



## Employment, Perceived Government Achievement and Political Participation Contributions to Depressed Mood: Implications for Sustainable Governance

**Juliana C. Njoku  
Ann U. Madukwe  
Juliet Ifeoma Nwufu  
Victoria C. Chukwudi  
Ufuoma Agonodi-Victor  
Raymond C. Ezike  
Raphael N. Uzoekwe**

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### Authors' Affiliation

Department of Social Sciences,  
School of General Studies, Federal  
Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri.

Department of Psychology, Faculty  
of Social Sciences, Imo State  
University, Owerri  
[anna.madukwe@imsu.edu.ng](mailto:anna.madukwe@imsu.edu.ng),  
[annemichael2002@yahoo.com](mailto:annemichael2002@yahoo.com),  
+2348069426008

Department of Psychology,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Department of Nursing Science,  
Faculty of Health Sciences, Gregory  
University, Uturu, Abia State.

God's Splendor Missionary Hospital,  
Rivers State, Nigeria

Department of Psychology,  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo  
State University, Owerri

Claretian Institute of Philosophy  
Nekede, Owerri.

### **Abstract**

*The study investigated how Imo people's level of political participation, perception of government achievement and employment status contributed to the prevalence of depression in the State. Three hundred respondents (69.3% males & 30.7% females) with age range of 18 to 80 years (M=36.09 years, SD=11.16) were selected from the three geo-political zones in Imo State using cluster sampling method. Respondents were assessed with Dosumu Government Achievement Rating Scale and Symptoms Distress Checklist-90. The study adopted a descriptive design and data was analyzed with generalized linear models. Result indicated that 91.3% of the respondents were depressed, 75% perceived government achievement to be poor, 59% expressed poor political participation and 50.3% were unemployed. The overall model showed that employment status, perceived government achievement, and political participation significantly contributed to depression. Specifically, employment status did not significantly contribute to depression; however, perceived government achievement was found to be the most significant contributor; followed by political participation. The study concluded that the people of Imo State were depressed, indicating that quality of life in the State was generally poor at the time of this study. Avoidance of anti-development governance practices, government display of the capacity to govern and implementation of strategic economic-recovery-oriented policies were recommended.*

**Keywords: Depression, Employment, Government Achievement, Political Participation, Sustainable Governance**

## Introduction

Depression is conceptualized in this study as a psychological condition in which the sufferer manifests symptoms like excessive fatigue, persistent feelings of sadness, anhedonia, concentration problems, changes in eating and sleeping patterns as well as thoughts of committing suicide. It is classified as mild, moderate or severe. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual edition five (DSM-5) provide the following criteria for the diagnoses of major depressive disorder; persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, feelings of worthlessness, loss of interest in formerly enjoyed activities, excessive feelings of guilt, suicidal ideation, loss of appetite (Dailey *et al.*, 2014). Depression has a myriad of consequences in the lives of sufferers. It is marked as leading cause of disability in the United States (CDC, 2014). The mildest consequences might include reduction in productivity at work or strained interpersonal relationships, while the most severe consequence might include suicidal ideation or suicide. Due to the endemic nature of depression and the cost of management, interest in factors that predispose people or cause depression among people have been the focus of many empirical studies, however, studies relating State government activities and governance to the development or prevalence of depression are scarce. Therefore, this study focuses on the prevalence of indicators of depressed mood among adults in Imo State because this affects a larger population and serves as the foundation for the onset of major depressive disorder or other depressive disorders. This study investigated the extent to which governance related activities in Imo State transformed a cheerful society to a sad and hostile one. Depressed mood is considered as an indicator of the quality of life in the State. Employment, perceived government achievement and political participation are considered here either as government activities or indicators of government actions.

Political participation means that a person is involved in the political process by making his or her opinion and belief known. White (2016) stated that political participation is often used to describe an action taken by a citizen to influence the outcome of a political issue. Individuals' participation in the political process exceed voting to include protest, public consultation, and advocacy and this can be direct or indirect. Such activities like attending political rallies, vying for a political post, campaigning, registering or identifying with a particular political party are some forms of direct participation in politics; while written or verbal analyses of a political situation can be considered indirect participation. Generally, the most commonly accepted form of political participation especially among Nigerians and Africans by extension are those that lead to the selection of a government particularly Federal and State elections. Activities like protest (rioting) and advocacy especially through the mass media are also common. In relating political participation to depression, Ojeda (2015) reported that voter turnout and other forms of participation decreased as the severity of depression increased among young adults.

