In the mid-1960s, social psychologist Morris Rosenberg defined self-esteem as a feeling of self-worth and developed the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES), which became the most-widely used scale to measure self-esteem in the social sciences (Orth & Robins, 2022).

In the mid-20th century, the rise of phenomenology and humanistic psychology led to renewed interest in self-esteem. Self-esteem then took a central role in personal self-actualization and in the treatment of psychic disorders. Psychologists started to consider the relationship between psychotherapy and the personal satisfaction of persons with high self-esteem as useful to the field. This led to new elements being introduced to the concept of self-esteem, including the reasons why people tend to feel less worthy and why people become discouraged or unable to meet challenges by themselves (Donohoe-Bales, et al. 2025). Relating to the development of self-esteem across the life span, evidence indicates that, experiences in a person's life are a major source of how self-esteem develops (Barbot, et al. 2019). In the early years of a child's life, parents have a significant influence on self-esteem and can be considered the main source of positive and negative experiences a child will have. Unconditional love from parents helps a child develop a stable sense of being cared for and respected. These feelings translate into later effects on self-esteem as the child grows older (Orth, et al. 2021). Self-esteem has shown to be related or linked to various individual behaviours and dispositions, and it is in this light that this study examines self-esteem and psychological health among nurses in Benue State, North-central, Nigeria.

Gender

Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to femininity and masculinity and differentiating between them (Sawada, et al. 2014). Depending on the context, this may include gender-based social structures (i.e. gender roles) and gender identity. Most cultures use a gender binary, in which gender is divided into two categories, and people are considered part of one or the other (boys/men and girls/women); those who are outside these groups may fall under the umbrella term non-binary (Kliman, 2016). Some societies have specific genders besides "man" and "woman", such as the hijras of South Asia; these are often referred to as third genders (and fourth genders). Most scholars agree that gender is a central characteristic for social organization (Lehtonen, et al. 2016). Evidence have shown that, people tend to differ significantly on various factors along gender lines, but this relationship is not well understood among nurses, hence this study examines this phenomenon by exploring gender difference in psychological health among nurses in Benue State.

Theoretical Review - Seligman's PERMA Model (2004)

The PERMA model was propounded by Martin Seligman with five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness. Seligman believes that these five elements can help people reach a life of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning. The PERMA model is broken down as follows (Seligman, 2011):

P – Positive Emotion: This element of the model is one of the most obvious connections to happiness. Being able to focus on positive emotions is more than just smiling, it is the ability to be optimistic and view the past, present, and future in a positive perspective. This positive view of life can help in relationships, work, and inspire one to be more creative and take more chances. In everyone's life, there are highs and lows, focusing on the lows increase chances of developing depression, therefore, individuals should focus on the high and positive aspects of life.

E – Engagement: Engagement in activities is important for us to learn, grow and nurture our personal happiness. Everyone is different and we all find enjoyment in different things whether it is playing an instrument, playing a sport, dancing, working on an interesting project at work or even just a hobby. Individuals need something in their lives that entirely absorbs them into the present moment, creating a 'flow' of blissful immersion into the task or activity. This type of 'flow' of engagement is important to stretch our intelligence, skills, and emotional capabilities (Seligman, 2011).

R – Relationships: Relationships and social connections are one of the most important aspects of life. Humans are social animals that thrive on connection, love, intimacy, and a strong emotional and physical interaction with other humans. Building positive relationships with parents, siblings, peers, and friends are important to spread love and joy. Having strong relationships gives a sense of support in difficult times (Seligman, 2011).

M – Meaning: Having a purpose and meaning to why each of us is on this earth is important to living a life of happiness and fulfillment. Rather than the pursuit of pleasure and material wealth, there is an actual meaning to our life. Such meaning gives people a reason for their life and that there is a greater purpose to life. To understand the greater impact of work and why one chose to the pursuit of that work will help enjoy the tasks more and become more satisfied and happier (Seligman, 2011).

A – Accomplishments: Having goals and ambition in life can help to achieve things that can give a sense of accomplishment. Individuals need to make realistic goals that can be met, and putting in the effort to achieving those goals can already give a sense of satisfaction, and when one finally achieves those goals, a sense of pride and fulfillment will be reached.

