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ASSESSMENT OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH CHALLENGES OF UNDERGRADUATES OF AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA KADUNA STATE

BY

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Abstract

Emotional health plays a crucial role in the overall well-being and academic success of undergraduates. This study assessed the emotional health challenges faced by undergraduates at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Kaduna State. The research raised one research question and formulate one hypothesis, tested using Chi-square. A mixed-method approach was adopted, utilizing surveys and interviews to gather data from students across various faculties. The findings revealed significant stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation among the students, as significant challenges (P= 0.000 <0.05). The study concluded that emotional health challenges are stress, anxiety, dippression and social isolation for undergraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Key issues such as academic pressure, financial difficulties, social isolation, and inadequate emotional support can contribute to mild stress, anxiety, and depression among the students. It was recommended that Ahmadu Bello University should establish a comprehensive mental health support system, including readily accessible counseling services, stress management workshops, and peer support programs. Additionally, financial assistance initiatives, such as scholarships and emergency relief funds, should be strengthened to alleviate the financial burdens that contribute to students' emotional distress.

Keywords: Emotional health, undergraduates, Ahmadu Bello University, stress, anxiety, depression, social isolation.

Introduction

Emotional health is a crucial component of overall well-being, influencing cognitive function, social interactions, and academic success. Emotional health challenges among university students have become a growing concern, as they navigate academic pressures,

financial constraints, social expectations, and personal development. Undergraduates at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Kaduna State, face these challenges, which, if not properly managed, may negatively impact their academic activities, social relationships, and future career prospects. The transition to university life poses several emotional challenges for undergraduates. Emotional health encompasses psychological well-being, stress management, and coping mechanisms essential for academic success and personal development. Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, one of Nigeria's largest universities, accommodates a diverse students population facing various stressors.

Studies have shown that university students are increasingly experiencing emotional health issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, and self-esteem problems due to academic workload, peer pressure, and uncertainties about their future (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). According to Oginni, Oladeji, and Gureje, (2018), Nigerian undergraduates often experience high levels of emotional distress, stemming from financial difficulties, academic demands, and limited access to mental health services. Furthermore, Akinola (2021) noted that emotional instability among university students could lead to poor academic outcomes, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and social withdrawal.

Despite the increasing prevalence of emotional health issues among students, many do not seek professional help due to stigma, lack of awareness, or inadequate support services within universities (Adekeye, Sholarin, & Olatunji, 2019). In Nigerian universities, including ABU, Zaria, there is a need for more structured interventions, counseling services, and mental health awareness programmes to help students cope with emotional challenges effectively.

Many students struggle to balance academic demands with personal responsibilities, leading to high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion. The competitive nature of university education, coupled with fear of failure, often exacerbates feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. Additionally, economic instability in Nigeria has made it difficult for some students to afford basic needs, further increasing their emotional distress (Adekeye, et, al, 2019).

Despite the existence of counseling services in the university, many students do not seek help due to stigma, lack of awareness, or inadequate mental health facilities. Emotional health challenges, if not properly managed, can lead to poor academic performance, social withdrawal, substance abuse, and even suicidal tendencies (Akinola, 2021). Previous studies on students' well-being in Nigerian universities have focused more on physical and academic stressors, with limited research on emotional health challenges. Understanding the nature, causes, and impact of emotional health issues among ABU undergraduates is essential in developing effective support systems and mental health interventions.

This study therefore aims at assessing the emotional health challenges faced by undergraduates at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Specifically, it seeks to identify the common emotional health issues among students.The findings from this research will provide valuable insights for university administrators, policymakers, and mental health professionals in designing effective support systems to improve students' well-being.

Research Question:

Based on the purpose of the study, the following research question was raised:

-What are the common emotional health challenges among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

Hypothesis:

The following null hypothesis guided the study:

-There are no significant emotional health challenges among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell, (2014) descriptive survey research design enables the researcher to collect data on the perspectives, experiences, and opinions of the respondents. The design was found appropriate as it gives room for collecting data from a large population to assess and examine the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of directors regarding their administrative roles in sports development in Nigeria's Colleges of Education. This design was also found appropriate for it is by nature non-experimental. The population of the study was 37,306 from which 384 were sampled as respondents using multi-stage sampling procedure which include purposive and simple random sampling. Data was collected using self-developed questionnaire and Data analysis was carried out using descriptive of -mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics of chi square was used to assess the emotional health challenges of undergraduate students of ABU Zaria at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question: What are the common emotional health challenges among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

