

# Influence of Paranormal Beliefs on Self Concept, Achievement Motivation and Depression among Undergraduates

MOKUOLU Bolade Olubunmi

**Abstract**— The extent of an individual's motivation to achieve and approach to life is sometimes a function of the belief of the individual about life and the forces that influence it. Paranormal beliefs were assessed in this study in order to understand its impact on the self-concept, achievement motivation, and depression among undergraduates. 265 undergraduates from the Ekiti State University randomly drawn from various faculties within the University were involved. Four hypotheses were tested using regression analysis. It was revealed that, Psi belief, Superstition, Spiritualism, extra ordinary life reform, precognition (which are all dimensions of paranormal beliefs) significantly predict self-concept; only superstition and traditional religious belief have significant influence on achievement motivation, and there is a significant joint influence of all paranormal dimensions on achievement motivation. Results also showed that only traditional belief has significant main influence on depression, and there is a significant joint influence of paranormal beliefs on depression. While superstition and precognition have significant influence on self-concept among male students, the self-concept of female students was found to be influenced by Psi belief, superstition, spiritualism, precognition and paranormal belief. Findings were discussed in relation to existing literature and it was recommended that undergraduates need to be more enlightened on the understanding of paranormal beliefs, its positive and negative effects on their well-being, and also how these beliefs can be positively used.

**Index Terms**— Paranormal beliefs, Self-concept, Achievement motivation, Depression.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The belief system is an integral part of every culture. It forms the basis of who we are, what we think and how we behave or react to things, people or events in our environment [1]. Paranormal is a general term coined between (1915-1920) that designates experiences that lie between the range of normal experiences or scientific explanations or that indicates phenomenon that are understood to be outside of what sciences have the ability to explain or measure [2]. Paranormal beliefs encompass varieties of beliefs including beliefs in psychic abilities such as extrasensory perception, precognition, and psycho kinesic beliefs in all powerful deities and the power of prayer, beliefs in survival of the soul after death and the ability to communicate with the deceased. Superstitious beliefs; beliefs that organism can be healed, or

harmed through the direct action of mental intension; and beliefs that the earth is visited by intelligent alien life forms [2]

Also paranormal belief is used to describe phenomena, which ordinarily seem to violate the principles of science [3],[4]. Paranormal events are associated with myths and rituals in which no scientific basis had been found and possibly the reason why they are not included in Psychiatric classification system

The term paranormal also refers to hypothesized process that in principle are 'physically impossible' or outside the realm of human capabilities as presently conceived by conventional scientist [5]. However, the fact that such events seem physically impossible does not mean that they are not effectively felt by the person concerned. Therefore it may mean that adequate knowledge in that regards has not been explored as viewed by [6].

Paranormal beliefs, whether secular or supernatural in origin stem back to the time our ancestors, when the first and enduring medium of exchange was oral storytelling, events that could not be explained logically then became the source of superstitions, many of which prevailed into modern times [7]. According to [7] even today, the mysterious work of the paranormal phenomena is found in popular culture, folklore and the recollection of individual subjects.

Research has focused on the relationship between paranormal beliefs and locus of control; according to [8], man believes that there is supernatural power that controls his activities and the universe, and individuals do not have any direct control over the activities of the spiritual beings. This lack of control over one's life may make an individual who perceives negative influence over his/her life to become anxious and then learn helplessness which consequently may have negative influence on his/her self-concept, impede achievement, inhibit motivation and be a catalyst to the development of depression symptoms. Research has also linked paranormal beliefs with psychopathology, [8] reported that paranormal beliefs are significantly and positively correlated with manic-depressive experiences.

Depression was defined by [9] as a "learned helplessness" in which a person has low self-esteem and a despairing outlook. [10] also defines depression as a negative affective state ranging from unhappiness and discontent to an extreme feeling of sadness, pessimism and despondency, that interferes with daily life, causing lack of energy or motivation and difficulty concentrating or making decisions. Going by this definition, there is a link between achievement

motivation and depression. Achievement motivated persons typically do not set goals that are too easy because they look forward to challenges and overcoming them [11]. Optimism can be said to be one of the factor that explain the relationship between paranormal and achievement motivation. More precisely, optimism refers to an expectation of positive outcomes [12]. Overly optimistic individuals tend to hold unrealistic expectations, and discount negative information. They tend to set unrealistically high goals and expect to attain them. Also, their relationship can exist through superstitious beliefs about the outcomes as seen for example in the case of a student who believes that when some events happen during or before his exams, he cannot come out successful in the exams [12].

