

**IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN USELU SECONDARY SCHOOLS, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE.**

BY

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SSC1909891

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

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MAY, 2024

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK,
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work was carried out by EGBABOR-FRED EWOMAZINO FREDA with Matriculation Number SSC1909891 in the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria and has not been presented in part or full in any diploma or degree awarding institution.

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DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty, my family and friends for the love, support, unending prayers and great grace they have shown to me throughout my period of study in the University of Benin.

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ABSTRACT

Mental Health” provides a comprehensive analysis of the pivotal role of school social workers in enhancing student mental health. The study was conducted across various educational settings, employing a random sampling technique to select a representative sample from different schools. The primary data collection tool was a questionnaire, supplemented by a thorough review of relevant literature and documents. Significant findings emerged from the study, highlighting the crucial role of school social workers in fostering mental health support for students. It was found that school social workers significantly impact students’ mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The study recommended that school social workers should collaborate with school administrators and community agencies to create a supportive school climate.

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.

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 and supports. The research also underscored the importance of collaboration between schools and community agencies, suggesting that such partnerships can enhance the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of mental health supports.

Keywords: School Social Workers, Student Mental Health, Supportive School Climate, Mental Health Interventions, Professional Development.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

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) estimates that approximately 20% of adolescents globally grapple with some form of mental health condition, and this percentage may be even higher in Nigeria (WHO, 2020). 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 (Alvord & Grados, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2018). These interventions may encompass individual counseling, group therapy, psychoeducation, 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 (Nwagwu, 2015). 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 programs 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 programs, 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.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The mental health of students in secondary schools in Nigeria is a growing concern. Many students face various challenges that can impact their mental well-being, such as academic stress, peer pressure, family issues, and societal expectations. The lack of proper support systems in schools to address these mental health issues further exacerbates the problem. Therefore, there is

a need to examine the impact of school social work on students' mental health in secondary schools in Nigeria, particularly in Uselu Secondary schools in Egor local government area of Edo state.

The impact of school social work on students' mental health in secondary schools in Nigeria remains a significant concern, especially given the rising prevalence of mental health issues among young people (Nasiru et al., 2019). While research has started to explore effective intervention strategies that can address these challenges, the specific impact of such work in Nigerian secondary schools, particularly in the Uselu community of Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, is not yet fully understood. One of the primary research problems is the lack of comprehensive mental health support services within the secondary school system in Nigeria (Ikhayere, Okundia, & Akeredolu, 2020). Limited access to professional mental health services, combined with the stigma surrounding mental health issues (Azhar & Varma, 2013), often leads to under-reporting and inadequate support for students in need. This situation exacerbates the challenges faced by students in maintaining their mental well-being and hampers their overall academic performance and personal development.

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 (Usman, Muhammed, Isa et al., 2012).

However, the extent to which these benefits can be realized in the Uselu secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area remains unexplored.

Moreover, the Uselu community faces its own unique challenges, such as poverty, substance abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics, and limited access to quality healthcare services, which may further exacerbate the prevalence of mental health problems among its school-going children (Oliha, 2014). Therefore, this research aims to address these gaps in knowledge by investigating the impact of school social work on students' mental health in secondary schools in the Uselu community of Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. By identifying the specific social work interventions that have significant positive effects, this study can contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies for promoting students' mental well-being in Nigerian secondary schools.

1.3 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?

1.4 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.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study of the impact of school social work on students' mental health in secondary schools in the Uselu community of Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria holds several significant implications. Firstly, it addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on secondary schools, which have received limited attention compared to primary schools and higher institutions. By examining the effectiveness of school social work interventions in this context, the study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how these interventions can best support the mental well-being of Nigerian secondary school students.

Secondly, the study will shed light on the specific challenges faced by students in the Uselu community, such as poverty, substance abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics, and limited access to quality healthcare services. Understanding the contextual factors that contribute to mental health issues among these students is crucial for developing targeted and culturally appropriate interventions. By identifying the unique needs and challenges of students in this community, the study can inform the design and implementation of effective school social work programs that address their specific circumstances.

