



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BREAKUPS AND DEPRESSION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The study explored the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. Two research questions and hypotheses were formulated to help inform the study. The investigation adopted correlational research design. A sample of 383 undergraduate students was chosen from a population of 84,781 public undergraduate university students in Delta State. The proportionate sampling technique was used to choose the sample. An instrument titled "Breakups and Depression Questionnaire (BREDEQ)" was used to gather data. The validity and reliability of the instrument was established and obtain a result of 0.73 and 0.79 respectively. The research questions were answered using Pearson and multiple Correlations statistics while hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance. The findings showed that a negative and significant relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State, the finding also showed a positive and no significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. On the basis of the findings it was concluded that a negative and significant relationship between breakups and depression existed among undergraduate students in Delta State. It was recommended that Universities in Delta State should reinforce student counseling units with trained psychologists and counselors who can provide emotional support and coping strategies for undergraduate students with breakup, also, Universities should establish and encourage support clubs as undergraduates may find it easier to share their emotional struggles with fellow students who have had similar experiences

Keywords: Breakups, Depression, Gender, Students

Introduction

Depression is one of the most common psychological outcomes from romantic relationship dissolution. It is characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, feelings of worthlessness, poor concentration, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation. Depression is a psychological disorder that involves persistent sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest or pleasure in daily activities. It can also be accompanied by changes in appetite, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, and feelings of worthlessness. According to the American Psychiatric Association in Awala (2023), depression is more than just temporary sadness; it is a mental health condition that interferes with an individual's daily functioning and well-being. Among students, depression often manifests in poor academic performance, withdrawal from social activities, and reduced motivation.

Depression can be classified into different types, including major depressive disorder, dysthymia (persistent depressive disorder), clinical and situational depression. Situational depression is particularly relevant in this study, as it occurs in response to stressful life events such as the loss of a relationship. According to Okeke and Eze (2021), students in Nigeria often experience situational depression after romantic breakups, which may escalate into clinical depression if left unaddressed. Depression is not only an emotional issue but also a cognitive and behavioral condition, as it affects thought patterns, decision-making, and social interactions. Depression among higher education learners is a serious psychiatric illness and can have severe consequences for life and also health. The incidence of higher education learners suffering from depressive disorders seems to be increasing and early depression increases the risk of depression in later life. Depression in higher learners has a serious negative consequence for education, relationship, general functioning and health and many adolescents engage in self-harming behaviours (Wenche et al, 2016). Not only this, once depression sets in, it can become fatal due to its association with suicide in addition to the challenges of its immediate clinical and social consequences.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), depression is a clinical

disorder that negatively impacts thinking, feeling, and behavior, leading to impairments in academic, occupational, and social functioning. In tertiary institutions, depression has become a critical issue of concern, as it has been associated with poor academic performance, substance abuse, truancy, and in extreme cases, suicide attempts. According to Okeke and Eze (2021), many Nigerian students silently endure depressive symptoms because of stigma, limited access to counseling services, and inadequate social support systems. Awala (2025) opined that depression among higher education learners has become a growing concern, with the increase in cases of emotional instability, low motivation and withdrawal of social and academic activities. Although several factors contribute to depression, break-up has been identified as one of the factors that is related to this emotional stress.

Breakups are typically experienced as a form of rejection, which undermines the sense of belonging and self-worth of young adults. For many students in tertiary institutions, the end of a relationship is perceived as a personal failure, especially when peers or family members were aware of the relationship. According to Larson and Skerrett (2019), breakups are similar to bereavement processes because individuals grieve the loss of a partner, shared memories, and imagined future plans. In the case of bereavement, the loved ones can never be seen again, unlike breakups where the presence of the ex-partner within the same social environment (e.g., the same campus) may prolong emotional pain, making recovery more difficult. Breakups can be categorized as mutual or unilateral. Mutual breakups occur when both partners agree that the relationship should end, while unilateral breakups happen when one partner initiates the separation, leaving the other partner feeling rejected and abandoned. According to Morris (2020), unilateral breakups are more psychologically distressing, as the rejected partner often experiences shock, sadness, and anger more intensely. Where students frequently live in close quarters such as hostels and share mutual friends, breakups can become even more painful due to constant reminders of the ex-partner (Urien, 2025). However, the dissolution of such relationships, commonly referred to as breakups is also a frequent occurrence in the lives of

students. Breakups are usually accompanied by strong negative emotions such as sadness, anger, anxiety, and feelings of rejection. According to Larson and Skerrett (2019), the end of a romantic relationship among young adults often mirrors the process of bereavement, with stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventual acceptance. For many students, this process is not easily managed and can lead to significant emotional distress which can naturally affect academic outcomes.