Self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks, evaluates or perceives him/herself. To be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself. [13] provides the following definition: the individual's belief about himself, including the person's attributes and who and what he is. One's self concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself that which includes elements such as academic performance, gender roles and sexuality, and racial identity. Although self-concepts are usually available to some degree in the consciousness, they may be inhibited from representation yet still influence judgment, mood, and behavioural patterns.

Therefore, individual's belief about the physical and non-physical forces (which fall within the purview of paranormal phenomena) is fundamentally to the extent to which he or she will react or respond to their influence. If such individual reacts negatively, then there is likelihood to attribute failure to such forces and this will consequently lower his or her achievement motivation and may lead to a state of helplessness and eventually depression.

### II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Everyday human's experiences are embodied with challenges, there is a need to solve or avoid those challenges by using different tools available. Naturally everyone seeks pleasure and avoid pain according to the principle of hedonism. There is the rising trend to want to give up on life so easily, could this be predicated upon some forces behind achievement as well as non-achievement. Belief in the paranormal is embedded in our culture most especially in Africa, and has cut across different population. This study attempted to examine the influence of paranormal beliefs on self-concept, to what extent do the beliefs in extra-ordinary power influence our lives, impact on the achievement motivation, and tendency to be depressed among undergraduates.

### III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research sought to examine the impact of paranormal beliefs on perception of self, achievement motivation and tendency to be depressed among the undergraduates and also assess sex differences in the influence of these beliefs on perception of self, achievement motivation and depression.

The hypotheses tested were:

- There will be significant predictive influence of Paranormal beliefs on self-concept, achievement motivation, depression among the undergraduates
- The impact of paranormal beliefs will be significantly more on Female undergraduates' self-concept than their male counterparts

### IV. METHODS

The study was a survey carried out among undergraduates in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

#### A. Sampling:

The sample comprised of 265 undergraduates of Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. It consisted of 128 males and 137 females with the age range of 17 to 28years. Cluster sampling method was employed for the study, as the respondents were approached in their residential hostels, where the questionnaire were distributed after obtaining their consent. The hostels have combination of students from different faculties, which gave the opportunity to have a good mix of all the faculties within the University rather than making use of stratified sampling.

#### B. Research Instruments

Questionnaire comprising of five sections was used for this study; it includes Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (RPBS), Rosenberg Self Esteem scale, Ray-Lynn achievement motivation scale and general health questionnaire.

The RPBS was designed by [14]. It consists of 25 items and scored on five point Likert format. Some changes were made in the original [15] with a view to improve the reliability and cross cultural validity of the scale. It has seven subscales. Witchcraft subscale has a four week test-retest reliability coefficient of .91, compared to .82 for the original subscale. Traditional belief .91, Psi belief .71, Superstition .81, spiritualism .91, and test retest reliability coefficient .92

Rosenberg self Esteem scale [15] was used to measure self-esteem. The 10-item scale assesses individuals by comparing himself or herself to another people. It has a reliability of .82 to .85. Validity: Criterion validity is .55 and it has concurrent validity of .64 with anxiety, .54 with depression and .43 with anomie.