Method

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. A cross-sectional survey design examines data from respondents in various dimensions at a particular point in time (Shindi, 2017). The setting was Benue State of Nigeria, covering the 23 General Hospitals in the state. The study was restricted to nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State, and were selected across the three geopolitical zones, including Zone A, B and C. Specifically, three (3) General Hospitals were randomly

selected from each of the Zones. These hospitals have varying numbers of nursing staff, comprising males and females of different ages, marital status, cadre and educational backgrounds.

Table 1: Showing General Hospitals in Benue State and their Zones

SN	Zone A	Zone B	Zone C
1	General Hospital Adikpo	General Hospital Makurdi	General Hospital Otukpo
2	General Hospital Vandeikya	General Hospital Aliade	General Hospital Okpoga
3	General Hospital Lessel	General Hospital Naka	General Hospital Oju
4	General Hospital Katsina-Ala	General Hospital Gbajimba	General Hospital Idekpa
5	General Hospital Ugba	General Hospital Gboko	General Hospital, Igumale
6	General Hospital Tse Agberagba	General Hospital Buruku	General Hospital Obagaji
7	General Hospital Sankera	General Hospital Wanune	General Hospital Ugbokpo
8			General Hospital Obarike-Ito
9			General Hospital Otukpa

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Participants for this study included a sample of 132 nurses, drawn from the population of nurses across 23 General Hospitals in Benue State. The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that, they comprise 103(78.0%) females and 29(22.0%) males, whose ages range from 22 – 58 (Mean age =39.39, SD=9.26). Of this number, 22(17.0%) were Assistant Chief Nursing Officers, 32(24.0%) were Principal Nursing Officers, 18(14.0%) were Senior Nursing Officers, 27(20.0%) were Nursing Officer I, while 33(25.0%) were Nursing Officer II.

Table 2: Showing the distribution of Nurses in the participating Hospitals

S/N	Hospital	No of Nurses	Percent
1	General Hospital Katsina Ala	21	10.55
2	General Hospital Adikpo	23	11.55
3	General Hospital Lessel	23	11.55
4	General Hospital Aliade	22	11.05
5	General Hospital Makurdi	25	12.56
6	General Hospital Wanune	22	11.05
7	General Hospital Otukpo	23	11.55
8	General Hospital Obarike-Ito	21	10.55
9	General Hospital Okpoga	19	9.54
	Total	199	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Stratified sampling technique was used in selecting the participating hospitals, while systematic sampling technique was adopted in selecting the participating nurses from each of the nine hospitals involved in the study. In selecting the participating hospitals, Benue State was stratified in line with the three existing three Senatorial Zones of 'A', 'B' and 'C'. A sample of 132 nurses were systematically drawn from 9 General Hospitals in Benue State to serve as participants. The

sample was derived using the Raosoft online sample size calculator at www.raosoft.com. The online sample size calculator has specifications into which figures are imputed as follows:

Margin of error	-	5%
Confidence level	-	95%
Population size	-	199
Response distribution	-	50%

Sample size = 132

After this, proportional sampling method based on Halleck's (2001) formula for proportional distribution was used to determine the sample for each of the participating hospitals as shown below:

$$\left(\frac{n}{N}\right) Ni$$

n = Population Size Per Stratum
N = Total Population
Ni = Determined Sample Size

For example, General Hospital Katstina-Ala has a total of 21 nurses. To get the proportion, the number was divided by the population of nurses in the nine participating hospitals and multiplied by the sample as follows:

General Hospital Katsina-Ala: $\frac{21}{199}$ x 132 = 14 questionnaires
General Hospital Adikpo: $\frac{23}{199}$ x 132 = 15 questionnaires
General Hospital Lessel: $\frac{23}{199}$ x 132 = 15 questionnaires
General Hospital Aliade: $\frac{22}{199}$ x 132 = 15 questionnaires
General Hospital Makurdi: $\frac{25}{199}$ x 132 = 16 questionnaires
General Hospital Wannune: $\frac{22}{199}$ x 132 = 15 questionnaires
General Hospital Otukpo: $\frac{223}{199}$ x 132 = 15 questionnaires
General Hospital Obarike-Ito: $\frac{21}{199}$ x 132 = 14 questionnaires
General Hospital Okpoga: $\frac{19}{199}$ x 132 = 13 questionnaires

