Original Research Article

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN REGARD TO THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper enlists the findings of the Qualitative research study conducted on students at the University of Namibia. This study is concerned with the lived experiences of students registered at the University of Namibia, in regards to their mental health. The study aimed at exploring the mental health issues faced by students at the University of Namibia, investigating how students cope with their mental health challenges as well as the institutional support available at the University of Namibia to promote student's mental health. This study adapted the phenomenological design and used a qualitative research approach to yield insights around the experiences of students at the University of Namibia. The participants on whom the study was conducted on were 10 students, including 4 significant informants, specifically a lecturer, an SRC, Dean of Students as well as a Social Worker. The study comprised of exploratory and thematic analysis. The findings were categorized into codes. The codes developed from the results were stress, COVID-19, negative encounters with lecturers, codes on their coping mechanisms as well as the institutional support available to them. Some participants portrayed symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress that affect their mental wellbeing, leading to poor academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Unrelenting afflictions experienced in life dictate how a person's mental health is affected; how they respond to them and therefore the actions that follow. As expressed by Lanese (2019), mental health is the "overall emotional, psychological and social wellbeing that impacts how we think, feel and behave". It may be argued that only a few people have knowledge on how severely poor mental health, particularly on students can affect them as well as many other systems. Thus, the researcher was concerned with exploring the mental health issues faced by students attending the University of Namibia (UNAM). This facilitated probing how students cope with their mental health challenges. Furthermore, to investigate and evaluate the institutional support available at UNAM campus'

that promote student's mental health.

The mental health of students deteriorates to an extent that they are no longer productive or able to perform daily tasks. Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust & Golberstein (2009) mention that "most of students who have problems do not receive any therapeutic or counselling services". This study aims to examine the experiences of students at the University of Namibia in relation to mental health. The present study acclimated the phenomenological research design and utilized a qualitative research approach to yield insights around the experiences of students at the University of Namibia. The sample of the present study consisted of mainly students, including 4 key informants, from the University of Namibia in the Khomas region.

A qualitative research design was utilized and may be described as an approach that "involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences" 14 (Bhandari, 2020). An analysis of the data was conducted through exploratory and thematic analysis. The key objective of the study is to explore the lived experiences of students in regards to mental health. This necessitates the urgency to help students realize the importance of maintaining good mental health and prevent chances of suicide, depression and drop-out rates.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study utilized the phenomenological design and adapted a qualitative research approach that generated insight around the concepts of the lived experiences students at the University of Namibia display in terms of issues with their mental health. This design allows researchers to capture the narrative around the experiences of people to get a holistic view around what they experience as they describe and narrate those events. Furthermore, Bhandari (2020) observes that it can be used to collect in-depth insights into a problem or help generate new ideas.

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) base their understanding that the goal of the phenomenological approach is to describe the meaning of the lived experiences by the people who lived it of which the way to analyze the data is to focus on what participants said while describing the phenomenon. This allowed the researcher to understand how the mental health state of students was greatly affected by academic pressures.

The target population for the present study comprised of students from the second year onwards registered at the University of Namibia for the 2021 academic year. The students were selected from various departments

from the respective faculties at the University of Namibia. The interviews were conducted on a total number of ten (10) students from the entire population with additional four (4) key informants. The key informants included one lecturer, a social worker, one of the Dean of Students, and one member from the Student Representative Council from the University of Namibia. The participants are ideal for this study because they have both been exposed to academic pressures as well as how demanding it can be.

The researcher selected three (3) participants to represent the sample size, two students and a lecturer. These three (3) participants selected as a sample were the population on which the pre-test was conducted. This study comprised of (n=14) participants representing the entire population on whom the researcher gathered data from. Of these, ten (10) were the students and four (4) were the key informants. Due to the nature and scope of the study, the purposive sampling method was utilized. This involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano, 2011).

