

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **Improving Students Mental Health and Psychological Well Being in the Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic**

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#### **Abstract**

Mentally healthy person is an adjusted person, not too distressed with the problems that face him. This chapter focus on improving student's mental health and psychological wellbeing in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. The state of mental and psychological health of students under COVID-19 lockdown were examined. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on psychological health of students, ways to improve students mental and psychological wellbeing were discussed in this chapter. It was suggested among others that federal, state government and education institutions should provide mobile connectivity and wireless network in major towns and cities to ease teaching and teaching techniques during this pandemic.

**Key words:** Mental health, psychological, Wellbeing, Pandemic, Depression,  
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#### **Introduction**

Mental health is the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. Mental health provides people with the capacity for rational thinking,

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communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience, and self-esteem. People experiencing emotional well-being or mental health function comfortably in a society and are satisfied with their achievements. Mental health is far more than the absence of mental illness. Speaking of happiness, getting along with others, a nice personality, of a good disposition, and so on, these are attributes of sound mental health (National Centre for Disease Control) (NCDC, 2020).

The present global pandemic of COVID-19 is capable of causing mental illness among the students if necessary, policies are not put in place. Mental disorders are health conditions marked by alterations in thinking, mood, or behaviour that cause distress, impair ability to function, or both. Meanwhile, mental illness is considered a clinically significant behaviour or psychological syndrome experienced by a person and marked by distress, disability, or the risk of suffering, disability, or loss of freedom. Mental health has to do with everyone's everyday life. It means the way people get along in their families, in the schools, in their job, at play with each other in the society (Cohen, 2017). For the teacher to function effectively in this period of global epidemic of COVID-19 he must be motivated by a sense of altruism, that is, they are working under the stress of global pandemic out of a desire to contribute something valuable to society. Although the work has an innately humanitarian purpose, it also has stressors that induce teachers to feel fearful, anxious, offended, helpless, repulsed, pitying, embarrassed, hopeless, angry, or have all of these emotions. The behaviour of students generally even before the onset of this global pandemic represent the range of human disturbance from violent, hostile, or aggressive to bizarre, repressed, or dependent. How teachers deal with these behaviours reflects their personal values and experiences (WHO, 2020).

Passive aggressive behaviour can be observed when a teacher resists request for adequate daily performance but expresses this resistance indirectly, hence the description as passive such resistance might take the form of procrastination, calling in sick, dawdling, intentional inefficiency, or forgetfulness (Torales *et al.*, 2020). Other warning signs of burnout are loss of energy and enthusiasm, fatigue, insomnia, and alcohol and drug use. Increasing burnout leads to more severe symptoms like physical illness or exhaustion, withdrawal mood changes, depression, hopelessness and increased use of alcohol and drugs. The global pandemic of corona virus disease

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(COVID-19) accompanied with myriad of psychological issues which rapidly compounded the public health burden (Torales *et al.*, 2020).

Wang *et al.*, (2020) identified increased prevalence of moderate to severe self-reported depressive and anxious symptomatology among the general population. Consequently, there is increase prevalence rate of psychologically distress and downstream negative academic consequences among the college students even during the normal situation without global pandemic. In a study conducted by Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong, and Zheng (2020) on students, it was documented that 25% of their sample reported to experience anxiety symptoms which was positively correlated with increased concerns about academic delays, economic effect of the pandemic on their daily life activities. The global pandemic has worsened pre-existing mental health conditions following the school closure by loss of routine and restriction of social connection (YoungMinds, 2020). The following were thoughts, feelings and reactions of students sampled when compiling this documents including feelings stressed or overwhelmed; anxiety, worry, or fear, racing thoughts, sadness, fearfulness, loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities, increased heart rate, stomach upset, fatigue and other uncomfortable sensations, frustration, irritability, anger, restlessness, agitation, feeling of hopeless and helpless, feeling of disconnected from others, trouble relaxing and apprehension about going to public places (YoungMinds, 2020).

Life is now opposite of what it used to be; COVID-19 is otherwise known as coronavirus disease which emanated from China in the last quarter of 2019 has no cure till now. The signs and symptoms of COVID 19 include fever, cough, sneezing, generalized body weakness, running nose, sore throat among others. The world Health Organization (2020) declared COVID 19 disease as notifiable disease and public health challenges early this year. The following guidelines were measures put in place to prevent the spread of the disease throughout the world: regular hand washing with soap and water under running tap for at least 20 minutes, use of alcohol based sanitizer, use of face mask, self-reporting and isolation for two weeks, quarantine, social distance, contact tracing, use of hand gloves where necessary, avoidance of social gathering and stay at home order. The few that had contacted the disease had mingled with the general population even before their isolation without realising that they had the virus. This is the real danger. A lot of people who have had contacts with original