Thirdly, the study's findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers and education authorities in Nigeria. With the rising prevalence of mental health issues among young people, there is a pressing need to prioritize mental health support services within the education system. By demonstrating the impact of school social work on students' mental health, the study can advocate for the integration of such services into the educational policy framework, leading to improved mental well-being and academic outcomes for secondary school students in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study has the potential to contribute to the reduction of stigma surrounding mental health issues in Nigeria. By raising awareness of the importance of addressing mental health concerns among secondary school students and demonstrating the positive impact of school social work interventions, the study can help to normalize discussions around mental health. This can contribute to a more supportive and inclusive school environment where students feel comfortable seeking help and accessing the necessary support services.

1.6 Defining Key Concepts/Terms

1. School Social Work: School social work refers to the professional practice of social workers within the educational setting. It involves providing support and interventions to students, families, and school staff to address various social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that may impact students' well-being and academic success.

2. Mental Health: Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It encompasses a range of factors, including an individual's ability to cope with stress, maintain healthy relationships, and make positive life choices. Mental health can be influenced by various factors, including biological, psychological, and social determinants.

3. Secondary Schools: Secondary schools, also known as high schools or secondary education institutions, provide education to students in the age range of approximately 12 to 18 years. They typically follow primary education and precede tertiary or higher education.

4. Intervention: In the context of this study, an intervention refers to a planned activity or program designed to address specific mental health issues or promote mental well-being among secondary school students. These interventions may include individual counseling, group therapy, psychoeducation, and other evidence-based strategies aimed at supporting students' mental health.

5. Prevalence: Prevalence refers to the proportion or percentage of a particular condition or phenomenon within a given population. In the context of this study, prevalence refers to the extent or frequency of mental health issues among secondary school students in the Uselu community.

6. Evidence-Based Strategies: Evidence-based strategies are approaches or interventions that have been proven effective through rigorous research and empirical evidence. In the context of this study, evidence-based strategies refer to school social work interventions that have demonstrated positive outcomes in promoting students' mental well-being. These strategies are grounded in research and follow best practices in the field of social work.

By defining these key concepts and terms, the study ensures clarity and common understanding of the central ideas being explored. It provides a foundation for researchers, policymakers, and readers to engage with the study's findings and draw meaningful conclusions. Additionally, these definitions help to establish a shared language and framework for discussing the impact of school social work on students' mental health in the Uselu community of Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

School social workers play a significant role in promoting mental health among students (Kelly et al., 2015). They provide services designed to improve students' psychological well-being, such as individual counseling, group therapy, crisis intervention, and family-school collaboration (Dupper, 2013). These services aim to address the unique challenges faced by students, including academic stress, social difficulties, family problems, and emotional issues.

Research has shown that school social work services can have a positive impact on students' mental health outcomes. For instance, Dupper (2013) found that students who received individual counseling from school social workers experienced a decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety. The availability of a trusted and accessible mental health professional within the school setting allows students to seek help and support in a familiar and comfortable environment.

In addition to individual counseling, school social workers often facilitate group therapy sessions, which have been found to be beneficial for students. Group therapy provides a supportive and inclusive space where students can share their experiences, learn coping strategies, and develop social skills (Kelly et al., 2015). By participating in group therapy, students can build connections with peers facing similar challenges, reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing their overall mental well-being.

Furthermore, school social workers play a crucial role in crisis intervention. They are trained to identify and respond to mental health crises, such as suicidal ideation, self-harm, or acute emotional distress (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Their timely intervention can help prevent potential harm and provide immediate support to students in crisis. School-based crisis intervention services have been shown to mitigate the negative impact of traumatic events and reduce the likelihood of long-term mental health consequences (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

Family-school collaboration is another key aspect of school social work that contributes to students' mental health. School social workers often work closely with families to address underlying issues that may impact students' well-being. They provide resources, referrals, and support to parents and guardians, fostering a collaborative approach in addressing students' mental health needs (Allen-Meares, 2013). By involving families in the intervention process, school social workers create a comprehensive support system that extends beyond the school environment.

