Mental Health An Increasing Challenge in Kenya Universities: The case of Kabarak University

Dr Eunice Wambui Njenga

Student Affairs Kabarak University, Private bag 20157 Kabarak, Kenya

enjenga@kabarak.ac.ke

ABSTRACT

Mental health issues continue to affect many young people globally and even in Kenya. Some students in our University are affected by mental health challenges. Some of the common challenges include depression, anxiety disorders and bipolar disorders. As a result of the mental health challenges many students react negatively upon any slight provocation. They have also attempted suicide and become very arrogant. Some of the students indulged in drugs and alcohol as they hope to forget the challenges they are facing. This study seeks to assess the common mental health issues students in the university are facing, establish the causes of this challenges and what interventions can be put in place to prevent or handle students struggling with this issues. This study will employ a descriptive survey design. The method is considered the best because it is an excellent vehicle for measuring opinions, feelings, attitudes, perceptions and orientation in a large population. The study aims to provide a true picture of the situation and form a proper basis not for evaluation of the mental health status of university students. The study will adopt a descriptive survey method. The study will target total population of 5500 students and counselors from Kabarak University. The sample size will consist of 377 students and 4 student counselors.The findings of the study will help students, the ministry of education, University administration, the counselors and the community at large to know some of the mental health issues they are facing understand the causes and know they can get help and members of the community can also be helped when they are faced with mental health issues. The study will also create awareness on the growing number of people facing mental health issues this will help reduce the stigma that is causing many people not to seek treatment early leaving many at a point of losing their mental capacities. The society is currently experiencing many suicide cases, domestic violence, battering of spouses and children and other negative issues which can be traced to the poor mental states of many people. The findings of this study are hoped to encourage people to seek help since help is available.

**Key words:** Mental Health and disorders

INTRODUCTION

The number of people suffering with mental challenges has greatly increased in Kenya. Many people continue to suffer in silence because of the stigma associated with mental health issues. According to Margaret Maina (2018) many people are struggling with depression, this is the most common illness worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).Last year alone; about 450 million people were affected by depression globally while Kenya was ranked at position four in Africa with 1.9 million people who have the condition. Depression is a disorder characterized by a persistently low mood, sadness and loss of interest. It is a persistent problem, not a passing one, lasting on average six to eight months. It is a silent killer that holds its victims captive for months before striking a fatal blow. Many who have the condition do not want to admit that they are depressed and so, fail to seek help. Many people with depression walk around with a smile, but are ashamed to show the world what their souls are really going through. They hide the fact that they are dying inside even from close friends and relatives because they don’t want society to judge them.

Many students are getting depressed as a result of many causes which include Culture shock as a result of new student experiences in a school, college or university, the struggle to fit in and peer pressure to abuse drugs. Institutions of higher learning provide the perfect breeding ground for depression. A struggle with body weight is one of the reasons known to cause depression all over the world. Some individuals may develop eating disorders as they struggle to achieve the desired weight. Depression can also run in the genes, just like some types of diseases. If there are people who have had depression in a family, some relatives will be prone to it, the same way people who have ailments like diabetes and high blood pressure who at some point start developing those symptoms without any particular trigger. Financial constraints are also a contributing factor for depression (Margaret Maina, 2018).

According to Erica Riba and Diana Cusumano Depression is a medical condition that can affect a student’s ability to work, study, interact with peers of take care of themselves. Symptoms of depression may include difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, appetitive changes, withdrawing from participating in activities once enjoyed, feelings of sadness, hopelessness, unhappiness and difficulty concentrating on school work, symptoms of depression.

**Statement of the problem**

Mental health issues continue to affect many young people globally and even in Kenya. Some students in our University are affected by mental health challenges. Some of the common challenges include depression, anxiety disorders and bipolar disorders. As a result of the mental health challenges many students react negatively upon any slight provocation. They have also attempted suicide and become very arrogant. Some of the students indulged in drugs and alcohol as they hope to forget the challenges they are facing. This study seeks to find out which are the common mental health issues students in the university are facing, what are the causes of this challenges and what interventions can be put in place to prevent or handle students struggling with this issues.

**Research objectives**

1. To assess the mental health challenges faced by Kabarak University students.
2. Determine the causes of mental health challenges experienced by Kabarak University students
3. Explore interventions that can be helpful in dealing with mental health issues in Kabarak University.