Table 1: Mean Scores on Emotional Health Challenges of ABU Undergraduates

Sn	Impact of the Programmes on Leadership Skills	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	I often feel overwhelmed by academic pressure.	3.88	0.839
2	Financial difficulties negatively affect my emotional well-being.	3.98	0.866
3	I experience frequent anxiety due to academic expectations.	3.85	0.917
4	I have trouble sleeping due to stress and emotional worries.	4.24	0.970
5	Social isolation has negatively impacted my emotional health.	3.91	0.725
6	I feel emotionally drained due to balancing academics and personal life.	4.15	0.972
7	I find it difficult to concentrate in class due to emotional distress.	4.20	0.937
8	I feel unsupported in dealing with my emotional challenges at the university.	4.18	0.829
9	I often experience feelings of sadness or depression.	4.08	0.856
10	Access to counseling and mental health services would improve my emotional well-being.	4.27	0.888
	Aggregate mean	**4.07**	**0.880**

(Decision Mean = 3.5)

Table 1 above shown that the aggregate mean of 4.07 which is greater than Decision mean 3.5 indicated that emotional health challenges are prevalent among ABU undergraduates. These are academic pressure, financial difficulties, anxiety, sleep disturbances, emotional exhaustion, social isolation, effort to balance academics with personal life, access to counseling and mental health services and lack of emotional support significantly affecting students' well-being. The relatively high standard deviation (0.880) across all items suggests that the responses were consistent across participants. This implied that that emotional health challenges are common among ABU undergraduates.

Hypothesis: There are no significant emotional health challenges among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Table 2: Summary of Chi-square on Emotional Health Challenges of ABU Undergraduates

Variable	N	X^2 Cal.	X^2 Crit.	df	P-Value	Decision
Emotional Health Challenges of ABU Undergraduates	384	203.853	51.0	36	.000	Null H_o Rejected

X^2 Cal. = 203.853 (X^2 Crit. =51.0), df= 36 (P<0.05)

The Chi-Square test results provided in table 2 above identified whether emotional health challenges are significant among undergraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria. The table showed that Chi-Square Calculated Value (X^2 Cal. = 203.853) >Chi-Square Critical Value (X^2 Crit. = 51.0) and P-Value (P = 0.000). The p-value is less than 0.05 (α = 0.05), indicated statistical significance. This means there is a very low probability that the observed results occurred by chance thus, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected. This means there is a significant emotional health challenges among undergraduate students at ABU. This implies that students are experiencing notable levels of stress, anxiety, financial strain, social isolation, effort to balance academics with personal life, access to counseling and mental health services, health challenges.

Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that undergraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, face significant emotional health challenges, which are stress, anxiety, financial difficulties, and social isolation effort to balance academics with personal life, access to counseling and mental health services. The results, which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (X^2 Cal. = 203.853, P = 0.000). This findings is consistent with finding of Smith and Johnson (2020), academic-related stress is one of the leading causes of emotional distress among university students, as they struggle to balance coursework, examinations, and deadlines. This aligns with the current study's findings, where students reported high levels of anxiety (M = 3.85) and difficulty concentrating due to emotional distress (M = 4.20).

Similarly, Adeyemo and Adeleke (2019) found that financial constraints significantly contribute to students' emotional health issues, particularly in Nigerian universities where limited access to financial aid exacerbates stress levels. The present study supports this assertion, with financial difficulties scoring a high mean value of 3.98, highlighting the economic strain affecting students' well-being.

Furthermore, Ogunlade et al. (2021) emphasized that social isolation and lack of adequate mental health support structures contribute to students' emotional distress. This is evident in the current study, where social isolation (M = 3.91) and lack of emotional support (M = 4.18) were identified as major concerns. These findings suggest that students at ABU

require greater access to mental health services and peer support networks to mitigate these challenges.

Conclusion

The study concludes that emotional health challenges were faced by undergraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Key issues such as academic pressure, financial difficulties, social isolation, and inadequate emotional support can contribute to mild stress, anxiety, and depression among students. These challenges can negatively affect students' academic performance, concentration, and overall well-being, highlighting the urgent need for institutional intervention.

Recommendation

The researcher recommended that Ahmadu Bello University should establish a comprehensive mental health support system, including expanded accessible counseling services, stress management workshops, and peer support programmes that covers financial assistance initiatives, such as scholarships and emergency relief funds. The findings emphasize the need for mental health support systems, stress management programs, and student counseling services to address these concerns effectively.

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