



IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS IN USELU SECONDARY SCHOOL, EGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE

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ABSTRACT

The significance of mental health, particularly among secondary school students cannot be overemphasized. This stage in the life of secondary school students is characterized by numerous physiological, emotional, and mental transformations. The objectives of this study are to: identify the main factors contributing to students' mental health issues; determine the effectiveness of the current school social work interventions in addressing students' mental health issues; and to make recommendations on how to improve school social work in Uselu Secondary School in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The survey research design was adopted in this study. The primary data collection tool was a questionnaire, supplemented by a thorough review of relevant literature and documents. The sample size for the population of 897 which is approximately 900 at 95 % confidence level and 5% degree of accuracy was two hundred and sixty nine (269). The formula used to determine the sample size was the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970): $S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P) + d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P (1-P)}{}$. It was found that school social workers significantly impact students' mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The study emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development for school social workers, suggesting that regular training and support could enhance their ability to effectively support students. The findings also underscored the need for schools to prioritize mental health and wellbeing, recognizing that students' academic success is closely linked to their mental health. The research also underscored the importance of collaboration between schools and community agencies. The study recommended that school social workers should collaborate with school administrators and community agencies to create a supportive school environment. In conclusion, the research highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to student mental health, emphasizing that school social workers play a key role in connecting students and their families with a range of services.

Keywords: School Social Workers, Mental Health, Supportive School Environment, Mental Health Interventions, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the significance of mental health, particularly among secondary school students, has become increasingly apparent. The adolescent stage, characterized by numerous physiological, emotional, and mental transformations, is a critical phase in

the human lifespan. This period is often fraught with increased stressors, peer influences, academic pressures, and personal and social development hurdles (Steinberg, 2014). As a result, a substantial number of students are confronted with mental health challenges such as anxiety disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and behavioral problems. These mental health issues among



secondary school students have amplified in Nigeria in recent years, becoming a matter of urgent concern. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimates that approximately 20% of adolescents globally grapple with some form of mental health condition, and this percentage may be even higher in Nigeria. These mental health complications can have far-reaching implications on students' academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being.

To address these challenges, the field of school social work has emerged as an effective intervention to bolster students' mental health in secondary schools. School social workers are specialized professionals equipped with the skills to provide counseling, support, and interventions tailored to students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. These professionals play a critical role in fostering a positive, inclusive, and supportive learning environment that encourages mental health and well-being (Franklin, Kim, & Tripodi, 2009). Numerous studies have delved into the impact of school social work on students' mental health across various contexts. There is a strong consensus in the literature that interventions by school social workers can yield positive outcomes such as enhanced emotional well-being, increased school engagement, decreased disruptive behaviors, and improved academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). These interventions may encompass individual counseling, group therapy, psycho-education, crisis management, and concerted collaboration with teachers, parents, and community resources. However, despite the potential benefits of school social work interventions, there is a gap in understanding their impact within the Nigerian context. The secondary education system in Nigeria is faced with unique challenges such as limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient mental health services, and cultural nuances that dictate help-seeking behaviors (Atilola, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the distinct impact of school social work on students' mental health

in Nigerian secondary schools as this would provide valuable insights pertinent to practice and policy formation.

In Nigeria, the mental health of secondary school students is a pressing issue that demands urgent attention. A study carried out in Nigeria demonstrated that 41.8% of secondary school students experienced psychological distress, pointing towards a significant prevalence of mental health problems (Adewuya and Ologun, 2006). Moreover, evidence shows that socioeconomic factors and family dynamics can contribute to mental health problems among adolescents (Amone-P'Olak et al., 2014). School-based mental health programs are considered a viable solution to this issue. There is evidence that such programs, including depression literacy programs, can lead to significant positive changes in mental health literacy and attitudes in diverse settings (Wei et al., 2013). Nonetheless, implementing these programs in Nigeria's schools is fraught with challenges. The secondary education system in Nigeria faces a plethora of issues such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, low-quality teachers, and examination malpractices. These challenges can potentially undermine the effectiveness of school-based mental health programs.