The relationship between breakups and depression is particularly significant in tertiary institutions because students are at a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, emotional exploration, and preparation for future relationships. According to Erikson in Urien (2025), the stage of intimacy versus isolation is critical during young adulthood, where individuals strive to establish meaningful emotional connections. Failure in these relationships, such as through a breakup, often leads to emotional instability, self-doubt, and withdrawal. In the Nigerian context, where students may already be facing academic pressures, financial constraints, and transitional challenges, the emotional burden of a breakup can exacerbate their vulnerability to depression. According to Oboh and Oji (2022), relationship issues are among the leading reasons for depression-related consultations in university counselling units in Nigeria, with many cases linked to breakups. According to Uwaifo and Efekodo (2020), cultural perceptions in southern Nigeria often associate breakups with failure, weakness, or incompetence in relationships, which may worsen the psychological impact. Breakups and depression are closely interrelated, as the emotional turmoil resulting from relationship dissolution often triggers depressive symptoms. According to Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, and Lewinsohn (1999), romantic breakups are among the most common precipitants of depression in adolescents and young adults. The loss of a significant emotional bond creates a void that students may find difficult to fill, leading to rumination, self-blame, and feelings of hopelessness. For students who depend heavily on romantic partners for emotional stability, academic encouragement, and social identity, the loss can be overwhelming.

The impact of breakups on depression is also influenced by gender, coping strategies, and social support. According to Choo, Levine, and Hatfield (1996), women are more likely to internalize breakup stress, experiencing depressive symptoms, while men may externalize it through aggressive behaviors or substance use. However, cultural expectations also play a role. In Delta State, young men are often discouraged from openly expressing vulnerability, while women may face stigmatization after failed relationships, making both groups vulnerable to different forms of depression. According to Oboh and Oji (2022), counselling centers in Nigerian universities report that many students who experience breakups struggle with prolonged sadness, withdrawal, and academic decline, reflecting depressive tendencies. The interplay between breakups and depression is not merely a psychological concern but also an academic and social challenge. Understanding these concepts provides the foundation for examining the extent to which breakups contribute to depression among students, as well as how cultural and institutional factors shape their experiences. According to Ndeti, Mutiso, and Mbwaiyo (2010), young people in African universities often face heightened social pressures to maintain relationships, and relationship dissolution is sometimes stigmatized. The stigma can exacerbate depressive symptoms, particularly for women, who may be blamed for failed relationships. Similarly, studies in South Africa have shown that university students experiencing relationship dissolution are at higher risk of developing depressive symptoms, especially in contexts where romantic partnerships are linked to social identity and peer validation (Mokgatle & Schoeman, 2018). Oladipo and Balogun (2012) opined that Nigerian students frequently interpret breakups as moral or spiritual failures, leading to self-blame and increased vulnerability to depression. The lack of adequate counselling services in most African universities further compounds this problem, as students often have no professional outlet for emotional support. Instead, they may rely on peers, who are not always equipped to provide appropriate guidance and support.

Studies on youth mental health have increasingly highlighted the emotional

consequences of romantic relationship dissolution. According to Oboh and Oji (2022), university counselling centers in Nigeria have reported that relationship issues, particularly breakups, are among the top reasons students seek psychological help. Their findings revealed that many students presented with symptoms of depression traced the onset of their problems to relationship failure. Similarly, Okeke and Eze (2021) argued that Nigerian students often lack coping skills and social support systems, making them particularly vulnerable to depressive episodes following breakups. The academic consequences of depression resulting from breakups cannot be overlooked. Students who are emotionally distressed may find it difficult to focus on their studies, leading to absenteeism, reduced concentration, and poor performance in examinations. According to Feldman (2018), depression among college students has been linked to declining grade point averages, academic withdrawal, and increased dropout rates. In a competitive academic environment such as tertiary institutions, these outcomes can have long-term implications for students' careers and socioeconomic well-being. In addition, unresolved emotional pain from breakups may encourage maladaptive coping behaviors such as alcohol consumption, substance abuse, or engagement in risky sexual activities, all of which can further compound mental health challenges.