Achievement motivation scale [16] consists of 14 items with three response options, it is used to rate the achievement motivation of students. Ray-Lynn achievement has an internal consistency alpha coefficient of .77 for a split-half reliability and 0.71 for its validity

The general health questionnaire (GHQ) is a screening instrument aimed at detecting non-psychotic psychiatric disorders, regardless of diagnosis in the community. It is designed for both normal population and clinic attendants. Age range for which it is designed includes adolescents and adults. Test retests reliability has been reported to be high (0.78 to 0.9) and inter-rater and inter-rated reliability have both been shown to be excellent (Crobach's 0.9- 0.95)

V. RESULTS

Regression and Analysis of Variance were employed to analyze the data and the following results were obtained:

Table I: Regression summary table showing the influence of the dimensions of paranormal beliefs on self-concept, achievement motivation and depression

Variables	Self-concept		Achievement motivation		Depression	
	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t
Psi belief	-0.27	-3.12*	-0.20	-0.32	0.61	0.94
Witchcraft	-0.24	-1.89	-0.112	-1.33	0.002	0.02
Superstition	-0.37	-5.07**	-0.139	-2.23*	0.75	1.78
Spiritualism	-0.34	-3.35**	-0.99	-1.39	0.30	0.39
Extraordinary life reform	-0.17	-2.04*	-0.10	-0.15	0.009	0.13
Precognition	-0.41	-4.41**	-0.60	-0.84	-0.08	-1.02
Paranormal	1.37	5.05**			-0.22	-3.60**
Traditional		0.42	5.16**	-0.35	-4.25**	
R		0.46		0.41		0.364
R2		0.21		0.17		0.133
F		10.02**		7.50**		05.61**

\*significant at .05

\*\*significant at .01

There is a significant main influence of Psi belief, superstition, spiritualism, extraordinary life reform, precognition and global score of paranormal belief, on self-concept. Only witchcraft does not have a significant influence on self-concept.

a significant joint influence of all on achievement motivation. Also, only traditional religious belief and the global paranormal beliefs have significant main influence on depression.

Only Superstition and traditional religious belief have significant influence on achievement motivation and there is

TABLE II: Regression summary table showing the influence of paranormal belief on self-concept between male and female undergraduates

Beliefs	self-concept				achievement motivation			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
TB					-0.46	-3.64**	-0.39	-3.76**
Psi belief	-0.3	0.26	0.50	3.85**	0.006	0.71	0.18	1.83
Witchcraft	0.18	0.91	0.32	1.96	0.39	3.08**	0.037	0.35
Superstition	0.45	4.15**	0.29	2.95**	0.18	2.07*	0.11	1.25
Spiritualism	0.07	0.48	0.53	4.01**	-0.27	-2.45*	-0.07	-0.72
ELR	0.13	1.09	0.18	1.63	0.14	1.43	-0.19	-2.14*
Precognition	0.28	2.07*	0.52	4.13**	0.039	0.38	0.02	0.22
GPB	0.91	2.24*	1.75	4.85**	-0.135	-1.53	-0.212	2.53*
R	0.49		0.50		0.45		0.43	
R2	0.25		0.25		0.199		0.190	
F	5.61		6.27		4.23		4.33	*

significant at .05

\*\* significant at .01

ELR = Extraordinary life reform GPB = Global score of paranormal beliefs TB = traditional belief

Among male students there is main influence of superstition, precognition and paranormal belief on self-esteem; traditional belief, witchcraft, superstition and spiritualism on achievement motivation. While among female students, Psi belief, superstition, spiritualism,

precognition and paranormal beliefs have significant influence on self-esteem; traditional belief, extraordinary life reform and paranormal beliefs significantly influence achievement motivation.

Table III: showing ANOVA and ANCOVA analysis of the influence of self-concept and achievement motivation on Depression while controlling for the effect of paranormal beliefs.

Source	ANOVA		ANCOVA	
	SS	F	SS	F
Corrected model	92.97	13.03'	105.29	11.25
Paranormal beliefs			12.32	5.26*
Self-concept (SC)	19.82	8.33**	14.70	6.28*
Achievement motivation	37.01	15.56**	31.25	13.35**
SC & Ach. motivation	q2.34	0.98	1.97	0.84
Error	620.87		608.56	
Total	713.85		713.85	

\* significant at .05    \*\* significant at .01

The Analysis of Variance shows that self-concept and achievement motivation both have significant main influence on Depression among undergraduates, although there is no significant joint influence of both on Depression.

