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Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders Among University Students in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The increasing rate of mental disorder among adolescents has necessitated the need for research on the prevalent rate of the various mental health disorders among university students of Benue State. The study investigated the prevalence rate of the different forms of mental health disorders among university students in Benue State, Nigeria. Three research objectives guided the study, which employed a descriptive survey design with a total population of 12,339 students. A sample size of 387 respondents was selected using random sampling techniques. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled "Mental Health Available (MHA)." The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation with the aid of Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Findings revealed that anxiety (3.2), post-traumatic stress (3.2) and depression (2.6) were the most emerging mental health disorders among university studies in Benue state with lesser disorder of Schizophrenia (2.4) and eating disorder (2.1). The common factors responsible for mental health disorders among university students in Benue State were identified as poverty (3.17), crisis (3.20), drug abuse (3.52) and environmental conditions (3.0). The result revealed that majority of respondents were not aware of the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders which include Exaggerated or unusual beliefs (2.6), difficulty sleeping (2.1), Problems with concentration and memory (2.4) but indicated that, they were aware of ideation suicidal (3.3) and problem with inconsistent schooling (3.3). Based on this finding, different forms of mental health disorder exist among university students in Benue state which might be caused by poverty, drug abuse and crisis in which majority of the students are unaware of the numerous signs and symptoms of mental disorder, therefore, it is essential to create an awareness program among the students on the need to identify the signs and symptoms for the purpose of prevention and early detection of mental disorders. Therefore, the study recommends implementation of mental health awareness programs for students in Benue state to create an awareness level of the early signs and symptoms of mental health disorders

Keywords: Mental health, Anxiety, Depression

Introduction

The increasing enrollment of adolescents into universities in a rapidly changing environment has created a need for research among university students in Benue State, as studies by Kim et al (2022) and Currie (2020) showed that adolescents are more prone to mental health disorders.

Mental health disorders form up to 15% of all recognized diseases worldwide. This indicates that poor mental health is a global issue and could be associated with certain determinants such as rapid social change, stressful work conditions, gender discrimination, social exclusion, unhealthy lifestyle, risks of violence, physical ill-health and human rights violations. These determinants indicate that the transition from high school to university plays a vital role in influencing

the mental health status of the students (Bankat,2023).

Bakare et al (2022), defined mental health disorder as a condition that affects a person's thoughts, feelings, mood, behavior, or a combination of these factors, leading to significant distress and impairment in functioning. Mental disorder could also be seen as a psychological pattern which is associated with a painful condition and impairment in one or more important areas of functioning, increased risk of death, or causes a significant loss of autonomy (WHO, 2021). Mental health disorders could include anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, addictive behavior, paranoia, conduct and eating disorders. Mental illness is caused by several factors. These include biological, socio-cultural and environmental factors such as drug abuse: cocaine, heroin, marijuana and alcohol (Bankat,2023). Mental disorder can be identified through physical, emotional cognitive and behavioral symptoms. According to Bakare et al (2022), Physical symptoms of mental health disorder include pain or sleep disturbance while emotional symptoms include feeling bad, scared and anxious whereas cognitive symptoms include difficulty thinking, abnormal belief and memory difficulty and behavioral symptoms involve behaving in an aggressive manner, inability to perform routine daily functions, excessive use of substance and perceptual symptoms such as seeing or hearing things that others cannot see.

Statistically, over 450 million people in the world live with mental disorder (WHO, 2021). Similarly, a study of Kim et al (2022) revealed that mental disorder is more prevalent among adolescents who are majoring in universities. Concordantly, report by Kang et al (2021) revealed that 43.2% of Nigeria university students have been diagnosed with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, while 24.2% are currently in therapy and 35.8% are taking antidepressant medication. This explains the degree at which mental problems are becoming prevalent across the nations of the world. It is also estimated that 5% of the entire African population suffers from one mental illness or another and that this number is expected to rise to 15% by 2030 (WHO, 2021). This situation has contributed significantly to the global burden of disorders such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders among the victims.