Sex is another psychological factor that could relate to depression among higher education learners. Sex differences across depressive sub-type conditions were examined in Delta State. Women scored only marginally higher than men on the depression severity measures. Women in the bipolar depression group, did score higher than men on depression severity. The symptoms most commonly and consistently caused by sex were appetite and weight change and psychomotor disturbance. Depressed girls and boys had similar symptoms. However, depressed girls had more guilt, body image dissatisfaction, self-blame, self-disappointment, feelings of failure, concentration problems, difficulty working, sadness/depressed mood, sleep problems, fatigue, and health worries than depressed boys. Association between mental wellbeing and depressive symptoms in Australian adolescents was examined. Analyses

demonstrated a negative association between earlier symptoms of depression and later positive mental wellbeing as well as the reverse. The researchers mean that focusing solely on the promotion of mental wellbeing, without intervening to reduce symptoms of depression, may limit the potential outcomes that might be achieved (Zadow, et al., 2017). Difference in depression originates from items that are commonly used to measure anxiety and depression symptoms which may not equally be captured by true levels of these behavioural problems in adolescent males and females. Adeniyi, et al (2011) examined the predictors of depression and physical activity in a sample of Nigerian adolescents and found females had a higher risk of low physical activity than male adolescents being in Senior Secondary class three and also found a significant predictor of depressive symptoms.

Statement of the Problem

Romantic relationships are a common feature of undergraduate life, often providing students with companionship, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. However, the dissolution of such relationships commonly referred to as a breakup can trigger significant emotional distress. It is observed that young adults, particularly undergraduates, are highly vulnerable to psychological challenges such as anxiety, stress, and depression following relationship breakups. Depression, characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest in daily activities, feelings of worthlessness, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation, is a growing concern among Nigerian youths. In Delta State, the situation is more troubling as undergraduate students often face multiple stressors including academic workload, financial constraints, peer pressure, and career uncertainties. When these pressures are compounded by the emotional toll of a breakup, students may experience heightened depressive symptoms that affect their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and general wellbeing.

Despite the prevalence of breakups among undergraduate students, empirical studies focusing on the relationship between romantic breakups and depression in Delta State are limited. Most existing research on student mental

health has emphasized stress, academic pressure, and substance use, leaving a gap in understanding the specific link between relationship dissolution (breakups) and depression among this population. Therefore, the problem this study sought to address was the insufficient empirical evidence on how romantic breakups contribute to depression among undergraduate students in Delta State.

Theoretical Framework

The study is hinged on Attachment theory. The attachment theory presents a significant variable influencing performance. Research demonstrates that individuals with secure attachment styles tend to showcase enhanced self-regulation and adapt time management skills. Lopez and García (2024) underscored that secure attachment fosters emotional resilience, which facilitates effective coping mechanisms in the face of stress. Nguyen and Zhao (2022) highlighted that those with anxious attachment often grapple with elevated stress and anxiety resulting in emotional instability that disrupts their focus.

Literature Reviewed

Empirical literature were reviewed in line with the present study

Adeyemi (2024) examined the relationship between romantic breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Southwestern Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions and two hypotheses. A sample size of 320 students was selected using multistage random sampling. Data was collected using a 30-item standardized questionnaire adapted from the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). Method of data collection involved self-administered surveys distributed during lecture breaks. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency counts, percentages) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and ANOVA). Findings revealed that students who had experienced breakups reported significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to those who had not.

Ibrahim (2024) assessed the relationship between breakups and depressive symptoms among undergraduates in a federal university in Northern Nigeria. It was guided by three research questions and three null hypotheses. A sample

size of 200 students was drawn using stratified sampling. Data were collected using a 20-item depression inventory scale developed and validated by the researcher. Method of data collection was self-report questionnaires administered during hostel visits. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, chi-square test, and Pearson correlation. Results showed that undergraduates who had experienced breakups were twice as likely to exhibit depressive symptoms compared to those in stable relationships.