Cultural nuances in Nigeria may also influence the effectiveness of these interventions. Societal attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking behaviors can affect students' willingness to participate in these programmes and their overall effectiveness (Atilola, 2015). Thus, a comprehensive approach is necessary when addressing mental health issues among secondary school students in Nigeria. This includes implementing school-based mental health programmes, addressing the broader challenges within the education system and society, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders such as educators, mental health professionals, parents, community leaders, and policymakers.

The existing literature on the impact of school social work in Nigeria is limited and, where available, tends to focus more on primary



schools and higher institutions. There is a gap in knowledge regarding the effectiveness of school social work interventions specifically tailored to the unique needs of secondary school students. Previous studies have highlighted the positive outcomes of school-based mental health interventions, such as improved emotional regulation, higher self-esteem, and enhanced academic engagement.

Research Questions

1. What is the current state of students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?
2. What are the main factors contributing to students' mental health issues in Uselu Secondary schools?
3. What are the current school social work interventions in place to support students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools?
4. How effective are the existing school social work interventions in addressing students' mental health issues in Uselu Secondary schools?
5. What are the potential areas of improvement for school social work interventions to better support students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools?

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the current state of students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools in Egor local government area of Edo state.
2. To identify the main factors contributing to students' mental health issues in Uselu Secondary Schools.
3. To evaluate the existing school social work interventions in place to support students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools.
4. To determine the effectiveness of the current school social work interventions in addressing students'

mental health issues in Uselu Secondary schools.

5. To propose recommendations for improving school social work interventions to better support students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted in this study. The primary data collection tool was the questionnaire, supplemented by a thorough review of relevant literature and documents. The population for this study consisted of all the Eight Hundred and Ninety Seven (897) students in Uselu Secondary School in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The sample size for the population of 897 which is approximately 900 at 95 % confidence level and 5% degree of accuracy was two hundred and sixty nine (269). The formula used to determine the sample size was the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970) cited in Bukhari (2020):

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P) + d^2 (N-1) + X^2 P (1-P)}{d^2}$$

Where S = required sample size; X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841); N = the population size; P = the population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 since this would provide maximum sample size; and d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05).

The collected data was analyzed using appropriate statistical technique. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages was used to summarize the demographic information and responses to the questionnaire items. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents, and strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The respondents were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

**Results****Table 1: Socio -Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

S/N	Variables	Attributes	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Gender	Males	155	57.6
		Females	114	42.4
2	Age	13 - 17 years	119	44.2
		18 - 21 years	150	55.8
3	Family Size	1-5	125	46.5
		6-10	102	37.9
		11years and above	41	15.2
5	Parenting Style	Dual Parenting	196	72.9
		Single Parenting	73	27.1

Source: Field work, 2024

Data in Table 1 revealed that out of the 269 respondents that were sampled in this study, 155 (57.6%) were males while 114 (42.2%) were females. The distribution of the respondents based on age revealed that 119 (44.2%) were between 13 and 17 years, while 150 (55.8%) were between 18 and 21 years. In

terms of family size, 125 (46.5%) were in a family size of between 1 and 5, and 102 (37.9%) were in a family size of 6 to 10, while 41 (15.2%) were in a family size of 11 years and above. In terms of parenting style, 196 (72.9%) have dual parenting style, while 73 (27.1%) have single parenting style.

Table 2: Do you believe that mental health is an important aspect of overall well-being?

	Frequency	Percent
YES	220	82%
NO	25	9.1%
UNDECIDED	24	8.9%
Total	269	100%

Source: Field survey, 2024

The above table showed that majority representing 82% of the total respondents believed that mental health is important to the overall well-being of students and 9.1% of the total respondents does not believe that mental health is important to the overall well-being of

students, and 8.9% were undecided in their responses on whether or not mental health is important to the overall well-being of students. This implies that the majority of the students agreed that mental health is important to the overall well-being of students.