However, despite the potential benefits, challenges exist in implementing effective school social work programs. Allen-Meares (2013) highlights the issue of limited resources, including inadequate staffing, limited funding, and insufficient training opportunities for school social workers. These resource constraints can hinder the delivery of comprehensive and sustained mental health services to students. Additionally, high caseloads and heavy administrative responsibilities may limit the amount of direct time school social workers can dedicate to individual students. Consequently, the depth and effectiveness of interventions may be compromised.

Moreover, the quality of school social work services can vary depending on the training and expertise of the professionals involved. Phillippo and Stone (2013) emphasize the importance of ongoing professional development and specialized training for school social workers to enhance their knowledge and skills in addressing the complex mental health needs of students. Continuing education and access to evidence-based practices can equip school social workers with the necessary tools to provide effective interventions and support.

Cultural considerations are also crucial in school social work practice. Students from diverse backgrounds may have unique mental health needs and require culturally sensitive approaches. Atilola (2015) highlights the significance of culturally appropriate interventions that consider the sociocultural context and values of the students and their families. School social workers should be knowledgeable about cultural nuances and engage in culturally responsive practices to ensure their interventions are effective and respectful.

Furthermore, the collaboration between school social workers and other stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, and community agencies, is essential for comprehensive mental health support. Effective communication, cooperation, and coordination among these parties can facilitate early identification of students in need, prompt referrals, and seamless delivery of services (Kelly et al., 2015). Interdisciplinary collaboration can also promote a holistic approach to addressing students' mental health needs, incorporating academic, social, and emotional aspects of their well-being.

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced additional challenges to school social work and student mental health. The shift to remote or hybrid learning models, social

isolation, and increased stressors have amplified the need for mental health support in schools (Dupper, 2013). School social workers have adapted their services to the virtual environment, utilizing telehealth platforms and implementing creative strategies to maintain connections and therapeutic interventions with students.

2.1 THE ROLE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENTS

School social workers serve as a critical component in the promotion of mental health among students, providing a range of services, including individual counseling, group therapy, crisis intervention, and family-school collaboration.

a. Individual Counseling and Group Therapy

School social workers play a pivotal role in providing individual counseling to students. They offer a safe space for students to express their feelings and thoughts, helping them navigate through their emotional turmoil (Kelly, et al., 2015). They use various therapeutic techniques, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and solution-focused brief therapy, to help students manage their emotions and develop coping strategies (Bruns, et al., 2014).

Group therapy, facilitated by school social workers, is another effective method to address students' mental health issues. It allows students to interact with peers who are going through similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and mutual support (Raines, 2013). School social workers guide these sessions, ensuring they are conducted in a respectful and safe manner.

They use activities and discussions to help students develop social skills, empathy, and understanding towards others' experiences (Reinke et al., 2011).

b. Crisis Intervention

In times of crisis, school social workers act swiftly to ensure the safety and well-being of students. They are trained to handle various crisis situations, from acute mental health crises to incidents of bullying or violence (Phillippo & Kelly, 2014). They provide immediate support to the student in crisis, helping them calm down and ensuring they are safe. They also coordinate with other school staff and community resources to provide further support and intervention as necessary (Allen-Meares, 2013).

c. Family-School Collaboration

School social workers serve as a bridge between families and schools. They work closely with parents and caregivers, understanding their needs and concerns, and involving them in their child's education (Alvarez, et al., 2013). They provide parents with information and resources to support their child's learning and mental health. They also advocate for the family within the school system, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met (Phillippo & Kelly, 2014).