**Justification of the study**

Universities in Kenya have recently reported an increase of suicide cases and students who are mentally disturbed these issues can be traced to their mental health. This study seeks to understand the mental health of our students in the University with its focus on Kabarak University**.**

**Significance of the study**

The findings of the study will help students, the ministry of education, University administration, the counselors and the community at large to know some of the mental health issues they are facing understand the causes and know they can get help and members of the community can also be helped when they are faced with mental health issues. The study will also create awareness on the growing number of people facing mental health issues this will help reduce the stigma that is causing many people not to seek treatment early leaving many at a point of losing their mental capacities. The society is currently experiencing many suicide cases, domestic violence, battering of spouses and children and other negative issues which can be traced to the poor mental states of many people. The findings of this study are hoped to encourage people to seek help since help is available.

**Assumptions**

The respondent’s views will reflect the actual mental health status of a majority of the students in the University. The students are well informed of mental health issues in the University. The University counselors are aware of the mental status of the majority of students.

**Scope**

The research will be conducted in Kabarak University to find out the mental health of Kabarak University. Kabarak University is one of the private Universities in Kenya that admits students from diverse backgrounds both from Kenya and internationally.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**THE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FACED BY KABARAK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.**

Mental health continues to be a big challenge globally and continues to affect all nations in the world some countries are more affected than others. The leading mental health challenge is depression. Although depression is a common health problem and has been shown to have detrimental effects on the students' studies few studies in Kenya have addressed the mental health problems in Kenyan universities. It is estimated that mental, neurological and substance use disorders account for 13% of the total global burden of disease (Ustun et al., 2004; Kessler, et al., 2003; Reddy, 2010;Ferrari et al., 2013) and that depression alone accounts for over 40% of the mental disabilities. Moreover, people with depression have a 40–60% chance of dying prematurely compared to the general population. There is also evidence that depression can predispose people to various diseases such as diabetes, myocardial infarction, HIV infection and death from suicide (Rubin et al., 2009; Nduna et al., 2010).

The prevalence of depression varies widely across cultures with developed countries recording higher rates than those of developing countries (Kessler and Bromet, 2013). However, the associated risk factors are largely the same including role transitions and low work performance. Given, that effective treatments for depression is now available, it is unfortunate that case identiﬁcation and treatment remain low. Hence there is need for stepping up the awareness campaigns and early evidence based intervention (World Health Organization, 2013).Prevalence rates of depression among students vary widely, perhaps as a reﬂection of the different methodologies and instruments used

According to Dr Njau J W, a consultant psychiatrist for South Rift and Central Regions, 17 to 25 percent of the population suffers from depression between the ages of 20 and 50. “I attend to over 30 patients a month," he said. Dr Njau said depression is more common in women than men on a 2:1 ratio due to hormonal differences, psychosocial stressors and environmental factors. Mr John Mututho, the CEO and founder of Jomec rehabilitation centre in Nakuru, said everyone is prone to depression, irrespective of age. “The first step to recovery is to admit that you need help, then seeking treatment,” he said. (Maina, 2019)

Low levels of stress and anxiety are a part of most people's lives. In turn, experiencing these feelings does not necessarily mean that you have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders occur when anxiety interferes with your daily life, halting your ability to function, and causing an immense amount of stress and fear. [The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) reports](https://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics) that anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S. today. According to the organization's report, anxiety disorders affect 40 million adults over the age of 18, yet only one-third seek and receive treatment. The ADAA says that nearly 75% of those affected by an anxiety disorder will experience their first episode before the age of 22.

As a result of poor mental health some people opt to commit suicide to deal with the problems they are facing. Suicide is the act of deliberately taking one's own life. Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and despair can build when students don't take steps to cope with stressors. Suicide affects everyone, including a victim's friends and family. [In a 2011 report from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm), 39,518 suicides were reported in the U.S., making it the 10th leading cause of death that year. In 2013, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, [according to the ADAA](https://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/suicide). It is now the [second leading cause of death in college students in the United States](https://collegian.com/2016/12/suicide-now-second-leading-cause-of-death-among-college-students/), based on an American College Health Association report. The review of mental health data also finds that the suicide rate for men is three times higher than the rate for women. Figures from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that the suicide rate per 100,000 people in Kenya is seven, with the rate for men being 11 and women three (Mutisya, J, 2018). Suicide in our universities continue to increase and it’s a major concern of this paper since students seem to be unable to handle rejections from their fellow students when in a relations in the past few month Kenya has experienced several suicides after love turns sour.