Table 3: Have you personally received support or counseling from a school social worker?

	Frequency	Percent
YES	138	51.3%
NO	81	30.1%
UNDECIDED	50	18.6%
Total	269	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024



The table above showed that 51.3% of the total students agreed that they have personally received support and counseling from school social workers as regards their mental health concerns, and 30.1% of the total students disagreed that they have experienced personal support and counseling from social workers regarding their mental health concern, and

18.6% of the total students were undecided in their responses if they have experienced personal support and counseling from school social workers regarding their mental health concern. This implies that majority of the students have experienced personal support and counseling from school social workers regarding their mental health.

Table 4: Have you noticed any changes in your engagement with school activities or academics as a result of school social work interventions?

Responses	Frequency	Percent
YES	69	25.7%
NO	180	66.9%
UNDECIDED	20	7.4%
Total	269	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table above, showed that 23.7% of the total students agreed that they have noticed changes in their engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the school social work intervention, and 66.9% of the total students disagreed that they have noticed changes in their engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the school social work intervention, and 7.4%

of the total students were undecided in their responses if they have noticed changes in their engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the school social work intervention. This therefore implies that majority of the students did not notice any change in their engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the school social work intervention.

Table 5: Do you believe that school social work interventions should be improved to better support students' mental health in your school?

Responses	Frequency	Percent
YES	145	53.9%
NO	90	33.5%
UNDECIDED	34	12.6%
Total	269	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table above, showed that 53.9% of the total students agreed that school social work interventions should be improved to better support students' mental health in their school, and 33.5% of the total students disagreed with the need for improvement in school social work interventions regarding their mental

health concern, and 12.6% of the total students were undecided in their responses. This therefore implies that majority of the students believe there is a need for improvement in school social work interventions to better support students' mental health in their school.

Discussion of Findings



The data suggests that a significant proportion of the respondents (82%) consider their mental health as a crucial part of their overall well-being. This finding is consistent with the emphasis on mental health awareness in the World Health Organization's Mental Health Atlas (2014). The importance of mental health awareness is further highlighted in a study by Kutcher et al. (2016), which found that school administrators can influence the school's culture and climate to promote acceptance and understanding around mental health, thereby reducing stigma and encouraging students to seek help when they need it.

The table reveals that a large majority of the respondents (91%) are cognizant of the primary factors contributing to mental health issues among students in their school. Furthermore, Walter et al. (2019) emphasized the role of school administrators in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of mental health policies and interventions, which could involve collecting and analyzing data on student mental health outcomes.

The data indicates that only a small fraction of the respondents (18.6%) concur that there are existing social work interventions in place to support students' mental health in their schools. This finding suggests a need for more comprehensive and effective social work interventions, a sentiment echoed in the systematic review by Ramsey and Montgomery (2014).

The table shows that just over half of the respondents (51.3%) have personally received support or counseling from a school social worker for their mental health concerns. Dupper (2013) found that students who received individual counseling from school social workers experienced a decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety, indicating the effectiveness of such interventions.

The data suggests that a majority of the respondents (66.9%) have not noticed any change in their engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the school social work intervention. This finding is consistent with the study by Wang and Degol

(2014), which emphasizes the importance of student engagement for optimal learning outcomes. Furthermore, Flook et al. (2013) suggested that by advocating for mental health, school social workers contribute to students' increased engagement in their learning, which can lead to enhanced academic outcomes.

The result reveals that a majority of the respondents (53.9%) believe that school social work interventions should be improved to better support students' mental health in their school. This finding aligns with the study by Plaistow, Masson, and O'Reilly (2014), which found that young people have expressed the need for improvements in mental health services. This suggests a recognition of the need for continuous improvement in the provision of mental health support services in schools.

Conclusion

The study on the mental health of students, particularly in the context of school social work, has provided a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by students in secondary schools, especially in Nigeria. The research has underscored the urgent need for effective interventions and support systems to address the mental health issues among students, which have far-reaching implications on their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being.