The entire research study undertook of both a non-physical and physical setting. From the process of attaining participants to gathering data and having it analyzed, this was all conducted online, face to face and telephonic platforms. This enabled the researcher to observe reactions as well as non-verbal cues from the participants as the researcher posed the questions to them. The study took on a purposive random sampling method to gather data by selecting at random students registered from second year onwards within the various faculties. This type of sampling is often used when working with diverse people to allow one access to various opinions. It ensured that there was no bias or discrimination that would have aided in yielding inaccurate results.

Due to the nature and scope of the present study a pilot study needed to be conducted in order to determine the feasibility of the research study. The researcher utilized open-ended surveys as a tool for pretesting and semistructured face to face and telephonic interview guides for the actual data collection. A pre-test "involves administering the interview to a group of individuals that have similar characteristics to the target study population, and in a manner that replicates how the data collection session will be introduced and what type of study materials will be administered" (Hurst et al., 2015). The pre-test survey was done in a manner closely

similar to the actual study from gathering participants, collecting data up to the final steps of analyzing the data. This was necessary to determine if the research design and methodology were appropriate for the research study and would produce accurate and reliable results beneficial to the study. The researcher conducted a pilot study on a total of three participants. This process was identical to that of the actual study in how participants were gathered, collecting the data as well 16 as how it was analyzed.

As highlighted above, the research undertook semi-structured telephonic and face to face interviews and analyzed the data by emulating the steps for qualitative data analysis. The researcher conducted the pilot study on the participants chosen to determine if the methodology, tools and research design was appropriate and feasible without loopholes that may have led to data misinterpretation and/or mistakes. The interviews consisted of different questions for the different population types. For example, the interview questions for the students varied from the ones of the key informants. The researcher conducted the interview on the sample population and analyzed data using the steps for data analysis in qualitative research. The purpose of this was to ensure that the questions, instruments and data analysis tool were of standard and yielded accurate, reliable and representative data when conducting the actual study. The basis to conduct the actual study was dependent on responses and accuracy of data the tools produced. The pre-test was conducted ethically to ensure that no harm was caused due to failure to properly conduct the study and act with professionalism.

The choice of a telephonic and face to face interview with the participants was an ideal research instrument. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has impacted several aspects of life, including academia, institutions and policies in place. By placing preconceived ideas aside, the researcher conducted the interviews and asked participants about their experiences as well as to narrate if they have experienced mental health issues and encourage them to describe those moments, their feelings and thoughts as well as what they have done in such situations. The researcher probed further to determine if it was a recurring incident. This instrument was necessary because it allowed participants to express themselves and describe their experiences copiously, thus, resulting in the research having access to raw data and first-hand information that aided in the purpose of this study.

This research study comprised of both exploratory and thematic analysis. Exploratory analysis entails gaining new insights, discovering ideas to increase knowledge about a particular phenomenon. Thematic analysis "is a qualitative data analysis method that involves reading through a data set (such as transcripts from in depth interviews or focus groups), and identifying patterns in meaning across the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It helped the researcher "generate new insights and concepts derived from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research had its basis on thematic and content analysis. The researcher identified common responses and patterns within the data and explored those areas. Based on the permission from participants, the researcher recorded the interviews and transcribed them, listened and re-listened to them and then grouped into themes. Thereafter, data was compiled, compared and conclusions were drawn out.

Most types of qualitative data analysis share the same five steps (Bhandari, 2020). Preparing and organizing the data which means transcribing the interviews, reviewing it and examining it for patterns or repeated ideas that may unfold (Bhandari, 2020). In qualitative analysis, the researcher goes through each participant's responses and attaches codes to the data and creates new codes to add to your system, if necessary, especially when there are recurring themes. Thereafter, the researcher links the codes together into cohesive themes. To conclude the data, it is important that the researcher review and revise themes in order to compose narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was adopted by the researcher to collect and analyze the data collected. As a means to add significance to the study, analyzing the data was done in a way that was ethical and with absolute honesty

3. RESULTS

This section consists of the demographic information of participants, themes and codes that were allocated as well as what they present in the data and quotations from participants supporting those themes.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS

(a) Age		(b) Relationship Status		(c) Accommodation Style		(d) Campus		(e) Level of Study	
18-23 Years	7	Single	10	Renting	5	Oshakati	3	Second Year	2
24-29 Years	3	Married	0	Hostel	2	Ogongo	2	Third Year	1
						Hifikepunye Pohamba	4		
30 above	0	Divorced	0	Living with Family	3	JEDS	1	Fourth Year	7
		Other	0						

According to the data represented in Table 1, part (a), the majority (7) of participants were in the age category of 18-23 years of age during the time of research and only three (3) participants who were within the age category of 24-29 during the time of

research. In regards to the relationship status (b), all the participants reported that they were single with none of them married or divorced during the time research was conducted. As evident in the data presentation in Table 1 above, participant's accommodation style (c) shows that majority (5) of the participants were renting, with three participants (3) living with family and two participants (2) residing in the hostel. Furthermore, column (d) demonstrated in Table 1 represents the various UNAM campuses, where the participants were registered, during the period the research was conducted, establishes that most (4) of the participants were registered at the Hifikepunye Pohamba UNAM campus. Second majority (3) of the participants were registered at the Oshakati UNAM campus, two (2) participants registered at the Ogongo UNAM campus and one (1) participant registered at the Jose Eduardo dos Santos UNAM Campus. Lastly, part (e) of Table 1 indicates the level of study of the participants which indicates that the majority (7) of participants were fourth year students, with two (2) second year students and one (1) third year student.

Overall, Table 1 represents the data collected of the students who were interviewed according to their age, relationship status, accommodation style, campus registered at as well as their current level of study during the time research was conducted.

TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND CHARACTERISTICS OF KEY INFORMANTS

1. Job Title/Occupation	2. Campus	3. Position
Lecturer	Main Campus	Lecturer for Security and Strategic Studies
Dean of Students	Main Campus	Academic Councilor
Student Representative Council	Main Campus	Secretary for Community Development and Gender Affairs
Social Worker	Main Campus	Student Councilor

Table 2 indicates the demographic data of the key informants. The researcher interviewed a social worker, student representative council, a member of the dean of students as well as a lecturer. All key informants were registered at the UNAM main campus during the time research was conducted. As indicated in the Table 2, Part (3), the lecturer teaches security and strategic studies. As represented in Table 2, the dean of students held the position of academic councillor at the time research was conducted. The student representative council held the position of secretary for community development and gender affairs at the time of the research with the social worker holding the position of student councillor. In total these were the key informants that provided information that aided in the purpose of the research.

4. LIVED EXPERIENCES
4.1 STRESS

From the data collected, the researcher identified stress as a factor that affected students caused by experiences with school or personal related stress. The participants all indicated issues that led to stress such as finances, pressures from school, insufficient time allocated to read through study material and notes and events that occurred in their lives that has impacted them. Participant 10 stated that she stresses because she feels she is "given too much work to do … I feel like sometimes it's just too much to handle". On the other hand, participant 6 stated that she is stressed by emotional/personal issues more than she is about academics. Participant 2 also stated that "it's not easy managing how I am trying to shape my life and how things are piled up" indicating that he struggles to find a balance between school and personal life.

Financial burdens also weigh a load on students as participant 1 indicated that financial problems affect her academics due to the passing of her father which resulted in a decrease in academic performance and good financial standing. Participant 8 stated that students often aren't able to attend classes due to financial constraints where they don't have money to buy data or 'AWEH'. Participant 3 described the difficulty of finances for students as they "don't have money to come to school every day".

Participants indicated that there was insufficient time allocated to read through course material and notes before assessments. Participant 6 stated that "notes are sent to a group at once and it's a lot, you just go through due to a test upcoming but does not learn anything" and that there are too many assignments that need to be completed and so many tests in one day. Participant 3 feels the work from school is too much to handle because sometimes they get too many assignments to complete at once. Participant 2 stated that "if time is not enough, students panic and tend to do things rashly and does not really do them the right way".

Most of the participants specified that something that occurred in their life has affected them and their academics either positively or negatively. Participant 10 stated that because she got pregnant, it changed her and resulted in her overthinking a lot with school on the side and family on the other. She also feels traumatized by something that has affected her and her academics. Participant 8 indicated that were a few things that positively affected her but is traumatized by a spiritual occurrence in her life. Participant 6 stated that she is emotionally affected by negative childhood treatment and the

discouraging words of her mother towards her failed grades.

