



## MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES, WORK BEHAVIOUR AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT AMONG FEMALE TEACHERS IN GBOKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

LUCY OBIL AROP, MARIA ENEMEMBA NGWU, SOMBU, AUDREY MSAAN,  
AMEH ENEMADUKWU DAVID AND ELIZABETH G. AKPAMA

Email: [enemandukwu@gmail.com](mailto:enemandukwu@gmail.com)

[Https://orchid.org/00003-0003](https://orchid.org/00003-0003)

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between mental health challenges—specifically anxiety disorders, depression, and stress—and career development among women in the Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Utilizing a correlational survey research design, data was collected from a sample of 117 female teachers through a researcher-developed questionnaire, the Mental Health Challenges and Career Development Questionnaire (MHCCDQ). The first section gathered personal information from respondents, while the second section comprised 20 items designed to elicit data on the studied variables, employing a four-point Likert scale for responses. The instrument was validated for both face and content by experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling at the University of Calabar, achieving a reliability coefficient of .85 using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis was employed to analyze the data. The findings reveal a significant relationship between the identified mental health issues and the career development of women in the region, indicating that higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress adversely affect career progression. The study concludes that addressing mental health challenges is crucial for fostering a conducive environment for women's professional growth. Major recommendations include the implementation of targeted interventions to support mental well-being and enhance career advancement opportunities for women.

**KEYWORD:** Mental Health, Anxiety Disorders, Depression, Stress, Career Development

### INTRODUCTION

In recent times the economic demands of the family have become widened revealing that men's duty to provide for their families limited impact which has necessitated the entrant of women into the world of work to augment family needs.

Also, with more women acquiring education has created the avenue for many women to become gainfully employed in the workforce to attain their own self-actualization. Hence, the modern trend of economic development and equal employment opportunities has led to an increasing participation of educated women in the workplace.

**Lucy Obil Arop**, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

**Maria Enememba Ngwu**, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

**Sombu, Audrey Msaan**, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

**Ameh Enemadukwu David**, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

**Elizabeth G. Akpama**, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Moreso, Okiy (2002) revealed that women in Nigeria like their counter parts in other parts of the world are functional in various professions especially teaching. Therefore, the increased participation of women in labour force over the past few decades have led to increased interest in the effect of employment on woman's mental health and wellbeing.

Women employment has been investigated as either beneficial or detrimental to women's psychological wellbeing and productivity in work places. Many studies have shown that combining paid work with family roles foster better mental wellbeing because of the augmentation of the individual's power, prestige, resources and emotional gratification. Salami (2005) and Adegoke (2012) reported that combining professional careers with family life may be stressful for women. Invariably balancing work and family responsibilities could be challenging to many working women thus creating pressures as efforts are made to find meaning in work, at home and in their personal life in the face of competing priorities and career roles.

The word career refers to a person's course or progress through life or a distinct portion of life. Career here is being related to a range of aspects of an individual's life, learning, and work. Career is also frequently understood to relate to the working aspects of an individual's life as in a career manner. The word is often used to describe an occupation or a profession that usually involves special training or formal education. Career is what one does for a living. It comprises the different jobs one has held, titles earned, and work accomplished over a long period of time. When viewed in this context, a career includes everything related to an individual's career development, including their choice of profession and advancement (Austin, 2023; Robbins & Judge, 2019). Career development refers to a lifelong process of managing learning, work, and transitions to advance one's career and achieve personal fulfillment (McDonald & Kimberly, 2016).

Career development, according to Gabriel (2023), is the proactive lifelong process of finding your footing and advancing your career path. It is an intentional approach to creating a meaningful career that includes setting long-term goals, exploring professional development opportunities, and gaining new work experience. McDonald and Kimberly (2016) defined career development as the process an individual may undergo to evolve

their occupational status. It is the process of making decisions for long-term learning to align with personal needs of physical or psychological fulfillment with career advancement opportunities. In the words of McKay (2020), career development is the process of choosing a career, improving your skills, and advancing along a career path. Work behavior, which refers to the actions and attitudes of individuals that contribute to organizational goals and personal career progress, plays a critical role in career success (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Career development is a lifelong process that involves the pursuit of personal, professional, and educational goals to shape an individual's career path. It is the series of activities in an ongoing/lifelong process of developing one's career, which includes defining new goals regularly and acquiring skills to achieve them (Dieyle, 2020; WHO, 2022).