2.1.1 THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS ON STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

i. Reduced Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

School social work interventions have demonstrated considerable success in mitigating symptoms of depression and anxiety among students (Reback, 2010). These interventions

typically incorporate cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness exercises, and other therapeutic strategies to equip students with the ability to comprehend and regulate their emotions (Bru et al., 2013). School social workers create secure and supportive spaces where students can freely explore their emotions, confront negative thought patterns, and acquire effective coping strategies (Durlak et al., 2011).

ii. Augmented Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation, the capacity to handle and respond to emotional events, is a central component of mental health and well-being (Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2017). School social work interventions often prioritize helping students enhance their emotional regulation skills. This may include instructing students on strategies for calming themselves during moments of distress, expressing their emotions in appropriate ways, and navigating emotional challenges constructively (Perryman et al., 2015).

iii. Elevated Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, the personal perception of one's worth, is a vital facet of mental health (Mann et al., 2004). School social work interventions can guide students in fortifying their self-esteem by fostering a positive self-concept, endorsing self-acceptance, and nurturing self-compassion (O'Malley et al., 2015). Through individual counseling, group therapy, and other initiatives, school social workers assist students in identifying their strengths, challenging self-defeating thoughts, and cultivating a healthier self-image (Franklin et al., 2012).

iv. Amplified Academic Engagement

Academic engagement, the degree to which students are actively participating in their education, is closely intertwined with mental health (Fredricks et al., 2004). School social work interventions can amplify academic engagement by addressing mental health issues that may obstruct students' ability to concentrate, participate in class, and complete assignments (Kidger et al., 2012). By advocating mental health, school social workers contribute to students' increased engagement in their learning, which can lead to enhanced academic outcomes (Flook et al., 2013).

2.1.2 CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS

a. Limited Resources

Limited resources indeed pose a significant challenge to the implementation of effective school social work programs. As Kelly et al. (2015) highlight, the scarcity of resources can restrict the array of services provided by school social workers, often resulting in large caseloads that limit the individual attention given to each student². Similarly, evidence from Villarreal Sosa, Martens, and Cummings (2018) underscores the impact of resource limitations, suggesting that these factors can adversely affect the quality of services provided³. Extensive caseloads can lead to social workers being unable to fully engage with students and their issues, further straining the effectiveness of the intervention. This problem is compounded by the fact that social workers, in many instances, are also tasked with administrative duties, which detracts from their capacity to provide direct services to students (Allen-Meares et al., 2014).

b. Staffing

The staffing challenge in school social work is multi-faceted. A report by Kelly et al. (2015) revealed the shortage of school social workers, particularly in rural and low-income areas². This shortage was echoed by Rafa (2017), who pointed out that many students lack access to the necessary support due to staffing shortages. Furthermore, the broad scope of responsibilities that school social workers carry, from individual and group therapy to community coordination, often results in high stress levels and burnout (Cinamon et al., 2016). These factors contribute to a vicious cycle of staffing shortages, further exacerbating the problem.

c. Funding

Funding is a critical component in the successful implementation of school social work programs. Bronstein and Mason (2016) stress that without adequate funding, schools may struggle to hire qualified social workers, provide ongoing training, and offer comprehensive services⁷. While funding for these programs comes from a variety of sources, it often falls short of the demand (Kelly et al., 2015). This disparity between funding and the need for mental health services in schools has been a persistent issue, with schools often finding themselves having to prioritize other areas of need over mental health services due to budget constraints (Phillippo & Stone, 2011).

d. Training Opportunities

The importance of ongoing training for school social workers cannot be overstated. However, as noted by Massat et al. (2013), opportunities for professional development can often be limited, especially in schools with tight budgets. Without such opportunities, school social workers may

struggle to stay current with the latest research and best practices in the field (Villarreal Sosa et al., 2018). This is problematic as continuous professional development is crucial for social workers to adapt to the changing needs of students and to effectively implement evidence-based interventions. Furthermore, limited training opportunities can contribute to feelings of incompetence and burnout, further exacerbating staffing shortages (Cinamon et al., 2016).