Broadway, Robin and Anwar (2009) defined government as a territorially based body that makes the authoritative decisions (for which it has constitutional or legislative authority) that are binding on residents and businesses within its boundaries. On its own, the plans, actions, decisions and policies of a seating government are decisive factors in the development of a State and its' people. Government achievement in this sense refers to government with a history of achievements or potential for needed achievements. However, this study argues that for a seating government to achieve sustainable development the active presence, support and involvement of all stakeholders (the citizens, resident businesses, media and other policy actors) is mandatory. Sustainable governance connotes governance through goalsetting, a bottom-up, stakeholders-oriented approach to governance. This type of government implements those goals that the governed considers as key factors to potential success (Biermann, Kanie, & Kim, 2017). Van de Kerk and Manuel (2008) defined a sustainable society as one that; meets the need of the present generation, does not compromise the ability of future generation to meet their own needs, and in which each human being has the opportunity to develop itself in freedom, within a well-balanced society and in harmony with their surroundings. The 2015 to 2019 government of Imo State, Nigeria neglected all aspects of the above description of sustainable governance or sustainable society. While there are many indicators provided to measure a sustainable society, personal development (e.g., healthy life, educational opportunities), well balanced society (e.g., good governance, unemployment) as listed by Van de Kerk and Manuel (2008) are the indicators of interest in this study. To this, the 2015 to 2019

government in Imo State claimed free and qualitative education, employment of 11,000 teachers, erection of four new high institutions, establishment of 27 ultramodern 200 bed capacity hospitals of international standard, and other activities in the agricultural sector as part of their achievement (Onwuemeodo, 2018). These achievements they claimed would have increased the level of employment in the state. In contrast, many people in the state lost their means of livelihood, as such there was noticeable increase in the level of unemployment during this period. Some past studies have linked employment status to quality of life and depression (Ho, Tran & McIntyre, 2022), while recurrent job discontinuity, unemployment and underemployment are associated to increased risk of self-reported depression in general population (Hoven *et al.*, 2021).

Yoo *et al.*, (2016) in a comparative study among Korean adults reported that individuals who moved from permanent employment to precarious employment, and from precarious employment to unemployment showed significantly greater odds of becoming depressed. Also, having continued precarious employment and unemployment significantly increased the odds of having depression. In Sweden, Hiswåls *et al.*, (2017) found significantly higher prevalence of depression among out of work adults than the employed. Clearly, the relationship between unemployment and poor health has been well documented (Dean & Wilson, 2009). The unemployed tend to have higher levels of impaired mental health including depression, anxiety and stress, as well as higher levels of impaired mental health hospital admissions, chronic disease (cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and musculoskeletal disorder, and premature mortality) (Dean & Wilson, 2009, Stroukal, 2016). Additionally, unemployment is associated with unhealthy behaviors such as increased alcohol and tobacco consumption and decreased physical activity (Dooley, Catalano & Hough, 1992; Lee *et al.*, 2015). In a study by Brenner & Bhugra (2020) on acceleration of anxiety, depression and suicide: secondary effects of economic disruption related to COVID-19. The authors presented a statistical model of the impact of unemployment and national income declines on suicide across 38 highly industrialized countries between 2000-2017. To predict the outcomes the authors used the Pooled cross-sectional time series (PCSTS) analysis with STATA. The study found that unemployment has a major effect on increasing suicide, especially among middle aged persons. While national income losses and decline had a more substantial impact than unemployment, it also influenced suicide throughout the life course more at old ages.