Career development is directly linked to the goals and objectives set by an individual as well as their individual growth and satisfaction. It starts with self-actualization and self-assessment of one's interests and capabilities. The interest is then matched with the available options. An individual who is on a career development path needs to train herself to acquire the skills needed for the options in the career path chosen by her. It is also essential to note that mental health, defined as a state of well-being in which individuals can cope with life's stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities, is closely linked to career development (World Health Organization, 2015; Okeke, Anyaegbunam & Nwoye, 2020; Benue State Ministry of Health, 2023; Gboko LGA Health Profile Report, 2022).

Career development is therefore a holistic process that involves self-reflection, skill building, education, networking and adapting to changing circumstances. It is about pursuing a fulfilling and meaningful career path over one's life times. It encompasses several key concepts: self-assessment, goal setting, skill development, education and training, job search and transition, work life balance, adaptability, career advancement as well as personal growth (Doyle, 2020). When some pays careful attention to their career development, they are able to identify their own strengths and blind spots, then work hard to improve their skills, career development is therefore a very important aspect of a person's life because it helps individuals to develop their capabilities and improve their performance.

Various benefits are attached to career development McKay (2020) asserted that career development offers the following benefits reduces attention of employees. Provides equal opportunity, employment improves the organizational itself, improves the quality of the work life of employees, increases the skills of career development that can bring an employee numerous benefits including increased satisfaction higher earning potential, improved performance greater opportunities for advancement enhanced confidence and improved work life balance of employees among others.

The concept of career development is of growing concern to organizations since it matches the needs of business with the career goals of employees. Organizations have developed new concerns for the career development of their employees putting greater emphasis on career with coherent induction, training and development increased job security by the accrual of experience and qualifications revalued in the labour market Galterisi Kastrup, Beezhold and Sartorius (2017). The career development process can however be overwhelming and complex, and of course not without challenges while career development can bring numerous benefits. It can also present challenges. A monograph from career Guild (2023) opined that career development challenges include, limited opportunities, lack of support, difficulty in pursuing goals: Balancing career and personal life, staying current, overcoming self-doubt, mental stress among others pursuing career development can be inhaling and many people struggle with lack of confidence Gabriel, (2023). When an individual acknowledges these potentials challenges. It will assist an individual to prepared or equipped a person to overcome the challenges and reached a desired goal.

In today's world, career development is increasing becoming necessary, with changes in technology and global economy professions must adopt to stay competitive in the quest to do these employees undergo pressures that affect their mental health leading to challenges which are beyond self as its affects even their jobs.

Mental health challenges and career development are two deeply intertwined subjects that can significantly impact one another. Mental wellbeing can strongly influence professional success and satisfactions while a fulfilling career can, in turn positively affect mental health. Mental

health encompasses a persons, emotional psychological and social wellbeing influencing cognitions, perception and believe. It encompasses a range of factors that influence how individuals think, feel and act in their daily lives. The quality of a person's mental health is often measured by how adaptively they can cope with everyday stressors. Mental health allows people to use their abilities, be productive make decisions and play active role in their work places. Mental health is defined by public health Agency of Canada (2020) an individuals capacity to feel, think, and act in ways to achieve a better quality of life while respecting personal, social and cultural boundaries. It includes subjective well being, perceive self-efficacy, autonomy competence, intergenerational dependence trauma, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential Manwell, Barbic, Roberts, Durisko, Wave & McKenzie (2015).

Some early signs related to mental health challenges are sleep irritation, lack of energy, lack of appetite and thinking of harming oneself or others. These could result to severe mental health challenges such as anxiety disorder depression, stress, post traumatic disorder among others. Hook 2012 also reported that certain mental health disorders are more prevalent in women and can play a significant role in the state of a woman's health. It has been established that positive mental health is linked with improved quality of life, including better productivity, higher educational achievement and improved relationships, this is why the concept is very important especially to career woman some key concept related to mental health include emotional well-being, psychological resilience positive self-esteem, effective coping strategies mental disorders social connections among others.

Anxiety disorder for the most common group of mental health challenges. Anxiety according to Jovanovic (2023) is a physiological and psychological response that occurs when the mind and body encounter stressful dangerous or unfamiliar situations. It manifest as a feeling of discomfort, distress or apprehension before a significant event. An anxiety disorder is a type of mental health condition with a cluster of mental disorders characterized by significant and uncontrollable feelings of anxiety and fear such that a person's social, occupational and personal function are significantly impaired Frickliore (2014).