In Benue state particularly and most parts of the North Central states of Nigeria, the challenge of mental health is a major concern. These states face a lot of insecurity as a result of Fulani insurgency, challenge of displacement from their ancestral land and from the source of livelihoods, resettlement issues in foreign habitats with inadequate facilities and minimum form of livelihoods. The scenario is pathetic because women and children are involved to the extent that some children have been born and bred in the internally displaced peoples' homes. Families have been disorganized, people have witnessed the killings, death and rape of family members, while people remain helpless with no hope on the way forward. Post-traumatic stress disorder occurs when a person experiences a traumatic event such as physical or emotional abuse, natural disaster, war, accidents and sexual and physical assault. The onset of mental problems at an early age can be worrisome because that is the period of growth and development in all the aspects of human life.

Kim et al (2022) reported that the onset of the major forms of mental disorders such as schizophrenia is between the early teens and twenties, while

depression during adolescence can affect socio-emotional and educational life goals. According to Fung et al, (2021) students experiencing mental health problems (DHD, anxiety, or depression) tend to have academic, social and behavioral problems. Students are likely to have delays in reading which may contribute to school dropout, suspension and poor academic performance. Kim, (2022) revealed some symptoms associated with mental health disorder as difficulty sitting and focusing during teaching and learning, difficulty in managing and prioritizing tasks and difficulty in talking and interacting with peers. Neglect of these symptoms result in an adverse effect of mental disorder leading to suicidal ideation, (Bankat et al 2023).

Currie (2020), revealed that adverse mental health disorders such as psychosis develop from childhood and persist into adulthood unless the causes are identified and treated timely. It has become urgent to identify and help students who are experiencing mental health problems. Early detection of mental health problems can help improve academic outcomes, prevent the extension of mental health problems into adulthood and ensure timely treatment and interventions. Researchers have identified a significant and positive relationship between the timely detection of behavioral, emotional problems and academic performance (Ji et al 2022). Students who receive timely intervention and medication are more likely to have better academic outcomes and graduate from university on time. (Xiang et al., 2020). It is on this basis that the study seeks to assess the prevalence rate of mental disorder among universities in Benue state.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the prevalence rate of various mental health disorders among university students in Benue state.

The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the prevalence rate of the forms of mental health disorders among university students in Benue state.
2. Identify the factors responsible for mental health disorder among university students in Benue state.
3. Assess the awareness level of the students towards the signs and symptoms of mental disorders for early detection and prevention among university students in Benue state.

Methodology

Study design

The study employed survey research design. The design was adopted because of the appropriateness of the design in gathering information on the prevalence rate of the forms of mental health disorders, possible factors responsible for mental health disorder and awareness level of the students towards the signs and symptoms of mental disorders thereby describing it in a systematic manner that are specific and familiar to respondents.

Population of the Study

The population of the study was 12,339 comprising of both male and female first year undergraduate students from the three Universities in Benue State for the 2018/2019 academic session: Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi 5,069, Benue State University Makurdi 5,770 and University of Mkar, Mkar 1,500 students respectively (Academic Offices of Universities, 2019).

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for the study was 387 respondents drawn from a population of 12,339 first year undergraduate students at the selected Universities using Taro Yamene (1967) sample determination formula. The study adopted both proportionate and random sampling techniques to select 387 respondents as the sample size.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instruments used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers titled 'Mental Health prevalence Questionnaire (MHP).' The instrument had sections A and B. Section A obtained the personal information of respondents, while section B obtained information on the variables on prevalence rate of mental disorders among university students in Benue State. The instrument was based on a four- point scale weighted from Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) =1.

Data was collected through the administration of the questionnaire with the support of two research assistants. Three hundred and eighty-seven (387) questionnaires were distributed. Data collection lasted for eight weeks.

Method of Data Analysis

The data for the study was analyzed using descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation. The data was computed with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 20.

Results

Table 1 presents the average mean and standard deviation responses on the prevalent rate of the different types of mental disorder among university students in Benue State. The result revealed that five (5) mental disorders were prevalent among the university students in Benue State while two forms of mental health were low using the mean rule of 2.5 and above as significantly high.

Table 1: Responses on the Prevalent Rate of the Different Types of Mental Disorders Among University Students in Benue State

Items	Prevalence	Decision
Anxiety	3.22	High
Depression	2.64	High
Psychosis	2.55	High
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	3.22	High
Schizophrenia	2.4	Low
Eating Disorders	2.1	Low
Disruptive behavior and dissocial disorders	3.4	High

Table 2 presents the average mean and standard deviation responses on the factors responsible for mental health disorders among university students in Benue state. The result shows that all the items (10) presented are responsible for mental disorders in the universities with the mean range of 2.68-3.52 and a cluster mean of 3.03.

