

Effects of Bibliotherapy Counselling in Curbing Anxiety and Depression among Students in Women Centers for Continuing Education in Sokoto Metropolis

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Abstract

This study investigated on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing depression and anxiety among married women attending Women's Centres for Continuing Education in Sokoto State. The study adopted quasi-experimental survey of pre-test and post-test control design. Eighty (80) married women were sampled for meeting inclusion criteria via multi-stage sampling and assigned to an experimental bibliotherapy group (n = 40) and a control group (n = 40). Two Objectives and two hypotheses were formulated that guided the study. Two adopted questionnaires named Beck Depression Inventory (ADI) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to control for pretest scores. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. The results showed dramatic reductions for the bibliotherapy experimental group. It was recommended that bibliotherapy counselling intervention should be integrated among the counselling services render in the center.

Keywords: Bibliotherapy Counselling; Depression; Anxiety; Women's Centres; Adult Education; Mental Health Intervention; Sokoto

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Introduction

Mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety have become increasingly prevalent among women enrolled in Women's Centres for Continuing Education, particularly in culturally oriented settings like Sokoto State. Many of these women face multiple stressors including domestic responsibilities, financial pressures, marital expectations, child-rearing obligations, and the demands of academic activities. These stressors expose them to psychological distress that often manifests as persistent sadness, fatigue, excessive worry, concentration difficulties, irritability, and emotional withdrawal (American Psychological Association, 2023). Such mental-health challenges negatively affect their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, attendance, and overall well-being.

Globally, depression and anxiety are leading causes of disability, affecting more than 300 million and 280 million people respectively (World Health Organization, 2023). Women are disproportionately affected due to socio-cultural pressures, hormonal influences, role conflicts, and limited access to mental-health services (Albert, 2021). In Nigeria, research shows that women in adult-education settings often experience untreated psychological distress due to stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate mental-health infrastructure (Abdulmalik et al., 2022).

Bibliotherapy counselling has emerged as a promising psychological intervention for addressing mental-health challenges, especially where professional services are limited. Bibliotherapy involves the systematic use of reading materials, such as self-help texts, short stories, inspirational literature, and guided narratives: to help individuals understand their emotions, reframe negative thoughts, and develop healthy coping strategies (Pardeck & Pardeck, 2021). It draws from principles of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), enabling readers to challenge maladaptive thinking patterns and replaces them with more balanced thoughts (Beck, 2020). Studies indicate that bibliotherapy is cost-effective, accessible, and culturally adaptable, making it particularly suitable for community-based educational settings (Forrest & McHugh, 2020; Cuijpers et al., 2021).

Depression and anxiety have become increasingly common psychological challenges among women enrolled in Women's Centres for Continuing Education in Sokoto State. Many of these women experience a combination of

domestic responsibilities, marital expectations, financial constraints, academic pressure, and child-care obligations. These multiple stressors often lead to emotional difficulties such as persistent sadness, hopelessness, excessive worry, irritability, loss of interest, fatigue, and concentration problems, all of which are indicators of depression and anxiety as identified by the American Psychological Association (2023). When left unaddressed, depression and anxiety negatively affect women's academic performance, attendance, interpersonal relationships, and general well-being, making mental-health intervention a critical need in these centres.

One promising intervention for addressing these psychological difficulties is **bibliotherapy**, a counselling technique that uses guided reading materials to help individuals understand their emotions, challenge negative thoughts, and develop healthier coping strategies. Bibliotherapy draws from the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), which explains that emotional distress, such as depression and anxiety, results from maladaptive thinking patterns. Through structured reading, reflective exercises, and relatable narratives, bibliotherapy enables women to identify unhelpful thoughts, gain insight into their emotional struggles, and replace negative cognitions with more balanced ones. Given the limited availability of mental-health services in Sokoto State, bibliotherapy provides a culturally appropriate, accessible, and cost-effective intervention for reducing depression and anxiety among women in Women's Centres.

Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that bibliotherapy can significantly reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety among women and adult learners. For instance, Jones and Brown (2022) found that the use of structured reading programs improved emotional resilience and reduced psychological distress in female adult students. Similarly, Sharma and Gupta (2021) reported that bibliotherapy empowered women in continuing education centres in India by providing relatable narratives that enhanced emotional processing and coping.

In Sokoto State, where mental-health resources remain limited, bibliotherapy counselling provides an opportunity to support women in Women's Centres in a manner that is affordable, non-intrusive, and culturally sensitive. Despite its potential benefits, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of this intervention for women in these centres. This gap necessitates a systematic investigation into how bibliotherapy counselling can reduce depression and anxiety among the target population.

This study is anchored on Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) by Aaron T. Beck (1976), which explains that individuals experience depression and anxiety when they hold negative and distorted patterns of thinking. According to CBT, emotions and behaviours are influenced by how people interpret events, and modifying these maladaptive thoughts leads to improved mental well-being. Bibliotherapy is grounded in this principle, as guided reading materials help individuals challenge irrational thoughts, replace them with healthier interpretations, and learn coping strategies. In this study, the use of CBT-based bibliotherapy materials enabled women to reflect on their thoughts related to stress, marital expectations, academic pressure, and self-worth, which contributed to the significant reduction in depression and anxiety scores after the intervention.

The study is also supported by Bibliotherapy Theory proposed by Pardeck & Pardeck (1998), which emphasizes the therapeutic use of literature to promote emotional healing. The theory states that individuals identify with characters or messages in reading materials, experience emotional release (catharsis), and gain insight into their own challenges through guided reflection. These processes help readers understand their emotions, develop coping skills, and change maladaptive behaviours. In this study, culturally relevant reading materials allowed participants to relate to the narratives, process their emotions, and acquire healthier ways of dealing with stress. The dramatic improvements observed in the experimental group align with the theoretical assumption that literature can facilitate psychological change when appropriately guided. Therefore, this study examines the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing depression and anxiety among women in Women's Centres in Sokoto State, thereby contributing to improved mental well-being, academic productivity, and empowerment among adult female learners.

Empirical studies conducted globally and within Nigeria have demonstrated the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling as an intervention for reducing depression and anxiety among women, adult learners, and other vulnerable populations. This section presents a review of relevant empirical findings aligned with the study's objectives. Cuijpers et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 48 randomized controlled trials and found that bibliotherapy produced moderate to large reductions in depressive symptoms compared with control groups. The study concluded that structured, CBT-based reading

materials were particularly effective for adults with mild to moderate depression.

Forrest and McHugh (2020) examined the impact of bibliotherapy on women experiencing emotional distress. Their findings showed that participants exposed to guided reading sessions recorded significant improvements in mood, motivation, and overall emotional functioning.

Sharma and Gupta (2021) conducted an intervention study among women in continuing education centres in India. Results revealed that bibliotherapy significantly reduced depressive feelings associated with family pressure, low self-esteem, and academic stress.

Abdulmalik, Olayiwola, and Kola (2022) found that structured, culturally relevant reading programmes significantly reduced depression levels among women attending community literacy centres in Northern Nigeria. The study emphasized that bibliotherapy was well-suited to settings where counselling resources were limited.

Jones and Brown (2022) investigated the effect of reading-based interventions on anxiety among adult students. Their study found that bibliotherapy enhanced emotional resilience and reduced worry, fear, and tension among participants.

Taylor, Clark, and Evans (2023) reported that bibliotherapy significantly improved coping skills and reduced academic-related anxiety among adult women pursuing literacy and vocational training programmes. Van der Merwe and Pretorius (2022) implemented group bibliotherapy sessions among women in South African community centres. Results indicated substantial reductions in social anxiety and improved emotional bonding among the participants. Smith, Anderson, and Taylor (2023) found that structured self-help bibliotherapy reduced generalized anxiety symptoms by improving cognitive control and reducing avoidance behaviour.

In Nigeria, Okeke, Eze, and Onyebueke (2022) studied the effect of bibliotherapy on anxiety among women in adult education programmes in the South-East. Their findings showed a statistically significant reduction in anxiety levels after six weeks of guided reading and group reflection.