Musa (2025) investigated how romantic relationship breakups influence depression among undergraduates. Guided by four research questions and three hypotheses, a sample of 210 students from three faculties was drawn through purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were gathered using a 25-item questionnaire designed by the researcher and validated by experts. Data collection was done in person with informed consent from respondents. Analysis employed mean and standard deviation for research questions, while multiple regression and t-test were used for hypothesis testing. Results showed that breakup experiences significantly predicted levels of depression, with females reporting higher depressive tendencies than males.

Johnson (2025) investigated the relationship between romantic breakups and depression among undergraduate students with a focus on demographic differences. The study posed four research questions and three hypotheses. A sample of 350 students were selected through a combination of stratified and systematic random sampling. Data collection was carried out using a researcher-developed questionnaire (28 items) with high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.85$). The method of data analysis involved descriptive statistics to answer research questions and t-test and ANOVA to test hypotheses. Findings revealed significant gender differences, with female students showing higher depression scores. Age also moderated the breakup-depression relationship, with younger students being more affected.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in

Delta State?

2. What does sex play in moderating relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State
2. There is no significant moderating impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State

Methods and Procedures

The investigation adopted correlational research design. This research design enabled the researcher examine the relationship that exists between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. According to Okagbare, Anho and Okaghare (2024), a correlational research design is chosen to determine the nature of relation that exists between variables of interest. The population for this study comprised of 84,781 public undergraduate university students in Delta State. Based on investigations by the researcher, there are 30,456 students in Delta State University, Abraka 20,245 students in Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Warri, 11,460 students in University of Delta, Agbor, 10,453 students in Southern Delta University, Ozoro and 12,167 students in Dennis Osadebe University, Asaba as at 2024/2025 academic session. The sample size of the study is 383 undergraduate students from all the public universities in Delta State. The researcher adjust that this sample size is adequate for the study because of the suggestion of Gill, Johnson and Clark (2010), that 383 sample size is adequate for a study where the population approaches 100,000. Proportionate sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample size. Using the proportionate method, simple random sampling was used to select 84 students from Delta State University, Abraka, 80 students from Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Warri, 70 students from University of Agbor, 75 students from Southern Delta University, Ozoro, and 74 students from Dennis Osadebe

University, Asaba making a total sample size of 383. An instrument titled "Breakups and Depression Questionnaire (BREDEQ)" was used to collect data. The questionnaire contained two sections. Section A contains information such as student sex and school while section B was designed to gather information on Breakups and Depression from students in the five (5) universities in Delta State. The subscales contains 15 item statement each that are based on the four-point rating scale of measurement weighted as Strongly Agreed (SA) (4 points), Agree (A) (3 points), Disagree (D) (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1 point). The face validity of the instrument was estimated by measurement experts in guidance and counselling of Delta State University Abraka whose opinion on the items were modified and corrected to suit the views of the respondents. while the content and construct validities were estimated through factor analysis of the Principal Component Analysis method. Before the factor analysis, 20 copies of the instrument were given to undergraduates students of western Deltan University who were not part of the study and the data obtained were subjected to factor analysis. The principal component analysis of the extraction method was used to estimate the content validity of the instrument. It yielded the following values 66.16% for the Breakups Rating Scale and 71.26% for Depression Rating Scale. The rotated factor loading of the varimax method was done to ascertain the construct validities of the items, which yielded 0.55-0.86 for Breakups Rating Scale and 0.57-0.87 for Depression Rating Scale. To ascertain the reliability of the research instrument, Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, which is a kind of statistic used in estimating measures of internal consistency was used to produce a coefficient of 0.73 for the Breakups Rating Scale and 0.79 for Depression Rating Scale. The researcher, alongside two research assistants, administered the instrument to respondents at the various schools and copies of the questionnaires were retrieved same day after completion. The research questions were answered using Pearson and multiple Correlations statistics while hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State?