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carriers of the virus don't even know they have the ailment and have in fact gone ahead to mingle with hundreds and thousands of others in the society, spreading the virus further. The federal and state governments put some measures in place to curb the further spread of the disease like restrictions of movement from one state to others and total ban on international travels, total lock down, closure of schools and colleges and Universities, ban on social and religious gathering, isolation and quarantine, contact tracing and closure of all institutions. Despite all these measures, citizens compliance is still poor. Hence, the alarming increase in new cases all over the country which still not allowed the federal government to lift ban on closure of schools and colleges. The long stay of students at home without face to face educational activities is capable of causing some mental dullness, emotional imbalance, fear, anxiety and resulting in ill practices such as substance abuse, as a proverb says devil find work for idle hands. Hence, there is need to improve mental and psychological wellbeing of the students in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic.

The global pandemic of corona virus requires longer periods of preparation to curtail the spread of the virus and provision of vaccines against the virus has not yet materialized. It is quite unfortunate that there is no established medical care for the treatment of corona virus as at today (NCDC, 2020). All the affected victims were treated symptomatically with increase in their vitamins and vegetable intake. Patient with respiratory challenges were given ventilator and bronchi dilator to ease their breathing. Isolation, quarantine and self-isolation, regular hand washing, with soap, maintenance of social distance, use of hand sanitizer, restriction of movement, lockdown order and ban on interstate movement and closure of schools were measures adopted to prevent further spread of the disease (WHO, 2020). Efforts were made to prevent community spread of the pandemic. All the aforementioned strategies may have led to tensions and frustration. Everyone experiences tension; tension means a pull, pressure or stress. Hunger and thirst are physical tensions that must be satisfied. Need for love, for attention and for security are emotional tensions which must also be satisfied. Emotional upsets make life difficult and painful. Before the closure of schools, students enjoyed social interaction amongst themselves, there was joy and happiness in student-teachers' interactions; leaving homes every day, travelling in the traffic, socializing with Okada riders and taxi drivers had a social contribution to their

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lives. All these in addition to physical exercises and mental activities involved in daily school works have been dampened by the lockdown order.

### **State of the Mental and Psychological Health of Students under COVID-19 Lockdown**

Mental health of students should be the concern of every reasonable teacher, parent and education policy makers all over the world today while considering the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of the students, and considering that the entire performance of the student depends on his mental health. This consideration became crucial because disturbances in the mental health not only have negative effects on the particular student but also have serious negative consequences on the society, as students of today are the leaders of the society in the future (Sai-Sailesh, Sarilatha, Gothy, Potey, Monja, Hirok-Chakraborty, Mahadik, 2020).

Lockdown has been the temporary solution to checkmate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic up till date. In this process, all schools; primary, secondary and tertiary institutions including the private-owned were closed down. Students were sent home indefinitely with no date for resumption of academic activities. Before the closure of schools, students were at different stages of academic calendar as some were already warming up for end of term examinations, some in higher institutions were preparing to transit to a new semester when some were writing their graduating examinations. All those preparations were abruptly stopped and students were thrown into a kind of mental and psychological trauma of what to do, where to go and so on. It is certain that students do experience lots of mental stress while preparing for, or while writing examinations. Examinations were postponed with no definite date. Students now find themselves in the dilemma of reading and waiting without any signal of when they will be invited back to school for the examinations. This situation gives students a kind of mental stress.

According to Sandro, Riva and Nicole (2020) in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, it appears likely that there will be substantial increases in anxiety and depression, substance use, loneliness and domestic violence; and with schools closed

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there is a very real possibility of an epidemic of child abuse, sexual abuse and drug abuse. It is observed that cases of rape especially among the youths, adolescents and children had been rampant in Nigeria during this period of COVID-19 lockdown. According to David (2020) in the Premium Newspaper of 15th of June, 2020, there had been seven hundred and seventeen (717) cases of rape in Nigeria between January and May, 2020. Though, there had been cases of rape before this period in question, but the number invest have been so high as a result of the lockdown episode. When a man is idle, lonely or frustrated, the mind becomes a workshop of the devil as evil thoughts will creep in and devilish actions will follow. If empirical research is carried out on the victims of these cases of rape, a higher percentage would be students who are roaming about the streets as a result of the lockdown.