4.2. CORONA VIRUS

The aspects of life have been impacted both negatively and positively by most, including students and their academics. Most of the participants stated that COVID-19 affected their learning negatively. From what participants have stated, it appears that with the impact of the Corona Virus, lectures are done online, students do not have electricity in rural areas, they don't have computers or laptops to attend online lectures as well as the TN Mobile cards are not working properly in those remote areas.

Participant 10 stated that it has been a challenge because "you don't get to interact with your lecturers in person". Participant 10 also believes "things were not explained in detail, you were just given notes to read through and ask questions, if you have which sometimes you don't even have because you don't understand at all". Participant 1 stated that "some lecturers don't teach at all". Participant 9 feels like the COVID-19 situation has changed the definition of learning as "people don't learn anymore". Key informant 2 believes that for students living in remote areas, they have been affected as well due to lack of electricity at home to charge laptops or phone to complete assignments and attend classes.

Participant 6 feels she is not really learning and hope they are writing exams online because it's not fair to write face-to-face exams for things done online. Participants 4 stated that "writing exams is harder now because when studying, the things weren't taught in class, sometimes lecturers just drop the notes and you have to study on your own which is difficult but you just have to study and understand everything so that you can pass".

4.3 LECTURERS

Participants indicated that lecturers were also one of the reasons why they had negative experiences that affected their mental health. Their responses indicated that lecturers do not give feedback or respond to their emails on time and they give students negative remarks and do not approach students very well. Participants stated that some lecturers are not serious when delivering study materials and they send notes to students for them to study on their own. Participants indicated that they feel lecturers give too much and unnecessary work and that they are not lenient.

Key Informant 1 stated that lectures "will teach you these things but it's the things that will never come in the examination". Key Informant 4 stated that "they do

things and say things without knowing how it would impact the students". Participant 10 stated that "lecturers should stop this thing of 'you students are going to fail' because already as a student you are on pressure and then when you hear your lecturer say that, it puts your hopes down completely. Participant 6 stated that lecturers are the cause of her academic stress because they like doing everything at once, sometimes you complain but they say "no, that is not my fault, I just want my work done".

5. COPING MECHANISMS

Participants responded to various ways of dealing with their academic stress or issues that posed a threat to their mental health whether personal or school related. Most of the participants indicated that they had a relationship with God, the read books, arts and crafts, watched YouTube videos/movies or series. Some of the participants would listen to music, exercise, singing and dancing, had a support system, engaged in sporting activities, slept and became fond of positive thinking and self-organization. Some participants would ask help from people or spend their time on social media.

Participant 10 believes that religion is very important as it is a part of a sense of belonging. Participant 9 stated that she sleeps when stressed/overwhelmed, eat, watch YouTube videos to motivate her and encourages her to move on. Participant 6 stated that she turns to God to pray when she has breakdowns

6. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

When asked about the institutional challenges they experience, participants responded that the University of Namibia has inadequate services and not many programs available. Participants also indicated that they have challenges with online learning/unfamiliarity with Moodle/e-learning and that the connectivity cards (TN Mobile) are not effective or have enough data bundles. Participants also mentioned that the University only responds to students when they demand for action and that there is no support from the University to help students experiencing challenges.

Participant 8 feels that the University does not have programs to help students ease their academic load. In response to a question of there being programs in place to help students ease their academic load, key informant 1 stated that "I'm not aware of that but perhaps there should be programs". Participant 7 stated that the system usually has errors, marks that go missing or are

entered incorrectly. Participant 2 believes that the University "should develop user friendly techniques of administering information to students". Key informant 4 stated that "UNAM is a mess" and that the university should fix this "boring, stupid system that they brought" and teach lecturers how to work with students to help them.