When the effect of paranormal beliefs was removed, the amount of variation accounted for by the model (SSm) slightly increased to 105.29 from 92.97 as shown in the corrected model, of which self-concept and achievement motivation accounted for only 14.70 units and 31.25 units respectively, which is a reduction to what it was when the effect of paranormal beliefs has not been removed. The amount of variation in self-concept and achievement motivation that are accounted for by the covariate means that the unexplainable SS residual was slightly reduced from 620.87 to 606.56. the SS total has not changed.

**VI. DISCUSSION**

The hypothesis which states that paranormal belief will have a significant predictive influence on self-concept, achievement motivation, depression among undergraduates was partially confirmed as it was observed from the result on table 1 that, there is a significant main influence of Psi belief, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extra-ordinary life reform, Precognition and Paranormal belief, on self-concept, and there is a significant joint influence of all on self-concept. Witchcraft and traditional religion belief do not have a significant main influence on self-concept. An individual who perceives him/herself as being favored for having an extra power may think highly of him/herself while it will be reversed if he/she perceive that the power is lacking.

Witchcraft may not have direct influence in an individual's perception of self because of the negative way witch crafting has been perceived in the society. So also traditional belief is fast losing ground in the society due to the influx of other religious beliefs which are more in vogue. [17] in his work discovered that fate as a factor of the paranormal can affect an individual's concept. This is understandable by the significant main influence of Psi belief which indicate that participants show high reliance on the power of mental process within them even when such beliefs seem to lack explanation through natural laws. Also, their significant scores on superstition which is a system of belief based on imaginary connection between event and incapable of being justified on rational grounds are in line with the culture of most population around the world, as depicted by [18].

The significant main influence of the precognitive and global measure of paranormal beliefs on self-concept are plausible indication of the role the belief in any form of extra-sensory perception involving knowledge of the future event play in the life of people and how it influences their self-concept.

It was observed from the result of the findings that only superstition and traditional religious belief have significant influence on achievement motivation and there is a joint influence of all paranormal factors on achievement motivation among undergraduates. This is in collaboration with the work of [19] which says that paranormal belief has an influence on achievement motivation. In their research on college campuses, they noticed that students often superstitiously strategized to assist performance on athletic competitions and exams. These are often noticed among student who either pray or recite s inaudible phrase or make mystery signs as a sign of supplication to a higher being

before sitting down to write their exams. Some athletes are also noticed assembling themselves in a cycle and recite what is not usually overtly known to spectators and their opponent before starting competitive event. Such act of spiritualism is a philosophical doctrine that the ultimate reality of the universe is of the nature of soul and spirit of those who believe them. Considering the influence of paranormal beliefs on depression, it was observed from the table of results that only traditional religion belief has a significant main influence on depression and there is a significant joint influence of paranormal beliefs. This results supports the work done by [20]. According to them, the time spent on religious activities resulted in decrease in the susceptibility to depression, symptoms and state anxiety probably. Also it decreases the rate of substance use among University students. The time devoted to religious activities is a period of active performance. It is also behaviorally stimulating and a process that prevent inactivity and blues which is therapeutic to depression patients. Therefore, high level of traditional religion belief based on cultural orientation is capable of inhibiting symptoms of depression while the doctrine of morality in most religions could act as catalyst to the decrease in psychoactive substance abuse among university student. The second hypothesis stated that female undergraduates' self-concept will be influenced by paranormal belief more than male undergraduates' self-concept and it was observed from the result on the table 4 that there is a main influence of superstition, precognition and paranormal belief on self-concept. While among female students, Psi belief, Superstition, Spiritualism, Precognition and Paranormal belief have a significant influence on self-concept. This result shows that, the female undergraduates' self-concept is significant more influenced by paranormal beliefs than the male undergraduates' self-concept. This result is in line with that of [21], he finds that there was a large significant sex difference between believers and non-believers. Also [22], noted that females were higher in their beliefs of extra sensory perception, and ghost while men had higher beliefs in extraordinary life forms and African IFA ideogram-which is a system and tool of investigating phenomena that lies beyond the physical realm.