Table 2: Responses On Factors Responsible for Mental Health Disorder Among University Students in Benue state.

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Crisis	3.20	.79
Poverty	3.17	.80
Genetics	3.23	.86
Drug abuse	3.52	.65
Natural disaster	2.56	1.20
Social exclusion	2.84	1.10
Personal assault	2.68	1.10
Too much workload	2.68	1.11
Excess consumption of alcohol	3.45	.67
Environmental condition of the place of living	3.00	1.10
Cluster Mean	**3.03**	**.929**

Table 3 presents the average mean and standard deviation responses on the awareness level of the signs and symptoms of mental disorders among university students in Benue State. The result shows that majority of students are not aware of signs and symptoms of mental disorders among university students in Benue State using the mean rule of 2.5 and above for awareness.

Table 3: Responses on awareness level of early signs and symptoms of Mental disorder among University Students in Benue State

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Difficulty in sleeping	2.1	.87	Not aware
Social withdraw	2.4	.86	Not aware
Loss of self esteem	2.3	.88	Not aware
Decline in personal care	2.3	.58	Not aware
Conduct disorder	2.4	.75	Not aware
Suicidal ideation	3.3	.68	Aware
Exaggerated or unusual beliefs	2.6	1.10	Aware
Loss of desire to participate in any activity	2.4	.75	Not aware
Problems with concentration and memory	2.4	.90	Not aware
Problem of inconsistent schooling	3.3	.78	Aware

Discussion

The result revealed that mental disorder exists among university students in Benue state, rating anxiety and post-traumatic stress as the emerging mental health disorder experienced among university students in Benue state. This might be due to the isolation nature of the university environment, since students are away from home and are faced with the mandate to be self-sufficient. This compliments Bankat (2023) who states that most youth suffer from mental disorder with anxiety disorder being the most frequent. Furthermore, Abubakar et al (2025) reported that limited access to mental healthcare and ignorance are the leading cause of the prevalence of mental disorder in Nigeria. Orok et al (2023)

revealed that the high prevalence of mental disorder among youths is because the students are prone to experience psychological discomfort and anxiety. In addition, Bankat (2023) revealed that anxiety prevalence among university students may be due to transitions, peer pressure at school, pressure from the community, new social situations and disappointing expectations.

Factors responsible for mental health disorders were stated as poverty (3.17), drug abuse (3.520, crisi (3.20), environmental conditions (3.0). This implies that people with happy and supportive family ties and environment have more self-esteem and have a lower likelihood of developing mental health diseases. This finding is like the finding of Shi et al (2022) that students from peaceful families and communities score higher on self-esteem than those from household and communities that experience crisis. This indicates that the constant crisis experienced by people in Benue state has a significant effect on the university students of Benue state, thus requires an immediate intervention. The study highlighted drug abuse as a factor that is responsible for mental health disorders, this is because substance abuse is detrimental to the overall physiological health of the brain. Stacy (2025) revealed that substance abuse impairs cognitive functions resulting in memory loss, problems with learning, dementia and severely hinder mental functioning in most severe cases. In addition, Okor et al (2023) revealed that the use of drugs promotes affiliation with antisocial peer groups which decreases school involvement and heightens other behavioral and social issues.

The study revealed that majority of the students are unaware of the early signs and symptoms of mental disorder to seek immediate intervention. Late detection of mental disorder is detrimental to the health of an individual and may lead to suicidal ideation or death in some cases. Bankat (2023) noted that some reasons for late detection are subtle, resulting in delay treatment. This study is therefore able to uncover the causes and symptoms of mental health disorder in order to encourage early detection and remediation for university students in Benue state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on this finding, mental health challenge is real occurrence among students in Benue state. it is essential to create an awareness program among the students on the need to identify the early signs and symptoms of mental disorders for immediate treatment and adverse prevention.

The study recommends the following:

1. Creation of awareness programs by the university management, non-governmental agencies and the government to identify early signs and symptoms of mental health disorder among students in Benue State.
2. Implementation intervention programs by social health workers to provide mental health services, educational initiatives and additional support programs to mitigate the prevalent rate of mental disorders among university students in Benue State.

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