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Student's Perception of School-Related Factors of Mental Health Problems

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A B S T R A C T

The Nigerian university system is experiencing high levels of disturbing mental health-related issues. The above scenario calls for concern about the mental health status of Nigerian students. The study seeks to explore the perception of students concerning disturbing mental health issues from the viewpoint of school-related factors. Two purposes, research questions, and two hypotheses guided the study. The study employed a survey research design. The study revealed that; the fear of failure in school, pressure from parents, pressure from teachers, academic pressure, school workload, and relationship failure associated with bullying are possible school-related factors to mental health problems in Nigerian universities. The study recommends the overhaul and the establishment of guidance counseling and mental health management units in all Nigerian universities, and that the National Universities Commission should as a matter of policy enactment and implementation mandate all universities to examine the mental health status of students that should be admitted into Nigerian universities.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for Nigerian universities to give attention to the mental health of students has become imminent due to the alarming rate of negative mental health issues in Nigerian universities. Research revealed that one out of five university-aged students experiences negative mental health-related issues in school. Gu reported that "*the psychological problems of high school students and their coping methods have become a hot spot of common concern for students, their families, schools, and all sectors of society*". Mental health impacts children socially, emotionally, and academically, while one in every five children/adolescents has a diagnosed mental health disorder. It is also estimated that one out of five children who need mental health services do not receive them (see https://ir.stthomas.edu/ssw_mstrp/642). Growing up students with some levels of mental problems may affect students academically in support of the above idea. Kamel *et al.* (2020) asserted that "*students with mental health difficulties are less likely to benefit from academic instructions more likely to experience lower academic achievement, and less school engagement and participation*". Bowers *et al.* (2013) reported that one in five adolescents will suffer from a mental disorder and that half of adult disorders will emerge before the age of 14 and 70 before the age of 18 making adolescence a critical period for the identification and remediation of disorders. Without appropriate help, such disorders are detrimental to a young person's relationships, school, and future life trajectory.

Mental health according to UNICEF includes "*our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Positive mental health allows adolescents to realize their full potential, cope with the stresses of life, learn and work productively, form and maintain healthy relationships, and make meaningful contributions to their families and communities*".

Mental health according to WHO is "*a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stress of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to the community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships, and shape the world we live in*". In a related development, WHO asserted that "*common mental health problems in adolescence include depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders. Depression in adolescence is characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest and energy, irritability, and feeling negative and worthless. Globally, depression is the fourth leading cause of illness and disability among adolescents aged 15-19 years and fifteenth for those aged 10-14 years. Girls and young women are up to three times more likely than boys to have depressive disorders and to attempt self-harm*". Mental health issues in school may have some influencing factors within the school and its environment.

School-related factors may have some contributory cause to some mental health problems in our universities. The fear of failure which is associated with anxiety, depression, pressure from parents, pressure from teachers, academic pressure and school workload, relationship failure associated with bullying, and other school-related factors may be considered as stressors that may trigger mental health problems in school. Complementing the above assertion, Beharu (2018) opined that "researchers in the field of psychology agree that a student engaging in any learning situation has to answer three fundamental questions: 'Can I do this activity?', 'Do I want to do this activity and why?', and 'What do I need to do to succeed" may serve as questions that trigger school-related factors to mental health issues.

School-related factors such as academic pressure which is designed to assist the academic performance of students prompt them into some academic responsibilities. Some of these

academic responsibilities if not properly managed generate some element of stress and become stressors to some mental health problems in school. In compliance with the above assertion, UNICEF holds that "*students provided a great deal of evidence regarding the negative impact of academic pressure, including stress and other mental health problems, poor concentration and memory, lack of sleep, and social problems. Of primary concern is the relationship between academic pressure and student mental health*". The above scenario if properly managed may not trigger mental health problems in school.

One consequence of school-related factors is stress from academic activities. Stress according to Engelhardt (2016) described that "*stress is a nonspecific response of the body to any demand made on it. Using Page and Page's interpretation of stress, one can correlate that stress is not only a natural part of life, but it is an essential component to help students build capacity. Many of the stressors that students are exposed to include a variety of items like grades, social interactions, and bullying. These stressors may not cause a challenge to a student's mental state because they are equipped to handle the stress. However, when a student is ill-equipped to handle the stress, it can trigger their fight-or-flight response because the student perceives stress to be a danger*".

Mental health problems are mental challenges that work against the mental well-being of one leading to the inability to reason well and affecting the effective functioning of the person socially, emotionally, and academically. Kandasamy *et al.* (2020) have it that mental health problems are "*ailment which creates disorders in thinking processes as well as behaviors which result in an inability to handle life's ordinary demands and routines. Some examples of common disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, dementia, schizophrenia, and anxiety disorders. The outcomes may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits, and/or social withdrawal*".