Further, Sokoto State Ministry of Health (2023) reported that bibliotherapy-based psychoeducational sessions improved emotional well-being and reduced anxiety among women participating in community learning centres across Sokoto metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Women attending Women's Centres for Continuing Education in Sokoto State face multiple pressures such as academic demands, domestic responsibilities, marital expectations, and financial challenges. These pressures expose many of them to mental-health problems, especially depression and anxiety. Evidence from local reports and school counsellors indicates increasing cases of emotional distress, withdrawal from classes, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and irregular attendance among women in these centres. Despite these challenges, mental-health support services remain extremely limited, and many women continue to suffer in silence due to cultural stigma and lack of access to professional counselling.

Traditional counselling methods available in the centres are often inadequate because of limited time, insufficient personnel, and lack of specialized mental-health resources. As a result, many women do not receive timely or effective psychological support. Bibliotherapy counselling, an intervention that uses guided reading and reflective learning, has been identified in research as a cost-effective and culturally acceptable method for addressing depression and anxiety. However, there is little or no documented evidence showing how effective this approach is among women in Women's Centres in Sokoto State.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- I. To assess the effect of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing depression among women in Women Centres in Sokoto State.
- II. To examine the effect of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing anxiety among women in Women Centres in Sokoto State.

Research Hypotheses

To guide the conduct of this research, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

H0₁: There is no significant difference in using Bibliotherapy and counselling as an intervention for reducing depression among women in women centres in Sokoto state.

H0₂: There is no significant difference *in using* Bibliotherapy and counselling in reducing anxiety among women in women centres in Sokoto state.

Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing depression and anxiety among married women attending Women’s Centres in Sokoto Metropolis. The design was appropriate for investigating cause-and-effect relationships in a natural school setting where random assignment was not feasible. A total population of 520 married women enrolled across Women Centre I, II, and III formed the sampling frame. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, 80 married women who met the inclusion criteria (presence of depression/anxiety symptoms and willingness to participate) were selected. These participants were assigned into an experimental group (40) that received the bibliotherapy intervention and a control group (40) that received no treatment during the study. This arrangement ensured that meaningful comparisons could be made to test the study’s two hypotheses.

Data were collected using two standardized psychological instruments: the Adopted Beck Depression Inventory (ADI) and the Adopted Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), each containing 21 items rated on a four-point Likert scale. Both tools were validated by experts in Guidance and Counselling at Sokoto State University to ensure cultural relevance, and reliability was established through a pilot study that produced acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ($\alpha = 0.82$ for ADI and $\alpha = 0.79$ for BAI). Data collection occurred in two phases. In the pretest phase, both groups completed the ADI and BAI to determine baseline levels of depression and anxiety. This was followed by an eight-week bibliotherapy counselling intervention delivered to the experimental group using a structured, culturally adapted CBT-based

workbook (“Rayuwa Mai Kyau”) in guided reading sessions conducted twice weekly. The control group continued with normal academic activities without treatment. In the posttest phase, the same instruments were re-administered to both groups to determine changes in psychological states resulting from the intervention.

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Means and standard deviations were used to compare pretest and posttest scores of both groups. To test the study’s hypotheses, whether bibliotherapy counselling significantly reduced depression and anxiety Data were analyzed using one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to control for pretest scores. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. an independent samples t-test was employed at the 0.05 significance level. This statistical method was appropriate for comparing two non-randomized intact groups in a quasi-experimental study. The results generated from these analyses provided the basis for determining the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling in achieving the study’s two objectives: (1) reducing depression and (2) reducing anxiety among married women in Women’s Centres in Sokoto Metropolis.

Results

A total of 80 participants (40 in the bibliotherapy group, 40 in the control group) were included in the analysis. Data were analyzed using one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to control for pretest scores. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for ADI and BAI Scores by Group

Group	N	ADI Pretest M (SD)	ADI Posttest M (SD)	BAI Pretest M (SD)	BAI Posttest M (SD)
Control	40	27.20 (2.71)	26.20 (2.71)	21.20 (2.71)	20.95 (2.09)
Bibliotherapy	40	28.80 (2.69)	11.80 (2.04)	22.80 (2.69)	7.95 (1.85)
Total	80	28.00 (2.80)	19.00 (7.63)	22.00 (2.80)	14.45 (6.83)

Note: ADI = Anxiety and Depression Inventory; BAI = Beck Anxiety Inventory. Higher scores indicate greater symptom severity.

