Chapter 12
Digital Mental Health Support for Students in Higher Institutions in Nigeria During Pandemics

Abel Ebiega Enokela

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4488-8614

Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This chapter examined the challenges associated with students' mental health in a pandemic period like the COVID-19 era and the expected coordinated response measures that should be in place to mitigate such challenges with focus on the mental health of students in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the most populous nation on the continent of Africa. Specifically, the review strengthened the need for school counselors' going back to the drawing board to come up with modalities that could keep students psychologically and emotionally healthy. Students normally enjoy school community life but would have to adjust their patterns of social interactions during an outbreak of an infectious disease. The review explored and applied the assumptions of social support theory which laid emphasis on supportive relationships within social contexts. School counselors were charged in this chapter to engage their students' community with digital mental health support to help them remain mentally healthy in spite of the adverse events usually provoked by the presence of a pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Impacts of pandemics have dominated research discourse since the outbreak of Covid-19, with varying emphases depending on research interests or concerns. Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary researches bringing researchers from different areas of specializations are inevitable to address some of the challenges posed to humanity as a result of an outbreak of a contagious disease like Covid-19. Pandemics could pose considerable mental health challenges to many students in Nigeria, as a result of increased

cases of robberies and violent crimes (Kalu, 2020), boredom, loneliness, poverty and anxiety which could come as aftermaths. Appropriate counselling therapeutic intervention is necessary to curb or flatten the curve of rising cases of psychological distresses among students, especially those in the higher institutions of learning, as consequences of a pandemic could be devastating. Following experts' observation, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic will generate considerable stress throughout the world (WHO, 2020; CDC, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Generally, mental health problems among students are on the increase with a number of them requiring therapeutic interventions (Macaskil, 2012; Lambie, Haugen, Borland, & Campbell, 2019; Christian, & Brown, 2018). Mental health could have negative statistical association with high morbidity rate that is capable of putting families and societies in a turmoil (Oostenbrink, Batelaan, De Graaf, & Beekman, 2006). As the world is battling with one of the most devastating pandemic- Covid-19, digitalization has to be extended to the counseling domain in order to help people, particularly, Nigerian students in institutions of higher learning for them to benefit from digital therapeutics. Mental health support to students is critical, drawing upon the claim of Starling Minds (2021) which stressed that over 90% of support and resources were provided for physical ailments with mental illness receiving little attention, and thereby increasing the number of mental health challenges among individuals as a result of lack of trained professionals to attend to them. This means that during a period of a pandemic, many students are likely to face a lot of mental health problems if therapists do not rise to help with an appropriate approach. Considerably, tertiary students' community life is crucial for their overall socialization processes, but when there is an outbreak of an infectious disease, this pattern would be altered. Thus, school counselors have the duty of facilitating a virtual community life among tertiary students to reduce boredom, isolation, depression, frustration and even suicide thoughts that may be threatening their mental wellbeing. The Nigerian Policy on Education (FRN, 2004; 2013) stipulated the need for counseling services in Nigerian schools to support students' career, education and emotional wellbeing. This makes it important for school counselors to wake up to render mental health services to students in the higher institutions of learning for the students to remain emotional healthy during a pandemic like Covid-19.

The world has consistently witnessed pandemics at various times. Huremović (2019) in a brief history of pandemics noted the Athenian plague of 430–26 B.C.; the Antonine plague of 161–180 A.D. believed to have been caused by smallpox; the Justinian plague of mid-6th century AD pandemic thought to have been caused by Yersinia Pestis; The Black Death, a bubonic pandemic which originated in China in 1334,with 60% fatalities in Europe; the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918–1920, adjudged to be the first real global pandemic; the Smallpox outbreak in former Yugoslavia in 1972 ; the SARS outbreak, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which occurred in 21st century with origin in China; the Swine Flu or H1N1/09 Pandemic in 2009; the Ebola Outbreak of 2014–2016, caused by Ebola virus; and the ZIKA outbreak in 2015–2016. All these pandemics made their negative impacts on lives of people at various points in history. However, the Covid-19 pandemic which started in China in 2019 seems to be the most devastating global pandemic in recent time. This has made Covid-19, which was still prevalent as at the time of writing this chapter, to attract research multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary attention, perhaps more than any other pandemic so far.

Counseling practice during pandemics, specifically, Covid-19 era in Nigeria should showcase the reality of the day, in terms of aligning philosophical inclinations or therapeutic models with the peculiarities birthed by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. It could be possible that school counselors and other mental health professionals did not prepare for the situation they find themselves in now in terms of the prevalence of Covid-19. Therefore, there is a need for urgent adjustments from different dimensions

16 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/digital-mental-health-support-for-students-in-higher-institutions-in-nigeria-during-pandemics/293412

Related Content

Explainable Learning Machines for Securing the IoMT Networks
Izhar Ahmed Khanand Dechang Pi (2023). *The Internet of Medical Things (IoMT) and Telemedicine Frameworks and Applications (pp. 135-154).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/explainable-learning-machines-for-securing-the-iomt-networks/313073

Impact of COVID-19 on Health Informatics
Asl Köse (2022). *Advancement, Opportunities, and Practices in Telehealth Technology (pp. 236-248).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/impact-of-covid-19-on-health-informatics/312093

Teaching Clinical Skills During Pandemic Times: Online Clinical Simulation
Maria Fernanda Chaparro, José Alberto Herrera, Miriam Lizzeth Turrubiatesand Silvia Lizett Olivares Olivares (2022). *Advancing Health Education With Telemedicine (pp. 249-273).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/teaching-clinical-skills-during-pandemic-times/293541

Role of Smart Wearable in Healthcare: Wearable Internet of Medical Things (WIoMT)
Jana Shafiand Amtul Waheed (2021). *Research Anthology on Telemedicine Efficacy, Adoption, and Impact on Healthcare Delivery (pp. 366-388).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/role-of-smart-wearable-in-healthcare/273475

How Online Counselling Is Utilised, Evaluated, and Received
Georgios Agathokleousand Abigail Olubola Taiwo (2022). *Digital Innovations for Mental Health Support (pp. 251-277).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/how-online-counselling-is-utilised-evaluated-and-received/293411