Chapter 18

Support Services to Enhance Students' Mental Health in Higher Education Institutions in Namibia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an overview of the support services to enhance students' mental health in higher education institutions in Namibia. In light of the myriad difficulties encountered by students on a daily basis, it is imperative to establish frameworks that guarantee the provision of essential assistance to foster academic excellence. An analysis was conducted by reviewing various sources in order to obtain an understanding of the student affairs and support services offered at three leading universities in Namibia. These services encompass a range of areas, such as counselling services, peer support programs, initiatives promoting mental health awareness, mental health screening, accommodation and support services, and crisis intervention services. Institutional support mechanisms in terms of policy and practice and recommendations for future practice are examined.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is crucial for students to succeed not only in their everyday lives, but most importantly, in their academic lives. However, students encounter numerous obstacles that complicate their lives, jeopardise their mental health, and impede their academic success (Abrams, 2022; Hans-Werner, 2015; Lattie et al. 2019; Pedrelli et al. 2015; Stein, 2013). Research evidence suggests that relationship prob-

lems, eating disorders, family issues, bereavement, stress, worry, abuse, and sexuality or gender identity crises are just a few of the problems students face daily (Pedrelli et al. 2015; Gupta et al. 2023). Pedrelli et al. (2015) argue that it is possible for mental health issues to develop for the first time as students get to higher education institutions due to academic pressure and other factors. The period of attending university is accompanied by a transitional phase in which the typical student experiences a new stage of personal growth, resulting in heightened obligations and duties. The importance of student mental health and its link to academic success is well documented (Bostani et al., 2014; Shankar & Park, 2016; Wyatt et al., 2017). Therefore, for students to have sound mental health, it is necessary to have support mechanisms in institutions of higher learning for those facing difficulties in place (Browne, 2017; Buizza et al. 2022; Hans-Werner, 2015; Prince, 2015).

In light of the considerable prevalence of mental health difficulties in student populations (Bantjes, et al. 2023; Katz & Davison, 2014; Macaskill, 2013; Oswalt et al., 2020; Porter, 2018), higher education institutions must provide comprehensive support systems that prioritise the promotion of students' psychological well-being. Indeed, many higher education institutions worldwide have been documented as having comprehensive structures in place, aiming aimed at promoting students' mental well-being and facilitate their academic focus (Cage et al., 2020; DiPlacito-DeRango, 2016; Giamos et al., 2017; Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Priestley et al., 2020). However, little is known about the support structures of students' mental health in institutions of higher education in Namibia. Thus, the chapter provides an overview of various student support services available at institutions of higher education in Namibia.

BACKGROUND

Mental health is a fundamental human right and an integral component of our overall health and well-being. The World Health Organisation [WHO] (2022) defines mental health as a condition of well-being in which every individual realises their potential, can deal with the pressures of everyday life, is productive in their work, and can make a positive contribution to society. Having sound mental health enables individuals to enhance their capacity for social interaction, cognitive functioning, adaptive coping, and overall well-being. For students to be able to navigate life's challenges in addition to those that are a direct consequence of being a student, mental health is even more crucial. Therefore, the prioritisation of student mental health within the context of higher education institutions should be a central focus in conversations pertaining to the overall welfare of students. According to Goodman (2017), mental health is a significant concern among post-secondary education students due to the unique developmental opportunities presented by institutions of higher education environment. This is because institutions of higher learning offer a crucial platform for equipping students with necessary skills to foster long-term mental health and overall well-being.

Mental health is a concern among the general population, and according to WHO (2022) approximately one in eight people in the world has a mental disorder. The prevalence of mental health difficulties among students is rising in response to the fast pace of modern society (Abelson et al., 2022; Hans-Werner, 2015; Johnson & Lester, 2021; Lattie et al., 2019; Storrie et al., 2010). According to Abrams (2022), today's students face a multitude of challenges encompassing academic demands, interpersonal dynamics, acclimation to the campus environment, financial constraints, societal inequities, instances of widespread violence, and multiple forms of loss. In addition to these challenges, post-secondary education entails heightened academic demands and exposure to new social environments. Brown (2016) noted that many

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