Studies have also demonstrated a positive correlation between employment and better health, improved self-confidence, self-esteem and happiness (Leupp, 2017; Ross & Mirowsky, 1995). Lewis *et al.*, (2017) who examined the relationship between employment status and depression symptomatology among women at risk for postpartum depression and found out that employment may be a protective factor for postpartum depression symptomatology. It is therefore expected that the 2015-2019 governmental activities (destruction of markets, business enterprises, etc.) in Imo state which caused many citizens to move from permanent employment to precarious employment and unemployment would bring about greater incidence of depressed mood among adults in the state.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Following the activities of the 2015 to 2019 political administration in Imo State, people in the State both young and old were left feeling used, bitter, angry and sad with the practices of past and present governments. In this case, they seem to have regretted their political participation during the previous general election. Every day observations and interactions with people of the State whether on the streets, markets or via the media point to a seeming feeling of worry and dissatisfaction with the ruling government. Increasingly, people express bitterness towards government activities, forced withdrawal from all forms of political participation and clear negative perception of the government and her achievements. The destructive activities of the government were also perceived as rendering many of the people jobless. Many claimed that the government had achieved nothing worthwhile while others state in no uncertain terms that the development brought about by the government is substandard and unsustainable. The negative feelings that accompany such comments are akin to many symptoms of depression. Depression is one of the most common psychological problems found among adults even in Nigeria. Therefore, this research intends to provide an empirical perspective to what has been observed, as such it will investigate whether political participation, perceived government achievement and employment status will contribute to the incidence of depression among adults in Imo State.

## Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine political participation, perceived government achievement and employment status as indices of depression in Imo State.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Find out if employment status would contribute to depression.
2. Investigate whether political participation would contribute to depression.
3. Examine whether perceived government achievement would contribute to depression.

## Hypothesis

1. Employment status will not significantly contribute to depression in Imo State.
2. Political participation will not significantly contribute to depression in Imo State.
3. Perceived government achievement will not significantly contribute to depression in Imo State.

## Method

### Participants

Cluster sampling technique was used to draw 300 (207 male & 91 female) adult respondents. They were selected from the three senatorial zones in Imo State, namely; Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu. The respondent's ages ranged from between 18 to 80 years old with a mean age of 36.09 and standard deviation of 11.16.

### Instruments

The Dosumu Government Achievement Rating Scale (DGARS) section A was used to measure employment, section B measures political participation and section C measures government achievement. Symptoms distress checklist -90 (SCL-90) subscale D was used to measure depression.

Dosumu Government Achievement Rating Scale (DGARS) developed by Dosumu (2014). This scale is divided into three sections; section A measures demographic variables, section B measures individuals' level of political participation and section C measures how individuals perceive government achievement in a state. Subscale section B (DGARS) was used to measure perception of political participation and actions taken by a citizen in politics and political issues. The subscale section B (DGARS) is an 8-item scale, measured on a 3-point format, yes = 2, no = 1, and not opportuned = 0. Values of the number shaded in each item are added up to obtain a total score in this section B. Sample items of the scale are: "Have you ever voted?", and "Are you a registered party member?". Subscale section C (DGARS) was used to measure individual's perceived achievement of government. The subscale section C (DGARS) is a 22-item scale, measured on a 5-point format ranging from 1 = very good to 5 = not aware. Values of the number shaded in each item are added up to obtain a total score in this section C. Sample items of the section are: "Political matters", and "Freedom of religion". In order to further ascertain the reliability of the section B and C for Nigerian samples, a pilot study was conducted with 100 males and female participants in Owerri Municipal of Imo state. The subscales demonstrated adequate Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .77 (norm = 10.35) and .86 (norm = 68.81) respectively.

Symptoms distress checklist -90 (SCL-90) was developed by Derogates, Lipman and Covi (1977). It is a 90-item scale with 10 subscales used to measure several manifestations of distress. In this study subscale D of SCL-90 was used to measure depression. It is measured on a 5-point format ranging from 0 = not at all, to 4 = extremely. Sample items of the scale are: "feeling of worthlessness", and "feeling everything is an effort". All items are scored directly. Values of the number shaded in each item are added up to obtain a total score. Derogates, Lipman, and Covi (1977) reported alpha coefficients which ranged from .77 for psychoticism to .90 for depression. Erinoso (1996) reported significant coefficient of concurrent validity between Retirement Stress

Inventory (Omoluabi, 1996) and SCL 90 scales. Scores higher than the norm indicates that the client manifest the characteristics of the particular SCL-90 subscale. Employment which considered as having a regular source of income accruing from work or service a person offered was measured as a categorical variable with employed and unemployed as the two levels of employment.