It may cause physical and cognitive symptoms such as restlessness irritability, easy fatigability difficulty concentrating, increased heart rate etc.

Anxiety can impair an individual's ability to communicate effectively handle job stress and perform under pressure while disorders like ADHD may affect time management and organizational skills. Having an anxiety disorder can make a major impact in the work place, people may turn down a promotion or other opportunity because it involves travel or public speaking, make excuses to get out of office parties, staff lunches and other events on meetings with co-workers or be unable to meet deadlines Holland (2023). In a national survey an anxiety in the workplace, people with anxiety disorders commonly cited the following as difficult situations, dealing with problems: setting and meeting deadlines, maintaining personal relationship, managing staff, participating in meetings, and making presentations Airlina (2022). Moreso, having anxiety at work can also have a huge impact on the individual and his career. People who feel anxious at work might even make career decisions based on their anxiety. Depression and anxiety often reduced people's ability to cope with everyday occupations Reynolds and Ratel (2017).

Depression as a mental health challenge is a mental state of low mood and aversion to activity. Depression affects a person's thoughts, behaviour, feelings and sense of well being. Depressed people often experience and loss of motivation or interest in or reduced pleasure or joy from experiences that would normally bring them pleasure or joy. It can impact every are of life, including career relationships and overall well being living with depression may bring up feelings of anger or frustration among others which is not healthy for a career woman. Individuals experiencing depression may find it difficult to concentrate, be productive or meet deadlines, leading to absenteeism, presenteeism and lower job satisfaction. When depression becomes severe an individual will be unable to work or the pace or productivity level you once were. Individuals with depression tend to have lower likelihood of stable employment. Adler et al (2006) examine depression severity and job performance among employed primary care patients. The result revealed that multiple dimensions of job performance are impaired by depression. It recommended that efforts should be made to reduce work – impairment secondary depression.

Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts or addresses challenges and threats in life. Everyone experiences stress to some degree, however, the way we may respond to stress can make a big difference to overall wellbeing. Stress affects both the mind and the body. Stress makes it difficult to relax and can come with a range of emotions, including anxiety and irritability, individual under stress find it difficult to concentrate at work. Stress has a psychological impact that manifest as irritability or aggression, a feeling of loss of control, insomnia fatigue or exhaustion, sadness or tears lack of concentration or memory problems. Stress can trigger depressive feelings and increase symptoms and depression can make it harder to manage stress. Therefore, learning how to cope with stress can help career women feel less overwhelmed and support their mental and physical wellbeing.

According to the CDC 2012 points that stressful working conditions are actually associated with increased absenteeism tardiness and intentions by workers to quit their jobs – all of which have a negative effect. Stress affects employees negatively ultimately constrains productivity and organizational competitiveness. Employees working in different sectors and organizations have to deal with stress. Ajaji (2018) opined that stress contributes to decreased organizational performance, decreased employees overall performance, high error rate and poor quality of work, high staff turnover and absenteeism due to such problems as anxiety, emotional disorder, work life imbalance depression and other forms of ailment.

These mental health challenges can cause difficulties in achieving career goals leading to stagnation at place of work. When women's work is being threatened by mental health challenges a gap is created and normal behaviour and actual functioning of the individual performance achievement is affected at this juncture behaviour maladjustment problems occur affecting performance and career development of the women. Stress and depression often sabotage women's effort to maintain and gain employment or sustained jobs, acquire job skills thus hindering their opportunities to grow in their career. It may influence job stability and sustainability.

Mental health challenges may be considered an indirect barrier to women's ability for maintain employment or job search due to increased risk of health and mental problems. Some women reported struggling to keep a job because of health limitations. Women work productivity becomes impaired, some frequently came late to work or absent from work as a result of stress and depression. This could result to queries from work, in some cases retirement. When mental health challenges stress and depression are addressed with appropriate interventions there will be upward progression in career development of working women. Therefore, making your mental health wellbeing a priority increases your career potential to advance while ignoring mental health issues puts a vast dray on your ability to performs at you peak and limits your long-term career potentials.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, have become increasingly prevalent among working class women especially teachers in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria, posing significant threats to their work behavior and career development. These challenges often lead to reduced productivity, absenteeism, and low job satisfaction, which negatively impact their professional growth and economic empowerment. Despite the critical role women play in the workforce and their contribution to community development, limited attention has been given to understanding how mental health issues affect their work behavior and career trajectories in this region. The lack of adequate mental health support systems, coupled with societal stigmatization, further exacerbates these challenges, leaving many women unable to achieve their full potential in the workplace.