7. DISCUSSIONS

According to data collected, it is evident that aspects of student life has been affected that has hindered them from performing well academically. Some students indicated that they had a few instances when they were unable to concentrate due to mental health related challenges such as when they experienced stressful situations resulting from financial issues, academic pressure and personal problems. Participants indicated that they experienced an event that had either a negative or positive impact on them and their academics. This event has also had significant effect on their mental well-being as some have indicated that they are traumatized or consider the event as traumatizing. Psychological distress of participants was a result of stress from financial issues, personal and school related stress as well as the pressure they receive from family and friends to succeed in their academics. The researcher believes that students experience a vast number of negative effects as compared to the few positive effects that come on a time-to-time basis in relation to their physical, emotional, mental and academic well-being. According to figures among the responses of participants regarding suicide ideation and attempted suicide, the factors that prompted it was issues with family members, difficulties stemming from failed modules, mental health related challenges such as stress and coexisting mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

During the time the research study was conducted, participants indicated that they had areas in their lives where they thought about committing suicide were close to fulfilling the act. The reasons stated were mostly due to personal issues and academic challenges. Various mental illnesses were discovered which participants stated to have experienced, displayed symptoms of as well as what key informants have observed among the student population. Participants on who the study was conducted on displayed symptoms of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety and mental health related issues such as stress that stood as a contributing factor in psychological distress and impairment in proper functioning leading to poor academic performance. Participants' sleep and eating patterns were affected due to personal problems such as issues at home, a load of tasks they had to complete and insomnia.

Participants would complain that because the work and

stress is too much, they wouldn't be able to eat well or sleep trying to juggle all the responsibilities. Most of the participants indicated that stress was due to academics such as a failing grade, things were too much to handle and lecturers who would not be supportive to them which in some cases led to emotional breakdowns. Some participants felt they were drained physically and emotionally and lost their appetite. This is a growing concern which should be taken seriously if this number should begin to decrease in the coming years. Suicide ideation was a result of pressure from past trauma, low academic performance, symptoms of an existing mental illness and lack of a support system. All participants indicated to have contemplated suicide. Some participants were able to identify suicide ideation within themselves and others identified it in their close friends who either did commit suicide or attempted to do so.

Three participants had symptoms of depression while three participants indicated they had depressive episodes such as not getting out of bed because they were unmotivated, disconnected from family and friends and the amount of stress that weighed heavy on them. Other participants either had no clear signs or had minor symptoms of depression.

Some participants were able to identify those members of their family who had mental illnesses and acknowledged that it was a generational occurrence. However, most of the participants stated they did not think they had a mental illness. Even though students are most likely to fall into depression, it is hard for the researcher to conclude that due to that statement, other students do not have depression. Based on responses from a key informant, the month of October is where there is a high number of psychological distress because students migrate closer to exams and when their CA marks are not up to standard, they fear that it is already too late falling into hopelessness, suicide ideation and anxiety which leads to depression. Most of the participants did not portray any signs or symptoms of panic attacks but minor anxiety when they would worry about a certain module, their marks as well as if they would qualify for examination. Some participants indicated a history of headaches; others reported they barely have headaches or that they only got headaches from stressing about school or the amount of work to complete.

Most of the participants indicated they barely had mood swings, and those who did were experiencing personal related stress. All the

participants indicated to have had at least, one stressful moment that affected them to a certain extent. These stressors were caused by academic responsibility and pressure, personal related issues such as relationships, problems at home with family as well as institutional related such as problems with the system and lecturers who do not respond to students needs and challenges on time. The COVID-19 pandemic has also caused students to stress as they were unable to get access to resources and material due to the regulations in place and decrease in performance due to a transition from face-to-face teaching to the online teaching. Based on the responses from participants, they have adopted healthy coping mechanisms as well as have good support systems. Participants indicated that they engage in exercise, watch encouraging videos on YouTube and sleep.