### **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Psychological Health of Students**

Psychological distress might have set in on students who have been sent parking from schools since the month of March 2020. As observed by Oberu, Akinsola, Agberotimi and Oguntayo (2020), the means of containing the pandemic such as self-isolation, quarantine, social distancing can pose a detrimental effect of psychological distress. Specifically, the loneliness effect of reduce social interactions is a risk factor for several psychological disorders such as; anxiety, isomnia, major depression and suicidal and delinquency behaviours among youths (Rubin and Wessely, 2020). According to Rubin and Wessely (2020), excessive quarantine has the tendency to give rise to anxiety significantly, for multiple reasons; even the elevated anxiety may also trigger and initiate the implications for some related mental health issues. Barbisch, Koenig and Shish (2015) had earlier observed the implications of confinement on the psychological well-being of the public (students inclusive), by pointing out hysteria, rejection and dejection feelings, observe-compulsive symptoms and mood challenges as conditions that can lead to complicated mental health issues in the victims of lockdown viz-a-viz isolation.

The social life of students' mental health has been negatively affected by the fall outs of COVID-19 lockdown, isolation and social distancing precautionary measures. An early draft of a study by researchers of Swansea University and the University of Manchester shows social distancing and isolation is having significant impacts on people's mental health and well-being. According to WHO, (2020) one of the big

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stressors is that students do not know how long they will stay away from school and academic activities. This has resulted to restlessness and mental gymnastics in the students. Students and pupils in secondary and primary schools are gregarious by nature and ecology. They are always found in groups of twos, three or more, interacting and socializing while at school. They engage in sports and other socially oriented activities such as drama, literary and debate societies, music and so on. All these activities have been abruptly stopped by the precautionary measures of COVID-19 pandemic. Like rivers, children adolescents and youths would always find ways to satisfy these natural drives and urges. In cases where they cannot get positive activities to satisfy their drives alternatives are juvenile delinquent behaviours such as sex abuse; some female student would prefer to reside in their boyfriends homes rather than their parents' substance abuse, cases of rape and gang star shouts as well as crimes like cultism, stealing and armed robbery may manifest.

The psychological impact also reflects on parents who are faced with the burden of keeping their children and wards busy, looking for means by which their learning can continue at home. Parents also want to keep their children at home and safe from contracting the COVID-19 disease. All these have negative impacts on the mental health of the students and the parents.

### **Ways to Improve Students Mental and Psychological Wellbeing**

To improve student's mental health and psychological wellbeing in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic, the following strategies should be put in place:

- a. Students should be usefully engaged
  - b. Realistic schedule of activities should be put in place
  - c. Read books and listen to radio programmes
  - d. Engage in social activities and sports
  - e. Eat good diet
1. **Students should be usefully engaged:** Students should seek help and communicate their needs with any meaningful individual within the community; parents can assist their children by engaging them in meaningful activities at home without the interference of an external person (Aljawarneh, 2019).

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2. **Realistic schedule of activities should be put in place:** Anxiety and poor coping can result from feeling overwhelmed; realistic schedule of personal activities and pleasures should be put in place (Hatfield and Lefley, 2013).
3. **Read books and listen to radio programmes:** Reading of books and literature as well as listening to radio and television educational programmes should be encouraged by the parents and guidance (Olaseni, Akinsola, Agberotimi, and Oguntayo, 2020).
4. **Engage in social activities and sports:** Students should learn to make use of musical instruments at their leisure times. They are also encouraged to engage in physical aerobic exercises in the mornings and evenings as this will help to tone up the muscles of the brain and reduce stress, depression and anxiety (Sanz, Sainz and Capilla, 2020).
5. **Eat good diet:** Students should be encouraged to eat nutritious food containing fibres fruits and vegetable. Food consumption should be minimized so as to avoid weight gain as students could be sedentary now unlike when they were in the school (Yen, Lo, Lee and Enrlquez, 2018).

### Conclusion

From this discourse, it is evident that students' mental health and psychological well-being has been negatively affected as a result of the precautionary measures for the COVID-19 pandemic as laid down by international health organization and the National health bodies and associations. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, mental stress, anti-social behaviours and poor inter-personal relationship are inevitable under these conditions. Parents and schools have roles to play so as to ameliorate the extent to which the impact of the pandemic could affect the mental and psychological health of the students viz-a-viz the future of the country.

### Suggestions

The following suggestios were made:

1. Teachers and students should recognize the potential of cell phone as tools for communication, teaching and learning in schools and colleges
2. Federal, State government and education institutions should provide mobile connectivity and wireless network in major towns and cities to ease teaching and teaching techniques during this pandemic.

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3. Electronic media and digitalization of all channels should be ensured by government in a bid to improve free flow of educational information for teaching and learning during the lockdown.
4. The government should create opportunity for teachers and lecturers to explore low cost technologies for dissemination of educational information in schools and colleges.
5. The teachers and students should be adequately motivated by the government and policy makers to improve their interest in teaching and learning.
6. Federal and State governments should promote internal reflection on the renewal of the teaching and learning model.

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