Millions of college students — both women and men alike — develop eating disorders during their college years. The vast majorities don’t seek help or don't realize the extent of their problem. Eating disorders are extreme behaviors, emotions, and attitudes that revolve around food and weight perceptions. These disorders cause serious mental and physical problems that can result in life-threatening issues when left untreated. According to statistics provided by the [National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)](http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/): Eating disorders are extremely common among all ages and genders — at least 30,000,000 people in the United States suffer from some type of eating disorder. Of all mental disorders, individuals suffering from eating disorders have the highest mortality rate. One person dies as a direct result of an eating disorder every 62 minutes. Males are nearly as likely to develop a disorder as women. Due to cultural views of eating disorders, however, they don't often seek treatment — bulimia and anorexia are seen as women. The signs and symptoms of eating disorders vary by person and condition and many depend on the mental state of the individual suffering from the disorder. However, there are several red flags that are common factors for anorexia, bulimia, and binging. These include: Distorted or poor body image, Excessive exercise, Irregular heartbeats, dehydration, Feeling like eating is out of control, Fear of eating in public, constantly making excuses for eating habits. Many college students do not seek treatment for their eating disorder, nor do they believe they've developed a problem. Eating disorders are potentially life threatening and can contribute to serious health issues if not treated properly, including: Kidney failure, stunted growth, Loss of menstruation, Failure in the reproductive system, Heart problems. Today young people especially those in Universities are increasingly concerned with their body image and are ready to carry out extreme exercises to ensure they remain slim since they believe looking fat makes them less attractive.

Alcohol and drug use has become commonplace on many college campuses throughout the U.S. For some students, what starts as a social tradition can become a full-fledged addiction. An addiction is defined as a dependency and repeated abuse of a substance such as drugs or alcohol. [The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) reports that](https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/special-populations-co-occurring-disorders/college-drinking): About 25% of students who regularly drink report academic problems tied to their drinking habits. Nearly 60% of college students have consumed alcohol in the past month, and nearly two out of three of those students engaged in binge drinking during the same period. Almost 20% of college students meet Alcohol Use Disorder criteria. The 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [reports that 21.3% of young adults between 18 and 25 used illicit drugs](http://archive.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2012SummNatFindDetTables/NationalFindings/NSDUHresults2012.htm#fig2.9). Of that same age group, [3.8% admitted to using psychotherapeutic drugs for non-medical purposes](https://www.drugs.com/drug-class/psychotherapeutic-agents.html). Drug and substance abuse is a big problem among university students in Kenya this is a major concern of this paper since there is an increase in drug and substance consumption among universities there is need for more research to address the issue of alcohol and drugs consumption which is leading to more psychological disorders among universities.

The following are common disorders that affect students: Bipolar disorder this is a mood disorder that is characterized by extreme mood swings that include one or more episodes of mania (an overexcited, unrealistically optimistic state) Coryell and others, 1999). Schizophrenia is a severe psychological disorder characterized by distorted thoughts, and perceptions, odd communication, inappropriate emotion, abnormal motor behaviour and social withdrawal. Dementia is a general term for a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life. Memory loss is an example Alzheimer’s is the most common type of dementia.

**THE CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY KABARAK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

Culture shock as a result of new student experiences in a school, college or university, the struggle to fit in and peer pressure to abuse drugs. Institutions of higher learning provide the perfect breeding ground for a struggle with body weight is one of the reasons known to cause depression all over the world. Some individuals may develop eating disorders as they struggle to achieve the desired weight.