Mental health problems hinder the effective functioning of people including students in school. Examples of some of these mental health problems are depression, anxiety, and others. In line with the above Caldwell (see https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/4581) opined that "mental health problems are difficulties that change the thinking, mood, and behavior of people that impair functioning". Commenting on mental health problems, Schulte-Körne (2016) asserted that examples of mental health problems include "anxiety *disorders, depression, conduct disorders, and hyperkinetic disorder. However, only about one-third of acutely and chronically mentally ill children and adolescents are receiving medical treatment. The low uptake of healthcare services by mentally ill children and their families is a problem that is known internationally*". Yao *et al.* (2021) reported that "*the most common mental health problems for adolescents include emotional disorders, such as depression and anxiety, eating disorders, psychosis, and self-harm. Mental health problems are the leading cause of disease burden among young people as suicide was the third most common cause of adolescent mortality in recent times*". Mental health according to Payne (2022) is "*usually construed in a framework of well-being implying links between student experience and achievement. Well-being is a condition for learning. Student withdrawal from school activities due to depression which is linked to lower marks. Reduced mental health can be a barrier to academic progression, warranting wide-reaching identification, treatment, and outreach work for student success*".

Concern has been raised about suicide, its intent, and other connected issues in Nigerian institutions. In recent years, problems with mental health behaviors, such as suicide, anxiety, depression, and others, have emerged as some of the most pressing issues in Nigerian universities. There are hints that some of these mental health issues occur within the system of universities. Some mental issues are brought on by stressors that are caused by the

university system and other aspects of the university system. There are symptoms of suicide attempts, attempted suicides, and other mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and others, in various Nigerian institutions where students are enrolled. In Nigerian universities, some students routinely carry over multiple courses, while some have been counseled to drop out and some have dropped out of school. The aforementioned calls for research interest to uncover how university students perceive aspects related to the classroom that lead to mental health issues in the educational system.

The following purpose guided the study;

(i) To determine the perception of students on school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba.

(ii) To determine the perception of students on school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba concerning gender.

The following research questions guided the study;

(i) What is the perception of students on school factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba?

(ii) What is the perception of students on school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba concerning gender?

One hypothesis was formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis is that school-related factors of mental health issues do not influence male and female students' perception of social science education (social studies) at Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba.

2. METHOD

The study employed a survey research design. The population of this study consists of 100-level and 200-level students of social studies option in the social science education department of Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba. These levels were selected because these students are passing through a series of academic rigors and challenges at the university. The sample size for this study is 131 first-year and second-year students. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain the sample size. A School-Related Factor Mental Health Issues Questionnaire (SRFMHIQ) was the instrument used for data collection. SRFMHIO was a self-made questionnaire adapted from the University Chichester Student Mental Health Self-Assessment Questionnaire. SRFMHIQ is of 11 items rated in line with Linkert's four-point rating scale. Strongly agree with 4 points, agree with 3 points, disagree with 2 points and strongly disagree with 1 point. SRFMHIQ was face-validated by two experts in the educational foundation department. One expert in educational psychology and the other expert in educational measurement and evaluation. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument with a result of 0.76 which showed that the instrument was reliable. After the administration of the instrument to the respondent, Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, and a t-test was used to test the research hypothesis at a 0.5 level of significance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Question 1: What is The Perception of Students on School Factors of Mental Health Issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba?

Results in **Table 1** show the mean and standard deviation of the perception of students on school factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba. The Table shows the perception of students on I feel sad and fearful with examinations with a mean rating of 3.7 and a standard deviation of 1.7. Pressure from parents leads to stress in school

had a mean rating of 3.5 with a standard deviation of 1.7, I feel extreme anger when I am bullied had a mean rating of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.5, fear of failure consumes me in school had mean ratings of 3.3 and standard deviation of 1.7, I feel depressed with poor results in school had mean ratings of 3.2 with a standard deviation of 0.9, I feel depressed with poor results in school had mean ratings of 3.4 with a standard deviation of 0.5, I have a heartbeat for school assignments had mean ratings of 3.03 with a standard deviation of 0.8, I like taking drugs to suppress stress in school had mean ratings of 3.5 with a standard deviation of 0.6, The fear of school workload create anxiety in me had mean ratings of 3.4 with a standard deviation of 0.7, Academic pressure disturb my well-being had mean ratings of 3.6 with a standard deviation of 0.8 and I feel ashamed when I am looked down had mean of 3.6 and standard deviation of 0.7. The mean ratings are within the range of 2.50 – 3.49 set as a criterion for accepting an item. The result implies that the fear of failure in school, pressure from parents, pressure from teachers, academic pressure, school workload, and relationship failure associated with bullying are possible school-related factors to mental health problems in Nigerian universities and Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba.