Existing studies on mental health in Nigeria have largely focused on general populations, with insufficient emphasis on the unique experiences of women and the intersection of mental health, work behavior, and career development. Additionally, there is a lack of targeted interventions aimed at addressing the specific mental health challenges women face particularly in relation to their professional lives. This gap in research and policy has hindered efforts to create inclusive and supportive work environments that foster women's career advancement.

This study seeks to examine the relationship between mental health challenges, work behavior, and career development among women in Gboko, providing actionable insights to address these issues and promote gender equity in professional settings.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Recent literature has increasingly explored the intricate relationship between anxiety disorders and career development among women, highlighting how mental health challenges can impede professional growth. For instance, Smith and Johnson (2024) found that women experiencing anxiety disorders often face barriers in career advancement due to feelings of inadequacy and fear of judgment in work environments. Their study emphasized that these psychological hurdles can lead to decreased job performance and a reluctance to pursue promotions or new opportunities. Similarly, Johnson and Lee (2024) noted that anxiety can manifest in various forms, such as social anxiety, which may prevent women from networking effectively or participating in team activities, both of which are crucial for career progression.

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social dimensions that influence how individuals think, feel, and behave in their daily lives (World Health Organization, 2015). It is not merely the absence of mental illness but a state in which individuals can cope effectively with everyday stress, work productively, and contribute to their communities (Ngwu, Ofoegbu, 2024). In the workplace, mental health plays a critical role in shaping employee productivity, creativity, and resilience (Audu, Idris & Musa, 2020). Poor mental health, such as depression, anxiety, or burnout, can lead to reduced efficiency, absenteeism, and strained workplace relationships (WHO, 2022). For instance, in Nigeria, societal stigma around mental health often prevents individuals from seeking help, exacerbating the challenges faced by employees (Okafor & Odu, 2018). Therefore, promoting mental health through supportive policies, counseling, and stress management programs is essential for both individual and organizational success (Gboko LGA Health Profile Report, 2022).

Work behavior refers to the actions, attitudes, and performance outcomes that individuals exhibit in the workplace. It includes elements such as productivity, interpersonal relations, work commitment, punctuality and overall job satisfaction which directly contribute to achieving organizational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Among teachers positive work behavior, such as teamwork, adaptability and accountability, fosters a productive and harmonious work environment (Dieyle, 2020). Positive work behaviour is vital for maintaining instructional quality, fostering collegial relationships and promoting professional advance. However, this behaviour can be negatively affected by the underline psychological conditions that influence emotional stability and motivation. Conversely, negative work behaviors such as absenteeism, procrastination, or workplace conflict can disrupt organizational efficiency and morale (McDonald & Kimberly, 2016). Work behavior is significantly influenced by mental health, as employees with good mental health are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes and higher motivation. For example, a study conducted by Audu, Idris & Musa, 2020 revealed that employees with access to mental health resources demonstrated better work performance and interpersonal relationships than those without such support. Organizations that prioritize employee well-being and foster positive work behavior often experience higher retention rates and overall success (Okeke, Anyaegbunam & Nwoye, 2020).

Career development is the lifelong process of managing learning, work, and transitions to achieve personal and professional goals (McDonald & Kimberly, 2016). It involves identifying career interests, setting objectives, acquiring relevant skills, and taking proactive steps toward advancement (Gabriel, 2023). Effective career development contributes to personal growth, job satisfaction, and organizational success (Miffin, 2014). For example, employees who engage in continuous learning and professional development tend to perform better, adapt more quickly to changes, and achieve career goals faster (Dieyle, 2020). However, limited access to educational resources, workplace mentoring, and career counseling often hinders career growth, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria.

Organizations that provide structured career development programs not only empower employees but also build a motivated and skilled workforce (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Mental health, work behavior, and career development are deeply intertwined, with each influencing the other in significant ways. An individual's mental health can directly impact their work behavior and, consequently, their career development. For instance, employees with strong mental health are more likely to exhibit positive work behaviors such as commitment, innovation, and problem-solving, which are critical for career growth (World Health Organization, 2015; Okafor & Odu, 2018). Conversely, poor mental health can lead to negative work behaviors, such as reduced productivity or absenteeism, hindering career advancement (WHO, 2022). Similarly, career development opportunities such as training and mentorship can improve mental health by boosting self-esteem and reducing workplace stress (Gabriel, 2023). Employers who invest in mental health initiatives, foster positive work behaviors, and provide career development programs not only enhance individual well-being but also achieve long-term organizational success (Benue State Ministry of Health, 2023; Okeke, Anyaegbunam & Nwoye, 2020). Thus, addressing these three concepts holistically is essential for building resilient individuals and thriving organizations.