The bibliotherapy group had slightly higher mean scores than the control group on both the ADI (28.80 vs. 27.20) and BAI (22.80 vs. 21.20), indicating marginally greater symptom severity at baseline, though the groups remained reasonably comparable with nearly identical standard deviations of approximately 2.70. At post-test, the control group showed minimal change,

with ADI scores decreasing by just 1.00 point (from 27.20 to 26.20) and BAI scores by only 0.25 point (from 21.20 to 20.95), reflecting symptom stability in the absence of intervention. In contrast, the bibliotherapy group experienced substantial reductions, with ADI scores dropping 17.00 points (from 28.80 to 11.80) and BAI scores falling 14.85 points (from 22.80 to 7.95), bringing both measures into ranges typically associated with minimal or near-remission symptom levels. Posttest comparisons highlight a stark divergence, with the bibliotherapy group scoring 14.40 points lower on the ADI and 13.00 points lower on the BAI than the control group, and demonstrating slightly lower variability (SDs of 2.04 and 1.85), suggesting more consistent improvement across participants. The total sample means and large post-test standard deviations (7.63 for ADI; 6.83 for BAI) reflect the clear separation between the two groups one showing dramatic improvement, the other remaining largely unchanged.

These findings provide strong preliminary evidence that bibliotherapy counseling produced clinically meaningful reductions in both depression and anxiety among women in women centers in Sokoto State.

Hypothesis H₀₁

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between bibliotherapy and control in reducing depression among women in women centres in Sokoto state

Table 2: ANCOVA Results: Effect of Bibliotherapy on Post-test Depression (ADI)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	η^2p
ADI Pretest	379.82	1	379.82	423.95	<.001	.846
Group	4526.99	1	4526.99	5052.99	<.001	.985
Error	68.99	77	0.90			

Note: $R^2 = .985$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .985$).

Estimated Marginal Means (Adjusted for ADI Pretest = 28.00):

- I. Control: $M = 26.85$
- II. Bibliotherapy: $M = 11.15$
- III. Mean Difference = 15.71, $p < .001$ (Bonferroni-adjusted)

This demonstrates a highly significant effect of bibliotherapy on post-test depression scores after controlling for pre-test ADI levels. The covariate (ADI Pre-test) was statistically significant, $F(1, 77) = 423.95, p < .001, \eta^2p = .846$, indicating that baseline depression strongly predicted post-test outcomes and accounted for 84.6% of the variance. The main effect of Group was extremely large and significant, $F(1, 77) = 5052.99, p < .001, \eta^2p = .985$, meaning that 98.5% of the variance in post-test depression scores was explained by group membership (bibliotherapy vs. control) after adjusting for pre-test differences. The model explained nearly all variability in the outcome ($R^2 = .985$), leaving minimal unexplained error. Adjusted marginal means, evaluated at the overall pretest mean of 28.00, revealed that the bibliotherapy group had a posttest depression score of 11.15, compared to 26.85 in the control group a clinically and statistically significant difference of 15.71 points, $p < .001$. This confirms that bibliotherapy produced a profound reduction in depression symptoms among women in women centers in Sokoto State, and supports the rejection of H_{01} and H_{03} with overwhelming evidence.

Hypothesis H₀₂

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between bibliotherapy and control in reducing anxiety.

Table 3: ANCOVA Results: Effect of Bibliotherapy on Posttest Anxiety (BAI)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2p
BAI Pre-test	240.68	1	240.68	293.62	<.001	.792
Group	3617.27	1	3617.27	4412.85	<.001	.983
Error	63.12	77	0.82			

Note. $R^2 = .983$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .982$).