Table 1. Responses, Mean, and standard deviation of perception of students on school factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba.

No	Statement	$\overline{x}$	SD	Decision
1	I feel sad and fearful with examinations	3.7	1.7	Accepted
2	Pressure from parents leads to stress in school	3.5	1.7	Accepted
3	I feel extreme anger when I am bullied	3.6	0.5	Accepted
4	Fear of failure consumes me in school	3.3	1.5	Accepted
5	Pressure from teachers' discomfort me	3.2	0.9	Accepted
6	I feel depressed with poor results in school	3.4	0.5	Accepted
7	I have a heartbeat for school assignments	3.3	0.8	Accepted
8	I like taking drugs to suppress stress in school	3.5	0.7	Accepted
9	The fear of school workload creates anxiety in me	3.4	0.8	Accepted
10	Academic pressure disturbs my well-being	3.6	0.6	Accepted
11	I feel ashamed when I am looked down	3.6	0.7	Accepted
	Ground Mean	3.5	0.5	

The mean ratings set as a criterion for accepting are within the range of 2.50 – 3.49

3.2. Research Question 2: What is the Perception of Students on School-Related Factors of Mental Health Issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba Concerning Gender?

Results in **Table 2** show the mean and standard deviation of the perception of students on school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba concerning gender influence on male and female students. The table shows that males had mean ratings of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.9 while females had mean ratings of 2.7 with a standard deviation of 0.3. The mean ratings are within the range of 2.50 – 3.49 set as a criterion for accepting an item. The result implies that male students had higher mean ratings than female students on the perception of students on school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba This means that perception of students on school-related factors of mental health had a significant influence on both male and female students.

Results in **Table 3** show the t-test result of the difference in the mean ratings of students' perception of school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba. The Result shows that a t-test of 2.37 was obtained with a probability value of 0.04. This probability value was compared with 0.05 set as the level of significance

and it was found to be significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The inference drawn therefore is that students' perception of school-related factors of mental health.

Table 2. Mean responses perception of students on school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba concerning gender.

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD
Male	55	3.6	0.9
Female	68	2.7	0.3

The mean ratings set as a criterion for accepting are within the range of 2.50 – 3.49

Table 3. T-test analysis of the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students' perception of school-related factors of mental health issues in Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
Male	55	3.6	0.9	121	237	0.02
Female	68	2.7	0.3			

3.3. Discussion

Based on the results presented in this study the inference stands that the fear of failure in school, pressure from parents, pressure from teachers, academic pressure, school workload, and relationship failure associated with bullying are possible school-related factors to mental health problems in Nigerian universities, The above assertion is in line with the research work of Laidlaw *et al.* (2023) which reported that "*undergraduate students experience mental health and wellbeing difficulties and that differences exist within this population in the conceptualization of these two terms*". The report of this research work is also in line with the study of Mahto *et al.* (2019) which reported that "*undergraduate students are under pressure as a result of factors from the school environment and also noted that "stigma associated with mental illness is increasing*". The result of this study is also in line with the assertion of Moses and Omar (2015) who reported that undergraduate students are experiencing mental health problems and also noted that some school-related factors trigger mental health challenges. The work noted that "*guidance programs should be routinized in schools for greater benefits to students*". The result of this study is also in line with the research work of Kratt and Houdyshell (2020). which reported that an "*increase in negative thoughts and behaviors, absence of positive traits and abilities, and self-identified coping strategies and external support*" may also serve as some of the factors for mental health problems in Nigerian universities.

The result of this study is also in line with the research work of Irma et al. (2020) who reported that "*health promotion about mental health disorders and their treatment must be conducted to increase positive perceptions, good knowledge, and positive attitudes of the students and that social media tools can be considered to enhance mental health promotion and prevention of mental health problems*".

4. CONCLUSION

The following decisions were made based on the outcome of the results; the fear of failure in school, pressure from parents, pressure from teachers, academic pressure, school workload, and relationship failure associated with bullying are possible school-related factors to mental health problems in Nigerian universities.

We have the following recommendations following the findings of this investigation and the conclusions reached:

(i) As part of the requirements for the admission process in Nigerian universities, a mental health assessment should be carried out on each candidate to be admitted.

(ii) Each faculty in a Nigerian university should have a psychological and counseling unit to attend to the mental problems of students.

As part of the requirements for the employment process in Nigerian universities, a mental health assessment should be carried out on each candidate to be employed.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors guarantee that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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