Depression can also run in the genes, just like some types of diseases. If there are people who have had depression in a family, some relatives will be prone to it, the same way people who have ailments like diabetes and high blood pressure who at some point start developing those symptoms without any particular trigger. Financial constraints are also a contributing factor for depression. Dr. Lukoye Atwoli rejects the notion that the political and economic environment are to blame for the high number of people battling depression, saying there is no one specific cause of depression. “The causes are many and they range from biological factors such as genetic makeup, pregnancy complications and certain illnesses in childhood. The psychological issues include the personality of the person and other risk factors such as how they behave and think. Finally, there are social factors such as how you are brought up, where you live and the state of your environment.” (Mutisya, J, 2018)

These factors combine to determine whether a person will get mental illness or not. Biological factors give you the risk of getting the illness while psychological and social issues determine when it will appear. Environmental and social stressors such as unemployment and bereavement can trigger depression. With about two million cases of depression annually, Kenya ranks second in East Africa after Tanzania (2.1 million cases), according to WHO data. There are concerns that the number could be higher since there are people who are depressed yet do not seek treatment. Nigeria, the most populous country in the continent, leads with seven million cases, followed by Ethiopia (four million) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (three million). Seychelles recorded the lowest number of cases in the world at 3,722

**INTERVENTIONS THAT CAN BE HELPFUL IN DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN KABARAK UNIVERSITY.**

This year, about five public universities have reported student suicides. Some like Kenyatta University have put up counseling units for students to respond to the cases, which appear to be on the rise. However, getting students to use the resources available to them has been a challenge. Other institutions, such as the Kenya Red Cross, have also put in place a system for those seeking help. For instance, the Red Cross has a toll free line — 1199 — for suicide help. However, the presence of counselors in institutions of learning is not enough. Experts have urged the universities to prepare first year students for the pressure they should expect after admission (Mutisya, J, 2018).

**METHODOLOGY**

This study will employ a descriptive survey design. The method is considered the best because it is an excellent vehicle for measuring opinions, feelings, attitudes, perceptions and orientation in a large population. The study aims to provide a true picture of the situation and form a proper basis for evaluation of the mental health status of University Students

**Population of the study**

According to Kabarak University Admissions office the current student population stands at 5000. The target population will be 5000 and the sample size will be 381 based on the table for determining sample size for a given population.

**Sampling procedure.**

The University students will be sampled from first years and second years since these students may still be adjusting to the University environment. The researcher will employ snowball sampling and purposive samplings to be able reach the students.

**Research Instruments**

The researcher will use two questionnaires which will be administered to students and University Student Counselors. The questionnaires will include open and closed questions which will address issues such as the types of mental health issues found among students, the causes of this mental health issues and ways people with mental health issues can be helped.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Questionnaires will be handed out to the 200 participants in Kabarak University with the assistance of research assistants. The respondents will include 3 student Counselors in Main Campus and one in two campus and 200 students from main and two campuses.

**Data Analysis**

The results will be analyzed using percentages and frequencies. The analysis will be done using the statistical package for social science.

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**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNVERSITY STUDENTS**

This questionnaire is intended to assess the increase mental health challenges faced by University students.Please answer questions as truly as possible. All information will be treated confidentially. Kindly do not put or indicate your name in the questionnaire. Tick or comment briefly where applicable.

**Section A: Biodata information**.

1. Name of your Campus …………………………………………….

b) Gender Male ( ) ii) Female ( )

1. What is your age bracket

i). 17 -18( )

ii) 18- 19 ( )

iii 19- 20 ( )

iv) 20-21( )

**Section B**

2 Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health challenge?

i) Yes ii) No iii) I don’t know

3. A person with a mental health challenge may have the following symptoms. Indicate any symptom that you have experienced in the last four months.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Symptoms | rare | never | frequently |
| Low moods |  |  |  |
| Prolonged sadness |  |  |  |
| Loss of interest |  |  |  |
| Quick to anger |  |  |  |
| Quick irritabilitality |  |  |  |
| Frequent hallucinations |  |  |  |
| Withdrawal |  |  |  |
| Fear of rejection |  |  |  |

5. Mental health challenges are caused by the following causes indicate the frequency of this causes

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Causes | Never | Rare | common | frequent |
| Culture shocks |  |  |  |  |
| Struggle with body weight |  |  |  |  |
| Genetic make up |  |  |  |  |
| Financial constraints |  |  |  |  |
| pregnancy complications |  |  |  |  |
| certain illnesses in childhood |  |  |  |  |
| Personality of the individual |  |  |  |  |
| How one was brought up |  |  |  |  |
| The state of your Environment |  |  |  |  |
| Where you live |  |  |  |  |