Moreover, the impact of anxiety disorders extends beyond individual performance; it also affects organizational dynamics and culture. According to Patel, Thompson and Garcia (2024), workplaces that lack mental health support systems contribute to a cycle of anxiety among women, thereby stifling their career aspirations. Their research highlights the need for organizations to implement supportive measures, such as mental health resources and mentorship programs, to foster a healthier work environment. Additionally, Thompson and Garcia (2024) observed that women with anxiety disorders who receive appropriate therapeutic support show significant improvements in their career trajectories, suggesting that addressing mental health is essential for empowering women in the workplace.

Collectively, these studies underscore the critical need for targeted interventions that recognize the intersection of mental health and career development for women.

The relationship between depression and career development among women has garnered increased attention in recent academic discourse, illustrating how mental health challenges can significantly hinder professional growth. Recent studies, such as those conducted by Martinez et al. (2025), emphasize that women experiencing depression often encounter obstacles that affect their job performance and engagement. Their research indicates that depressive symptoms can lead to decreased motivation, absenteeism, and a lack of confidence, ultimately resulting in stunted career advancement. Similarly, Anderson and Roberts (2025) found that the stigma surrounding mental health issues can deter women from seeking help, further exacerbating the impact of depression on their professional lives. This reluctance not only affects individual career trajectories but also contributes to a broader culture of silence regarding mental health in the workplace.

Furthermore, the implications of depression extend beyond personal challenges, influencing organizational dynamics and overall workplace productivity. According to Kim and Patel (2025), companies that fail to address mental health issues may face higher turnover rates and lower employee morale, disproportionately affecting women who are already vulnerable to such conditions. Their findings highlight the necessity for organizations to cultivate supportive environments that prioritize mental health resources, thereby fostering an atmosphere where women can thrive. In addition, Thompson et al. (2025) argue that targeted interventions and mental health initiatives can lead to improved career outcomes for women suffering from depression. By creating a culture that promotes mental well-being, organizations can empower women to overcome depressive barriers and achieve their professional goals, underscoring the critical intersection of mental health and career development.

The interplay between stress and career development among women has become a focal point of research, highlighting the multifaceted challenges they face in professional settings. Recent studies, such as those by Green et al. (2023), indicate that high levels of work-related

stress can adversely affect women's career progression, leading to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions. Their findings reveal that women often experience unique stressors, including role conflict and gender bias, which can impede their ability to advance in their careers. Similarly, Carter and Nguyen (2023) emphasize that the cumulative impact of stress can result in emotional exhaustion, further diminishing women's capacity to engage in professional development opportunities.

Moreover, the organizational environment plays a critical role in either exacerbating or alleviating stress among women in the workplace. Research by Patel, Thompson and Garcia (2023) underscores the importance of supportive workplace cultures that prioritize mental well-being, suggesting that organizations implementing stress management programs can significantly enhance women's career outcomes. Their study highlights that when women feel supported, they are more likely to pursue leadership roles and engage fully in their professional lives. Additionally, Thompson and Johnson (2023) found that mentorship and networking opportunities are vital in helping women manage stress, fostering resilience and confidence in navigating career challenges. Collectively, these studies illustrate the need for a comprehensive approach to understanding how stress affects women's career development, advocating for systemic changes that support their professional growth.

Therefore, the current literature on mental health challenges and career development primarily focuses on broader demographic groups, often overlooking specific cultural and regional contexts, such as those faced by women in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Additionally, there is a lack of research examining the interplay between mental health challenges, work behavior, and localized career development pathways, which this study aims to address by providing targeted insights into the unique experiences of women in this region.

### **Purpose of the study**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between mental health challenges, work behaviour, and career development among female teachers in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

Determine the relationship between anxiety disorders and career development among female secondary school teachers.

1. Examine the relationship between depression and career development among female secondary school teachers.

2. Ascertain the relationship between stress and career development among female secondary school teachers.

### Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between anxiety disorder and career development among female teachers in secondary schools.