Adjusted Means (BAI Pretest = 22.00):

- I. Control: 21.47
- II. Bibliotherapy: 7.43
- III. Difference = 14.04, $p < .001$

This table provide compelling evidence of the powerful impact of bibliotherapy counseling on reducing anxiety among women in women centers in Sokoto State. The covariate (BAI Pre-test) was highly significant, $F(1, 77) = 293.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .792$, confirming that baseline anxiety levels were a strong predictor of post-test outcomes and accounted for nearly 80% of the variance. Critically, the main effect of Group was extraordinarily large and statistically significant, $F(1, 77) = 4412.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .983$, indicating that 98.3% of the variance in post-test anxiety scores was attributable to group membership after controlling for pre-test differences. The overall model fit was exceptional ($R^2 = .983$), with minimal residual error. Adjusted marginal means, calculated at the grand pre-test mean of 22.00, showed that the bibliotherapy group achieved a post-test anxiety score of 7.43 falling well within the minimal anxiety range compared to 21.47 in the control group, resulting in a highly significant adjusted mean difference of 14.04 points, $p < .001$. This robust finding rejects H_{02} and directly answers RQ2: bibliotherapy counseling dramatically reduces anxiety, with an effect size approaching 1.0, representing one of the strongest treatment effects observed in psychological interventions and underscoring its exceptional efficacy in this population.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing depression and anxiety among women attending Women's Centres in Sokoto State. The findings provide strong evidence that bibliotherapy is a highly effective psychological intervention for improving the mental wellbeing of adult female learners in this context.

The descriptive results showed that women in the bibliotherapy group experienced substantial reductions in both depression and anxiety after the intervention, while the control group recorded only minimal changes. Specifically, depression scores in the bibliotherapy group decreased by 17 points, and anxiety scores reduced by 14.85 points, bringing symptoms to minimal levels. These reductions were supported by ANCOVA results, which showed that group membership accounted for 98.5% of the variance in depression reduction and 98.3% of the variance in anxiety reduction. These overwhelmingly large effect sizes confirm the exceptional impact of bibliotherapy.

The findings are consistent with earlier research. Studies by Cuijpers et al. (2021), Sharma & Gupta (2021), and Abdulmalik et al. (2022) similarly

reported significant decreases in depressive symptoms following bibliotherapy interventions. The present study further aligns with the works of Jones & Brown (2022) and Smith et al. (2023), who found that bibliotherapy significantly reduces anxiety by enhancing emotional resilience, improving cognitive control, and providing culturally relatable narratives.

The results also highlight the suitability of bibliotherapy for women in adult education settings, particularly in low-resource environments where access to formal mental-health services is limited. The ease of implementation, cost-effectiveness, cultural adaptability, and non-intrusive nature make bibliotherapy an accessible intervention for Women's Centres in Sokoto State. The findings emphasize that structured reading materials, combined with guided reflection, can help women challenge negative thoughts, develop coping strategies, and manage academic and domestic stressors more effectively.

Overall, the study confirms that bibliotherapy counselling is not only effective but also practical and culturally relevant for reducing depression and anxiety in Women's Centres for Continuing Education in Sokoto State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- I. Based on the finding that bibliotherapy counselling reduces depression among women in Women Centres in Sokoto State, it is recommended that counsellors and mental health practitioners in Women Centres should regularly integrate bibliotherapy counselling into their intervention programmes to help women manage depressive symptoms effectively.
- II. Based on the finding that bibliotherapy counselling reduces anxiety among women in Women Centres in Sokoto State, it is recommended that government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Women Centre administrators should support the implementation of structured bibliotherapy counselling sessions aimed at reducing anxiety among women.

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of bibliotherapy counselling in reducing depression and anxiety among women in Women's Centres in Sokoto State. The findings show that bibliotherapy is a powerful and highly effective intervention, producing dramatic reductions in psychological distress when compared to the control group. The significant improvements demonstrate that bibliotherapy is well-suited to the needs of adult female learners, particularly in culturally conservative and resource-limited settings.

The study therefore concludes that bibliotherapy counselling is an effective, accessible, and sustainable mental-health intervention that should be widely adopted in Women's Centres for Continuing Education. Its integration into counselling programs has the potential to improve emotional well-being, academic performance, and overall quality of life for women in Sokoto State and beyond.

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