6. The following are psychological challenges that affect the mental health of our students. Indicate if you have ever experienced any of the following disorders.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Type of disorder | No | Yes |
| Obsessive compulsive disorder |  |  |
| Bipolar disorder |  |  |
| Schizophrenia |  |  |
| Anxiety disorder |  |  |
| Depression |  |  |
| Suicidal tendencies |  |  |
| Drug induced depression |  |  |
| Panic disorder |  |  |
| Phobia |  |  |
| Sleep disorder |  |  |
| Sexual disorder |  |  |
| Adjustment disorders |  |  |
| Mood disorders |  |  |

7. How frequent are these disorders seen among our students

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of disorder | Never | Rare | Common | Frequently |
| Obsessive compulsive disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Bipolar disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Schizophrenia |  |  |  |  |
| Anxiety disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Depression |  |  |  |  |
| Suicidal tendencies |  |  |  |  |
| Drug induced depression |  |  |  |  |
| Panic disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Phobia |  |  |  |  |
| Sleep disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Sexual disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Adjustment disorders |  |  |  |  |
| Mood disorders |  |  |  |  |

8. The following are intervention developed by the university to address mental health issues how effective are the methods

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Intervention | effective | Not effective |
| Open forums |  |  |
| Individual Counselling |  |  |
| Group Counselling |  |  |
| Psychiatry help (Outside the university) |  |  |

How can the University improve on helping students with mental health challenge?

**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNVERSITY COUNSELORS**

This questionnaire is intended to assess the increase mental health challenges faced by University students. Please answer questions as truly as possible. All information will be treated confidentially. Kindly do not put or indicate your name in the questionnaire. Tick or comment briefly where applicable.

**Section A: Biodata information**.

1. Name of your Campus …………………………………………….

b) Gender Male ( ) ii) Female ( )

**Section B**

2 Mental health challenge has become an increasing challenge in our university have you counselled any student in the last four months having a mental challenge?

i) Yes ii) No iii) I don’t know

3. A person with a mental health challenge may have the following symptoms. Indicate any frequency of symptoms that you have observed in the last four months.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Symptoms | rare | never | frequently |
| Low moods |  |  |  |
| Prolonged sadness |  |  |  |
| Loss of interest |  |  |  |
| Quick to anger |  |  |  |
| Quick irritabilitality |  |  |  |
| Frequent hallucinations |  |  |  |
| Withdrawal |  |  |  |
| Fear of rejection |  |  |  |

5. Mental health challenges maybe caused by the following indicate the frequency of this causes

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Causes | Never | Rare | common | frequent |
| Culture shocks |  |  |  |  |
| Struggle with body weight |  |  |  |  |
| Genetic make up |  |  |  |  |
| Financial constraints |  |  |  |  |
| pregnancy complications |  |  |  |  |
| certain illnesses in childhood |  |  |  |  |
| Personality of the individual |  |  |  |  |
| How one was brought up |  |  |  |  |
| The state of their Environment |  |  |  |  |
| Where you they live |  |  |  |  |

6. The following are psychological challenges that affect the mental health of our students. Indicate if you have ever counselled students with any of the following disorders.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Type of disorder | No | Yes |
| Obsessive compulsive disorder |  |  |
| Bipolar disorder |  |  |
| Schizophrenia |  |  |
| Anxiety disorder |  |  |
| Depression |  |  |
| Suicidal tendencies |  |  |
| Drug induced depression |  |  |
| Panic disorder |  |  |
| Phobia |  |  |
| Sleep disorder |  |  |
| Sexual disorder |  |  |
| Adjustment disorders |  |  |
| Mood disorders |  |  |

7. How frequent are these disorders seen among our students

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of disorder | Never | Rare | Common | Frequently |
| Obsessive compulsive disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Bipolar disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Schizophrenia |  |  |  |  |
| Anxiety disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Depression |  |  |  |  |
| Suicidal tendencies |  |  |  |  |
| Drug induced depression |  |  |  |  |
| Panic disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Phobia |  |  |  |  |
| Sleep disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Sexual disorder |  |  |  |  |
| Adjustment disorders |  |  |  |  |
| Mood disorders |  |  |  |  |

8. How do you help a student affected by mental health challenges?

9. How can the University improve on helping students with mental health challenge?