The researcher believes that due to the many challenges that the participants indicated to experience, it has been their support system and coping strategies that have kept them afloat amidst of their academic challenges. The participants indicated that they felt there weren't any programs or support from the University to help address their needs and mental health challenges. Most of the participants stated that they have a family member as their support system while a few stated they had a close friend. As mentioned above, the following factors that led to participants resorting to their coping mechanisms. These factors include significant life changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic, family, relationship issues, financial challenges and academic pressure. This study has allowed the researcher to believe that when students are overwhelmed with school work, they can easily fall into psychological distress and find difficulty in completing their tasks. Also, with significant mental health deterioration, students can quickly develop mental illnesses or have a mental illness which was dormant to be triggered and may lead to further mental health deterioration, low academic and personal performance.

The University of Namibia has various programs that run from beginning of an academic year to the end of one. However, participants feel there are insufficient programs that address the emotional and mental health of students. Most of the participants encouraged that the University should implement more programs that allow for students to openly talk and discuss their challenges with relevant parties, have awareness of mental illnesses affecting the academics of students as well as support from the University when faced with a heavy work load. This allowed students to be sensitized about various issues that affect them, understand that mental illness does not symbolize craziness including the idea of feeling hopeless when facing a difficulty.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher has compiled recommendations for future reference and studies that will be undertaken in this nature. These recommendations serve as basis for improvement and enhancement of services and resources available to the student population to improve their mental health.

The recommendations are to the following role players:

8.1 STUDENTS:

Students need to be more organized, plan in advance, anticipate upcoming assignments, talk to SRCs or leaders on campus to refer you to someone you can talk to. Students should be committed to their school work and attend forums and educational events hosted by the University. Students should engage in planning and scheduling to ensure that they finish their work on time. Students should not be ignorant but consider those in the capacity to help them in their challenges and ask for help/direction wherever needed. Students should not procrastinate and avoid work but should aim to get things done on time. Students should talk to someone when experiencing academic pressures to avoid suicide and mental illnesses as a result of a high workload. Students should prioritize and put effort into their work to be able to submit quality academic work.

8.2 THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA:

8.2.1 Directorate of Students Affairs: The University of Namibia should put more programs in place that cater to the needs of students to ensure that issues with their mental health do not affect their academics. The University should create mental health clubs where students can engage in discussion aimed at improving their mental health, academics as well as addressing challenges students may be experiencing. The University should introduce forums that allow students especially first year students to familiarize themselves with various parts and departments around the campus and which facilities cater to which needs and so forth.

The University should invest in helping students such as buying computers, scanners etc. The University should improve their management and accountability/availability to student needs. The University should have policies in place that speak to students needs and address their challenges as well as activities that targets improving psychological, emotional and mental health related difficulties that impede students well-functioning and academic performance. The University should

be involved in conducting research on a more professional level means to determine student experience and improve services as well as student's mental health status. The University needs to involve students to get first-hand information about their experiences and challenges faced in order to know which areas to deal with. This can be achieved by having surveys on student portals that they would fill in stating what challenges they have or recommendation for improvement.

The University needs to implement more recreational activities that allow students to 'blow off steam' in a healthier as compared to resorting to drugs and alcohol. Social workers and school councillors should conduct group related activities to decrease chances of suicide or experiencing mental health related challenges and dealing with it without proper and professional treatment. The University should take action into ensuring that they create awareness on programs and facilities available to students that help them with their academic and mental challenges and departments where these students can receive proper help and assistance. These programs should aim at exploring the various mental illnesses that students may display such as schizophrenia, bipolar, depression and many others. The University should also address the need to raise awareness of student councilors such as psychologists or social workers available on campus who students can be referred to when seeking psychosocial or academic assistance. Departments and faculties should engage with lecturers and address the negative manner in which they approach students.

The University should enlist people that students are able to talk to about their problems and challenges on a more personal level or have councilors step down from being too formal with students and become more approachable and relating to students enabling the students to be more open about their challenges and mental illnesses. The Student Representative Council (SRC) should have a program in place that address the immediate need of students that strengthen their well-functioning as well as the mental health of students. SRCs should be take up the concerns of students with either the management of UNAM, a specific department or personally with lecturers when addressing a need or challenge students may have. The SRC should identify students that are experiencing challenges and take it up with relevant departments to address those issues.