## Procedure

Ethical approval for this study was gotten from the ethical board of the Department of Psychology, Imo State University, Owerri and study was carried out across the three geo-political zones in Imo state namely; Owerri, Okigwe and Orlu. One hundred (100) participants were selected from each geo-political zone using cluster sampling technique. G-power was used to calculate the sampling size. Six clusters were generated by grouping respondents according to the settings they were selected from: markets, schools, homes, local government offices, churches, and industries. A simple random sampling technique was used to select a target of 50 respondents from each cluster across the three senatorial zones. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, assured of confidentiality and then the questionnaires were administered to those who agreed to participate. As such, oral consent was obtained. Each respondent was given 20 minutes to fill the questionnaires, afterwards respondents were thanked for participating. The questionnaire administration and collection process lasted for three weeks. The data generated were organized and presented for data analyses.

## Design and Statistics

Descriptive design with cross-sectional survey data collection method was used in this study because the researcher studied a large population and participants were sampled across different age brackets, locations and gender. Generalized linear models for between-subjects designs- multivariate logistic regression analyses were adopted. The GLM relates the explanatory variables with the response variable, describes pattern of association and the resulting model can be used for prediction. It is a super model that unifies many different models under one umbrella.

## Results

**Table I: Summary Table of Descriptive Statistics showing the Frequency and Percentage of Participants across the Study Variable**

			N	Percent
Dependent Variable	Depressed Mood Level	No Depressed Mood	26	8.7%
		Depressed Mood	274	91.3%
		Total	300	100.0%
Employment Status	Employment Status	Unemployed	151	50.3%
		Employed	149	49.7%
		Total	300	100.0%
Factor	PP	Poor Political Participation	177	59.0%
		High Political Participation	123	41.0%
		Total	300	100.0%
	GA	Poor Perceived Government Achievement	225	75.0%
		Good Perceived Government Achievement	75	25.0%
		Total	300	100.0%

The Table I above displays a depressed mood prevalence rate of 91.3% in Imo State at the time of this study. Majority of the participants 50.3% were unemployed, most 59% reported poor political participation and 75% perceived the achievements of the seating government to be poor.

**Table II: Summary of Multivariate Logistic Regression Analyses Showing the maximum likelihood estimates of Factors contributing to Depressed Mood**

Parameters	B	SE	95% Wald CI	Wald X <sup>2</sup>	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	.661	.8466	-.99, 2.32	.609	1	.435
Employment (Unemployed / Employed)	-.845	.4689	-1.76, .07	3.247	1	.072
Political participation (Poor / High)	-.985	.4531	-1.87, -.10	4.725	1	.030
Government Achievement (Poor / Good)	-1.540	.4420	-2.41, -.67	12.141	1	.000

Note: Log likelihood = -64.88; Log likelihood X<sup>2</sup> = 26.16; Pearson X<sup>2</sup> = 1.22; p < .001

According to Table II above, the result  $\beta = -.85$  shows that depressed mood decreases as employment status increases, however this finding (X<sup>2</sup>(1) = 3.25, p > .05) was not significant. Hence, the first null hypothesis that employment status will not contribute to the expression of depressed mood was accepted. The second result  $\beta = -.99$  shows that depressed mood decreases as political participation increases and this finding (X<sup>2</sup>(1) = 4.73, p < .05) was significant. Hence, the second null hypothesis that political participation will not contribute to the expression of depressed mood was rejected. Finally, the result  $\beta = -1.54$  shows that depressed mood decreases as perceived government achievement increases, this finding (X<sup>2</sup>(1) = 12.14, p < .01) was also significant. Hence, the third null hypothesis that perceived government achievement will not contribute to the expression of depressed mood was rejected.