The findings of the study have highlighted the significant role of school social workers in fostering students' mental health. Through services such as individual counseling, group therapy, crisis intervention, and family-school collaboration, school social workers have been found to positively impact students' mental health outcomes. The study has also emphasized the importance of a supportive and inclusive school environment where students can seek help and support. The research has shed light on the effectiveness of group therapy sessions facilitated by school social workers. These sessions provide a platform for students to share their



experiences, learn coping strategies, and develop social skills, thereby enhancing their overall mental wellbeing. The study has also highlighted the crucial role of school social workers in crisis intervention, further underscoring their importance in the school setting.

The study recommended that schools should actively involve social workers in addressing the mental health issues among students. It emphasized the need for the adoption of evidence-based practices and the implementation of effective mental health interventions in schools. The study also stressed the importance of collaboration between schools, community agencies, and families to provide comprehensive care and support for students. The research concluded that addressing the mental health issues among students is not only a matter of urgency but also a collective responsibility that requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders. The study further recommended that schools should prioritize mental health and wellbeing, recognizing that students' academic success is closely linked to their mental health.

It concluded that school social workers play a key role in connecting students and their families with a range of services and supports, and their role is invaluable in fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment. The study advocates for the active involvement of school social workers in addressing the mental health issues among students. It calls for the adoption of evidence-based practices and the implementation of effective mental health interventions in schools. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for collaboration between schools, community agencies, and families to provide comprehensive care and support for students.

Recommendation

- a. **School-Based Counseling:** Implementing individual and group counseling sessions in schools can be a powerful tool in addressing mental health issues among students. These sessions can provide a safe space for

students to express their feelings, fears, and concerns. Trained counselors can help students understand and manage their emotions, and develop coping strategies. This can lead to improved mental health, better academic performance, and healthier social interactions.

- b. **Crisis Intervention Training:** Training school social workers to identify and respond to mental health crises among students is crucial. This training can equip them with the skills to recognize the signs of a mental health crisis, understand its potential impacts, and take appropriate action. This can include providing immediate support, referring the student to appropriate mental health services, or, in severe cases, initiating emergency procedures.
- c. **Emotional Regulation Training:** Helping students enhance their emotional regulation skills can have a significant impact on their mental health. This training can teach students strategies for calming themselves during moments of distress and expressing their emotions in appropriate ways. Improved emotional regulation can lead to better mental health, improved relationships, and better academic performance.
- d. **Collaboration with Community Agencies:** Fostering relationships with community agencies can streamline services, make referrals, and ensure that students and their families have access to the support they need. This collaboration can lead to a more holistic approach to mental health care, where all aspects of a student's life are considered and addressed.
- e. **Mental Health Advocacy:** Advocating for mental health within the school system can promote a culture of acceptance and understanding around mental health. This can help reduce stigma,



encourage students to seek help when they need it, and create a more supportive and inclusive school environment.

- f. **Parental Involvement:** Involving parents in supporting students' mental health can be beneficial. This might include helping teachers communicate effectively with parents about their child's needs and progress, and developing strategies to involve parents in supporting their child's mental health.
- g. **Peer Support Groups:** Establishing peer support groups can provide students with a safe and supportive environment where they can share their experiences, learn coping strategies, and develop social skills. These groups can also reduce feelings of isolation and stigma, and promote a sense of belonging.
- h. **Teacher Training:** Providing training for teachers can equip them with the skills to manage classroom behaviors and promote a positive learning environment. This can lead to improved student behavior, better academic performance, and a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment.
- i. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Conducting public awareness campaigns can educate the community about the dangers of substance abuse and the importance of prevention. These campaigns can dispel myths, provide accurate information, and encourage community members to take action.
- j. **Mentorship Programs:** Establishing mentorship programs can provide students with guidance and support from experienced individuals. These mentors can provide advice, share their experiences, and help students navigate challenges. This can lead to improved self-esteem, better decision-

making skills, and a more positive outlook on life.

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