Table 1: Correlation and Coefficient of Determination of breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>r</i> ² %	Decision
Breakups Depression	383	-0.28	0.08	8	Negative Relationship

Table 1 presents the Pearson's correlation coefficient used to assess the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. The results indicate that $r = -0.28$, with an $r^2 = 0.08$, and $r^2\% = 8$, suggesting a negative relationship between the variables. This means that breakups accounts for 8% of the variance in depression.

Research Question 2: What does sex play in moderating relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State?

Table 2: Multiple correlation analysis of the impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State.

Sex	Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² %	Decision
Male	Breakups Depression	176	0.53	0.28	28	Positive Relationship
Female	Breakups Depression	207	0.57	0.32	32	Positive Relationship

Table 2 shows a multiple correlation coefficient, which was used to determine the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. The result revealed a positive relationship between the variables ($R = 0.53$; $R^2 = 0.28$; $R^2\% = 28$) for male students and ($R = 0.57$; $R^2 = 0.32$; $R^2\% = 32$) for female students. The result further showed that breakups contributed 28% and 32% to the variance in depression among male and female students undergraduate.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State

Table 3: Regression analysis of the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P
Regression	824.359	1	824.359	30.380	.000 ^b
Residual	9985.738	381	27.135		
Total	10810.097	382			

Variables in Equation					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient Beta	T	p
	B	Std. Error			
Constant	7.287	1.407		5.179	.000
Breakups	.402	.073	.276	5.512	.000

a = 0.05; $R = 0.28$; $R^2 = 0.08$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.07$

a. **Dependent Variable:** Depression

b. **Predictors (Constant):** Breakups

Table 3 shows a regression analysis, which was run to determine the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. Result showed that breakups can predict depression. It explains 8% of the variance in depression, $R^2 = 0.08$, $F(1, 382) = 30.380$, $p < 0.05$ level of significance. Hence, the

null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant negative relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. The unstandardized coefficient for predicting depression from breakups is 0.40 while the standardized coefficient (Beta) = 0.28, $t = 5.51$.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State

Table 4: Multiple Fisher's Z statistics of the significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State.

Sex	Variables	n	R	Fisher-z	Remark
Male	Breakups Depression	176	0.53		Not Significant
Female	Breakups Depression	207	0.57	0.57	

Table 4 showed a multiple Fisher's Z statistics which were used to determine the significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. The result revealed that (R [Male] = 0.53; R [Female] = 0.57; $Z = 0.57$). Hence, the null hypothesis is not rejected, which means that there is no significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State.

Discussion of Results

Relationship between Breakups and Depression among Undergraduate Students

Data relating to research question one and its corresponding hypothesis revealed a negative and significant relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. The reason for this finding could be the poor limited counselling services without professional guidance, that make students to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as withdrawal, substance use, or excessive rumination, which deepen depression after a breakup. The negative and significant relationship between breakups and depression arises because emotional instability from failed relationships combines with academic stress that create a fertile ground for depressive symptoms among undergraduates students. This finding

agreed with the finding of Ibrahim (2024) who found that undergraduates who had experienced breakups were twice as likely to exhibit depressive symptoms compared to those in stable relationships.

Impact of Sex on the Relationship between Breakups and Depression among Undergraduate Students in Delta State

Data relating to research question two and its corresponding hypothesis revealed a positive and no significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State. The reason for this finding is that sex may have a positive influence on how breakups affect depression with male or female slightly more prone, but because both male and female students in Delta State face similar emotional, social, and academic pressures, the differences are not large enough to be statistically significant. This finding disagreed with the findings of Musa (2025) that breakup experiences significantly predicted levels of depression, with females reporting higher depressive tendencies than males.

Conclusions

From the above findings, it can be concluded that a negative and significant relationship between breakups and depression existed among

undergraduate students in Delta State. It can also be concluded that there was a positive and no significant impact of sex on the relationship between breakups and depression among undergraduate students in Delta State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Universities in Delta State should reinforce student counselling units with trained psychologists and counsellors who can provide emotional support and coping strategies for undergraduate students with breakups.
2. Universities should establish and encourage support clubs as undergraduates may find it easier to share their emotional struggles with fellow students who have had similar experiences.
3. Parents and guardians should be given routine feedback on their wards to understand the emotional challenges in order to be proactive in offering supportive environments at home thereby reducing the risk of depressiveness after breakups.

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