The findings of this study also show that self-concept and achievement motivation also influence experience of depression among undergraduates, meanwhile paranormal beliefs increases the impact of achievement motivation and self-concept on depression.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This research has been able to show another dimension of people's belief in paranormal phenomenon and its consequent influence on self-concept, achievement motivation and depression. In the light of these findings, it can be concluded that despite the enlightenment provided by education among undergraduates, attribution to some forces beyond one's control (paranormal belief) still has a way of influencing perception of self, the kind of goal to set and the extent to which the goal will be pursued and also the predisposition to depression.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATION

Further research on this study could be encouraged to cut across academic institutions in various societies to give an extensive explanation on this subject. Also, there is a need to enlighten people on the understanding of paranormal belief, its positive and negative effect on their well-being and also to ensure it is diverted towards positive usage and avoid its negative perception which may impede better and productive life.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Kezhia, T. (2012). *Self-concept, Study Habits, School Environment, Socio-economic status and Academic Achievement Of Students at the Secondary Level*, M.Phil, Thesis, Tamilnadu Teachers Education University, Chennai.
- [2] Irwin H.J (2005). *The Psychology of Paranormal belief*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation.
- [3] Brand, C.D. (1953). The relevance of physical research to philosophy. In J. Luddwig (Eds) *Philosophy and Psychopathology* (pp.. 43-63). Buffalo NY: Prametheus
- [4] Tobacyk, J. & Milford, G. (1996). Belief in paranormal phenomenon: Assessment instrument and implications for personality functioning. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 648-655.
- [5] Thalbourne M.A. & Delin P.S. (1994). A common thread underlying belief in paranormal, creative personality, mystical experience and psychopathology, *Journal of Parapsychology*, 58, 3-38
- [6] Ilori, S.O. & Adebayo S.O. (2012). Influence of paranormal beliefs on psychopathology in a cross-cultural society. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(2); 63-70
- [7] Abraham R. (1999). The emotional dissonance on organizational commitment and intention to turnover, *Journal of Psychology*, 133, 4411-455
- [8] Thalbourne, M.A. (1997) Paranormal Belief and superstition- how large is the association? *Journal of American society for physical research*, 91,221-226
- [9] Dudley, T. (1996). Self other judgments of paranormal and religious belief. *Journal of Social Behaviour & Personality*, 14, 309-315.
- [10] APA Dictionary of Psychology (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). 2015. UK American Psychological Association
- [11] Gold, M. (Ed). (1999) the complete socialist: A Kurt Lewin reader Washington, D.C: *American Psychological Association*. 13, 506-509
- [12] Sheier, M.F. & Carver C.S. (2001). Effects of optimism on psychological and physical well-being: Theoretical overviews and empirical update. *Cognitive therapy research*, 16, 201-228.
- [13] Baumeister, R.F (E.d) (1999). The self in social psychology. Philadelphia, PA: *Psychological press*.66, 527-533.
- [14] Tobacyk, J.J. (2004). Revised paranormal beliefs scale. *International Journal of Transpersonal studies* 23(23).
- [15] Rosenberg M. (1965). *Society and adolescent self-image*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press
- [16] Lynn S.J. & Rhue J.W. (1988). Fantasy proneness: Hypnosis, developmental antecedents, and psychopathology. *American Psychologist*, 43, 35-44
- [17] Fadeyi, B. (2005). Aspects of cultural practices in Africa. *Fundamentals of General studies: A publication of the General studies Division*, Lagos State University
- [18] Abraham, R. (1995). The emotional dissonance on organizational commitment and intention to turnover. *Journal of psychology*, 1133, 441-455
- [19] Burger J.M. & Lynn A.L. (2005) Superstitious behaviour among American and Japanese professional baseball players. 27, 71-76. Doi: 10.1207/s1532483
- [20] Ghorbani E. & Behdani (2001). Can religious activities prevent depression, anxiety and substance abuse in the University students? 1<sup>st</sup> international congress on religion and mental health. Tehran, Iran
- [21] Blackmore, S. (1997). Parapsychology: sex differences. *British Journal of Psychology*, 88, 683-694
- [22] Irwin H.J (1993). Belief in Paranormal: A review of empirical literature. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 87, 1-39.