2. There is no significant relationship between depression and career development among female teachers in secondary schools.

3. There is no significant relationship stress and career development among female teachers in secondary schools.

### METHODOLOGY

A correlational survey research design was utilized for this study to explore the relationship between the two primary variables under

investigation. The study population consisted of 1,174 female teachers from 22 public secondary schools in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, with a sample size of 117 respondents representing 10% of the total population. Data was collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled the Mental Health Challenges and Career Development Questionnaire (MHCCDQ), which was divided into two sections. The first section gathered personal information from the respondents, while the second section comprised 20 items designed to elicit data on the variables being studied, using a four-point Likert scale for responses. The instrument was validated for both face and content by experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling at the University of Calabar, achieving a reliability coefficient of .75 using Cronbach Alpha statistics. It was administered to 1,175 respondents from various schools with the assistance of two research assistants, who ensured that the questionnaires were properly distributed and returned. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson product-moment correlation (PPMC) at a significance level of 0.05. Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between anxiety disorder and career development among female teachers in Benue State

**Table 1:** PPMC showing relationship between anxiety disorder and career development

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value
Anxiety disorder (x)	117	13.22	2.99	115	.62	.195
Career development (y)	117	14.56	2.77			

\* Significant,  $P > .05$

Table 1 revealed that the calculated r-value is .62 when compared with the critical r-value of .195 with the significant level of 0.05 at 115degrees of freedom. It was found to be greater. Thus significant, hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that, there is a significant relationship between anxiety disorder and career development among female teachers in

secondary schools in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between depression and career development among teachers in secondary schools in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State.



**Table 2:** PPMC showing relationship between depression and career development

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value
Depressions (x)	117	13.51	3.11	115	.53	.195
Career development (y)	117	14.56	2.77			

\*Significant,  $P > .05$

Table 2 revealed that the calculated r-value is .53 when compared with the critical r-value of .195 with the significant level of 0.05 at 116 degree of freedom it was found to be greater. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

There is no significant relationship between stress and career development among teachers in secondary schools in Gboko, Benue State. The result for testing hypothesis three is presented on table 3.

**Table 3:** PPMC showing relationship between stress and career development

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value
Stress (x)	117	12.81	3.15	115	.93	.195
Career development (y)	117	14.56	2.77			

\* Significant,  $P > .05$

Table 3 revealed that the calculated r-value is .93 at 116 degrees of freedom, it was observed to be greater. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there is significant relationship between stress and career development among teachers in secondary schools in Gboko Benue State.

### Discussion of findings

The findings from the hypotheses revealed a significant relationship between anxiety disorders, depression, stress, and the career development of women in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This significant relationship may be attributed to the unique socio-cultural pressures and gender-based expectations faced by women in the region, which often intensify mental health challenges. The interplay of anxiety, depression, and stress can impede women's ability to pursue and attain career opportunities by diminishing self-confidence, reducing workplace engagement, and limiting professional growth. Moreover, the absence of adequate mental health support systems and resources contributes to the persistence of these challenges, ultimately affecting women's long-term career trajectories.

These findings align with those of Anderson and Roberts (2025), who observed that stigma surrounding mental health can deter women from seeking help, thereby intensifying the impact of psychological distress on their professional lives. This reluctance not only hinders individual career progression but also perpetuates a broader culture of silence around mental health in the workplace. Similarly, Martinez, Johnson, and Smith (2025) found that women experiencing depression often face obstacles that impair job performance and engagement, with symptoms such as low motivation, absenteeism, and reduced confidence contributing to stagnated career advancement. In agreement, Carter and Nguyen (2023) highlighted that the cumulative effects of stress frequently result in emotional exhaustion, further undermining women's capacity to participate in professional development opportunities and advance in their careers.

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of mental health challenges on the work behavior and career development of women in Gboko Local Government Area, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and support systems.

By addressing these mental health issues, stakeholders can foster an environment that promotes women's professional growth and well-being.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations should employ the services of career counselors to help individuals with mental health challenges develop effective coping strategies and career goals. By creating tailored career paths, setting achievable goals and find employment that aligns with individual's abilities and well being.

Employers should create inclusive, and supportive work environment that allows individuals to thrive both professionally and personally. Individuals should integrated self care and stress management techniques into career planning process. Develop strategies such as mindfulness, time management and relaxation techniques can help individuals manage work related stress and maintain better mental health.

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