

## Chapter 20

# Institutional Support Available to Enhance the Mental Health of Students at the University of Namibia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter critically examines the institutional support systems aimed at supporting the mental health of students within the University of Namibia. The shift from childhood to adulthood brings with it special difficulties, leaving students open to a range of stresses that can negatively impact their mental health. This research examines common mental health problems among students, such as stress and anxiety, with a particular focus at the University of Namibia. The study highlights the necessity of an all-encompassing strategy that considers social, emotional, and intellectual aspects in order to create an environment where students can flourish both academically and mentally. This chapter adds to the continuing conversation on mental health in higher education by advocating for additional improvements and identifying successful initiatives. This chapter adds to the continuing conversation on mental health in higher education by advocating for additional improvements and identifying successful initiatives.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The mental health of university students is a topic of increasing concern, both globally and within the context of the University of Namibia (Pillay, 2022). Mental health emphasises the need to face life difficulties without the student collapsing under pressure. Campbell et al. (2022) explain that mental health

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challenges among university students is a rising concern. Furthermore, a study by Mutinta (2022) found that mental distress is more prevalent in student communities than in the general population. This is supported by Agrawal and Sharma (2022), who state that many mental disorders present among young people within the age range of 18 to 24 years, corresponding to the average enrolment in higher education institutions, an observation which is worrying. Mental health encompasses an extricable relationship between three factors: social, emotional and psychological wellbeing (Agrawal & Sharma, 2022). In addition, harmony between the three leads to mental wellbeing, signifying a process where the individual can think, feel, and react in varying conditions based on their decisions. When one or more of the three experiences distress, negative consequences will disturb the student's mental wellbeing (Neupert, 2022). It is critical for higher education institutions to consider students' mental health by providing supportive environment that will ensure harmony between their social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. A supportive environment for students is one which provides relevant services and supportive policies for students in higher institutions of learning can help them to successfully overcome their psychological challenges that may be encountered during their academic life. Alternative sources of support could help students to cope with psychological challenges and study skill adversities, which are some of the challenges experienced in higher education (Barrable et al., 2018). The term "student support" describes a broad range of services, tools and programmes that educational institutions offer to help students with many elements of their overall, academic and personal development (Huijser et al., 2022). These services are intended to improve students' success and overall wellbeing throughout their academic careers. Academic support, mental health and counselling services, financial aid, career counselling, and access to resources are just a few of the many aspects of student support that contribute to students' development, wellbeing and success in both academic and extracurricular contexts (Cenko & Canollari-Baze, 2018). The purpose of student support is to provide a welcoming, inclusive learning environment that promotes students' holistic development and assists them in overcoming obstacles they may face while pursuing their education (Simpson, 2018). The available institutional support services include counselling sessions, financial aid programs, and specialized resources designed to assist students in overcoming mental health challenges. This background underscores the vital need for continued institutional support, emphasizing the significance of targeted interventions, awareness campaigns, and the availability of resources to enhance the mental health and well-being of students at UNAM.

The psychological challenges faced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as isolation, a sense of threat and transiting to e-learning, exposed certain strengths and weaknesses in the mental health support system at universities (Iisiecka et al., 2023). A good understanding of factors that contribute to mental health distress among university students is crucial for higher education institutions. Positive diversity of mental health support for students at higher education institutions can help them to deal with stressors and future challenges without crumbling under pressure (Pandya & Lodha, 2022). In order to assist students' mental health, teachers are extremely important (Udah & Francis, 2022). They must be aware of the particular difficulties that students experience and offer chances for socialisation and emotional assistance. However, faculty members frequently lack the requisite expertise to recognise and successfully handle mental health issues (Ford & Parker, 2016). Institutions must therefore offer training courses that give teachers the knowledge and skills they need to support students' mental health. Institutions should also develop a learning atmosphere that supports students' overall wellbeing (Yao, 2023). This entails establishing a feeling of community, offering tools for mental health support, and putting into practice regulations that give students' mental health top priority. The University of Namibia (UNAM) can improve its efforts to promote the mental health of its students and foster an environment

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