Data collection was done using a questionnaire, comprising a demographic section, the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and the General Health Questionnaire. The instruments were pilot-tested, using 43 nurses purposively drawn from three (3) hospitals including; General Hospital Vandeikya (n = 14) representing (32.56%), General Hospital Gboko (n = 14) also representing (32.56%) and General Hospital Oju (n = 15), representing (34.88%). Of these participants, there were 34 (79.01%) females, and 9 (20.93%) males, whose ages ranged from 22 – 55 (Mean age = 38.00, SD = 8.09). All the instruments showed adequate correlated total item correlation above the .30 cut-off mark, as well as adequate Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient above the .70. In terms of procedure, permission was obtained from the Benue State Hospitals Management Board to carry out the study using nurses from General Hospitals in the State. In complying with ethical standards, participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study. A written informed consent form was signed by each participant prior to data collection. The consent form clearly stated that participation is completely voluntary, including a statement that withdrawal from the study was permitted at any time without negative consequences. The participants were also informed that

confidentiality will be maintained on all data collection forms. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics including; frequency counts, mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics including multiple linear regression and independent samples t-test.

Results

Findings based on the analysis of results indicates that, 132 participants took part in the study. Of this number, 103(78.0%) were females, while 29(22.0%) were males, and their ages ranged from 22 – 58 years, (Mean age = 39.39, SD=9.26). In terms of cadre, 22(17.0%) were Assistant Nursing Officers, 32(24.0%) Principal Nursing Officers, 18(14.0%) Senior Nursing Officers, 27(20.0%) Nursing Officer I, while 33(25.0%) were Nursing Officer II accordingly.

Table 3: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression showing influence of Self-Esteem on Psychological Health among Nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State.

DV	Predictors	R	R^2	df	F	P	β	t	p
Psychological Health	Constant	.335	.112	2,130	7.014	.000		12.848	.000
	High SE						.210	7.332	.002
	Low SE						-.185	-1.488	.011

The result of Multiple Linear Regression in Table 3 shows that, self-esteem had a significant positive influence on psychological health among nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State [R=.335, R^2.112, F(2,130)=7.014, p<.01]. This means that, nurses with high self-esteem are likely to experience sound psychological health. The result also indicated that, self-esteem accounted for 11.2% of the variance observed in psychological health among the nurses. This indicates that, nurses with high self-esteem have 11.2% likelihood of experiencing sound psychological health. On the independent contributions of the dimensions of self-esteem to psychological health, the results revealed that, high self-esteem made a significant positive contribution (β=.201, t=7.332, p<.05). On the other hand, low self-esteem made a significant negative contribution to psychological health (β=-.185, t=-1.488, p<.05), suggesting that, nurses with low self-esteem are likely to experience poor psychological health.

Table 4: Summary of Independent Samples t-test showing differences between Males and Females on Psychological Health among Nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State.

Sex	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Male	29	28.97	13.46			
				130	7.189	.034
Female	103	11.86	3.93			

The result of independent samples t-test in Table 4 shows that, there was a significant difference between males and females on psychological health among nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State [t = (130) =7.189, p<.05]. The result further indicated that, male nurses had higher Mean scores (M=28.97) as compared to females (M=11.86). This suggests that male nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State showed better psychological health, compared to their female counterparts.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings of the result revealed that, self-esteem had a significant positive influence on psychological health among the nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State. The finding suggests that, nurses with high self-esteem have a corresponding high likelihood of experiencing sound psychological health. On the independent contributions of the dimensions of self-esteem to psychological health, it was found that, high self-esteem made a significant positive contribution, while low self-esteem had a significant negative contribution. This finding hold practical implications for enhancing psychological health among nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State, factoring in the role of relevant aspects of self-esteem in the mix.

Furthermore, there was a significant gender difference among the nurses, with males having higher mean scores compared to females. This suggests that, males have better psychological health among the nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State. This suggests that, priority should be given to improving the psychological health of female nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State, compared to their male counterparts. The study therefore concluded that, self-esteem and gender are significantly linked to psychological health among nurses of General Hospitals in Benue State. Based on this, the following recommendations are advanced to improve psychological health among the nurses:

i. The government of Benue State, through the Benue State Health Management Board should employ the services of Clinical Psychologists, to train and provide targeted psycho-education to nurses on adaptive personal cognitive strategies. This have the potential for encouraging and improving positive affirmations bout the self, thereby reducing high self-esteem deficits among the nurses.

ii. The management of General Hospitals in Benue State, through relevant agencies should prioritise the training and re-training of nurses to acquire additional clinical competence. This is important, considering that competence have shown to naturally improve self-esteem and reduce feelings of inadequacy.

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