8.2.2 *Registrar's Office:* The University should fix the grading system that have often led to students' marks to go missing, errors and inability for students to have a smooth registration process. The University should work on improving internet connectivity and providing excellent Wi-Fi and network due to the fact most of student's activities are done online and require proper

connection to internet to fulfil their academic responsibilities The connectivity fees being charged are too high for students to not be able to access the internet, thus, it is imperative that the data bundle is increased or that the connection is strengthened. Equipment such as projectors, projecting screen, mics and speakers should be fixed to avoid difficulty students experience of not being able to hear lecturers speak when in a class with many students.

8.2.3 *Finance Office:* The fact that students pay hefty sums of money for tuition, it is unfair that the university charge them for proof of registration as well as academic records. Therefore, the University should waive the fees allocated to provide students with academic records or proof of registration.

8.2.4 *Center for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT):* The University should set up discussion forums on the Moodle platforms/portals where students can discuss various areas that are posing threat to their academics or challenges, they are facing which can be taken up with the management board of UNAM to implement and address accordingly. The forums would also help students be mentally prepared and assess their challenges and readiness for academia.

8.2.5 *Library:* The University should ensure that all the books and academic material that students require are readily available in the library.

8.3 ACADEMICS (LECTURERS):

Lecturers should be more lenient especially when students have high workloads and a busy schedule to complete on that specific day/time. Engage in proper communication with students. Respond to emails and phone calls. Lecturers should be in their offices according to the time indicated for consultation so that they are able to assist students with the concerns raised. Lecturers should not direct personal stress onto students as it is of an unfair nature to do so, therefore, lecturers ought to be professionally responsive.

Lecturers should consider the opinions of students before they give tests or assignments and give students suitable submission dates for assessment which will allow students a chance to manage their tasks better. Lecturers should also consider the fact that some things are beyond the control of students before attempting to fail a student when a task is not completed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lecturers should be more understanding to students who do not

have the resources to complete a certain task. In practical situations, lecturers should teach students in their natural settings for them to understand things better, especially for courses such as nursing etc.

During the period lecturers release the students Continuous Assessment marks, lecturers should avoid giving last minute tests and assignments that put pressure on students and result in a low grade and minimal chance of qualifying for examination. This would ensure that students do not endure psychological distress which would lead to the development of mental illnesses or triggering an underlying mental health illness.

Lecturers should engage more with their students to understand how they perform, their learning styles as well as give support to students when they face an academic difficulty.

8.4 OTHER ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS:

Other tertiary institutions should consider implementing services that cater towards addressing the needs of students and their challenges to prevent the increase of mental health related issues or the development of mental illnesses. These institutions should also conduct similar research studies on their student population to discover what challenges their students are facing and ways to address those impediments.

9. CONCLUSION

This study adapted a phenomenological design and qualitative approach to highlight the narrative pertaining to the experiences of the student population registered at the University of Namibia. In order to determine what challenges, they encounter in terms of their mental health. Overall, the researcher is of the inclination that the conditions experienced by students registered at the University of Namibia are not favorable to students' mental health and their academic growth. Students experience many hardships being a student, together with the difficulty from their personal life, it becomes even harder for an individual to function under those circumstances. With the absence of programs that allow students to explore their challenges and find ways to address them, it creates an ongoing struggle for students to perform well academically and personally.

This research study paved the way for students to become more aware of their experiences and how they lead to mental health challenges. It also allowed the researcher to identify loopholes within the management of the University of Namibia. Overall, this research study has been able to uncover the little things that were often not considered important but had a drastic impact on not only students but how lecturers and key staff at the University of Namibia conduct their academic work.

The researcher was able to accomplish the objectives of this study which were to identify and explore the mental health issues faced by students at the University of Namibia of which in this case are stress, mental illness such as depression, anxiety, and COVID-19 related difficulties. The researcher has also investigated how students cope with their mental health challenges which were identified that some students use sleep, music and exercise, to mention a few, as a means of coping with their challenges. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the institutional support available at UNAM to promote student's mental health is somewhat the bare minimum as to what should be of standard. Social work is geared towards improving the lives of individual experiencing social and personal ills and educating them on different ways they can enhance themselves.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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