## Discussion

This study revealed a high prevalence of depressed mood in Imo State at the time of the study. It also showed increased unemployment and decreased political participation; government achievements at the time was also perceived to be poor. The first hypothesis that employment status will not significantly correlate with depressed mood was accepted. This result deviates from the findings of Hiswåls, Walander, Soares, and Macassa (2017) and Yoo, et al., (2016) that the unemployed are more likely to be depressed. The present finding appears to reflect the fact that alongside the unemployed, the seemingly employed ones did not consider their jobs to be secure, permanent or regular. Those who were under government employment were uncertain of getting paid and scared that they could lose their jobs at any time; the rest (self-employed, irregular workers, etc.) were also uncertain how their business would fare in future due to government activities. Hence, the consequent depressed mood cuts across people with different employment status. In other words, the current finding reflects the insecurities people felt about their jobs or lack of it and the accompanying negative feelings it generated, so depressed mood was common among the employed and unemployed. The second finding from this study showed that poor political participation significantly related to depressed mood. This result is in line with Ojeda (2015) finding that political participation decreases as the severity of depression increases. The negative relationship indicated in the study shows that decreased political participation is related to heightened depressed mood in Imo State. This finding reflects the actual occurrences of anger outburst, loss of interest in political, state and government activities and expression of strong feelings of bitterness towards the government. Public fights, road rage by motorists, hopelessness, fear and excessive worry were other ways inhabitants of the state were manifesting this mood during the period understudy. This finding supports the argument that social experiences and social factors can lead to the development of depression and vice versa. These citizens were hindered from exercising their civic rights, the rule of law was not upheld, and the seating government did not follow the tenets of democracy. Knowing that one cannot challenge the activities of the government through any legal or political means resulted in the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. The third hypothesis that perceived government achievement will not significantly correlate with depressed mood was also rejected. The result showed that the more people perceived government achievement or performance as poor, the greater the incidence of depressed mood. This finding is not surprising and supports the fact that any societal development

project that puts the quality of human life at risk is unnecessary, unacceptable and nonsensical. The destruction of peoples' sources of livelihood and homes, looting of state properties, reduction and or withholding of salaries and pensions created an atmosphere of bitterness, fearfulness and hopelessness and set the society backward. It also agrees with the description of sustainable governance as one in which a government is expected to develop plans and implement strategies that would transform their societies and bring them closer towards the sustainable development paths. This stand of sustainable governance demands that a government should consider the choices and preferences of the governed rather than impose policies on the people. By this finding it has become evident that people evaluate government achievements, even when there is no formal or structured impact evaluation procedures available.

### **Implications of the Study**

1. The high prevalence of depressed mood found is an indication of prevalent low quality of life in the state at the time of this study.
2. The finding that decreased political participation is related to depressed mood shows that in normal and fully functioning mental state the people of Imo State would participate in the political activities of the state.
3. The study indicated that perceived government achievement correlated positively with depressed mood in Imo State, this implies that the people of Imo State rate government achievements and that their perception of such achievements does not only have political but also emotional import on the quality of life of the people.
4. Another implication of this study goes to the society in general. It is now clear that to minimize the occurrence of depressed mood in Imo state, the state government should adopt the sustainable governance approach that takes the ideas and desires of the citizenry into consideration.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The shortcoming in this study is that many people refused to participate in the research as they misunderstood the aim of the research work, while others thought it was politically motivated and these resulted in the limited number of participants involved in the study.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that an association does exist between depressed mood and peoples' political participation as well as their perception of the achievements of the seating government. However, to ascertain the direction of this association would require further empirical studies. State government jobs should be secure, permanent and regular; and workers in the state should not be threatened by the politics of the day Again, future governments in Imo State must recognize the benefits of the sustainable governance strategies, understand and adopt it in order to move the State forward and bring about needed developments. As well as, enhance the quality of life of the people by reducing if not eradicating avoidable health problems like depression.

### **Recommendations**

1. Imo State people should be governed using the sustainable governance approach since the people prefer being involved in governmental processes especially those relating to goalsetting and decision making.
2. The study also recommends that a ruling government and her security agencies should take proper measures to protect the lives and properties of the citizens, the governed. Instead of destroying said lives and properties in light of new infrastructural developments and negating sustainable development measures. Such protection would serve to motivate the citizenry, reinforce political participation, and bring about a reduction in depressive feelings in the State.

3. As regards sustainable governance, incoming governments should display the capacity to govern, develop and implement strategic economic-recovery-oriented policies through public consultation while prioritizing those goals deemed as most important by the governed.
4. Government and law makers in the State should promulgate policies that would protect State owned institutions like universities, media houses and their workers from State politics.

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