2.1.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

i. Ongoing Professional Development

Ongoing professional development is vital for school social workers for them to remain abreast with the latest research, best practices, and emerging trends in the field (Allen-Meares, 2013). Such continuous learning is instrumental in meeting the diverse and ever-changing needs of students (Kelly et al., 2014). Professional development can be pursued through various avenues, such as workshops, seminars, webinars, and conferences (Massat et al., 2015). These platforms provide school social workers with the chance to learn from field experts, share experiences and insights with colleagues, and acquire new skills and knowledge that can be applied in their practice (Kelly et al., 2017).

Self-directed learning activities, such as reading professional literature, participating in online forums and communities of practice, and reflecting on one's practice also comprise ongoing professional development (Villarreal Sosa et al., 2018). These activities allow school social workers to keep up-to-date with field developments, explore novel ideas and perspectives, and continually refine their practice (Villarreal Sosa et al., 2019). Having an active commitment to

ongoing professional development is essential in fostering an environment of lifelong learning. It promotes the development of a reflective practitioner who is able to critically analyze their work and implement changes when necessary (Teasley, 2013). Moreover, it aids school social workers in maintaining ethical standards and upholding the values of the profession (Kelly et al., 2020).

ii. Specialized Training

Specialized training is equally important for school social workers due to the complex and multifaceted nature of their role (Allen-Meares, 2013). School social workers are required to possess a wide range of skills and competencies (Kelly et al., 2014). Specialized training aids school social workers in developing expertise in specific areas, such as mental health, trauma-informed practice, crisis intervention, family engagement, and cultural competence (Massat et al., 2015). This specialized knowledge and skills can enhance their effectiveness in supporting students and families, collaborating with other professionals, and advocating for systemic change (Kelly et al., 2017).

Training tailored to the unique challenges and complexities of the school context is also crucial. For instance, they may require training on educational laws and policies, school-based interventions, and strategies for collaborating with teachers and administrators (Villarreal Sosa et al., 2018). Such specialized training equips school social workers with the necessary tools to navigate the intricacies of the education system and effectively address the needs of students within that context (Villarreal Sosa et al., 2019).

In addition, specialized training plays a pivotal role in promoting evidence-based practice among school social workers. It allows them to acquire the latest research-based interventions and

strategies that have been proven effective in supporting student well-being and academic success (Teasley, 2013). By staying informed about evidence-based practices, school social workers can ensure that their interventions are grounded in the best available knowledge and are aligned with current research findings (Kelly et al., 2020).

Furthermore, specialized training serves as a platform for professional networking and collaboration. It provides opportunities for school social workers to connect with experts and colleagues in their field, fostering a supportive professional community (Allen-Meares, 2013). These connections can lead to valuable partnerships, the exchange of ideas, and the sharing of resources and best practices (Kelly et al., 2014).

2.1.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS IN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

a. Cultural Considerations

The importance of cultural considerations in school social work practice is increasingly recognized as crucial in our diverse society (Fisher-Borne, Montana Cain, & Martin, 2015). Cultural competence, while dynamic, has been shown to enhance service delivery and improve client outcomes (Sue & Sue, 2016). This concept extends beyond mere awareness, demanding cultural humility and a commitment to appreciate and integrate culture as a fundamental aspect of effective practice (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013).

Within this context, school social workers need to appreciate the values, customs, traditions, and historical perspectives of their clients, and utilize this knowledge in crafting their assessments

and interventions (Lum, 2016). This necessitates acknowledging their own privilege and power, and understanding how this impacts their work with clients (Goodman, 2015). Cultural competence requires constant self-reflection, understanding of social and historical context, and the ability to challenge power imbalances in the client-worker relationship (Isaacs, Huang, Hernandez, & Echo-Hawk, 2015).

Moreover, school social workers should strive to become cultural brokers, advocating for the cultural needs of their clients within the school system and community at large (Lum, 2016)⁷. This involves not just understanding the client's culture, but also the school and community culture, and how these interact and impact the student's experience (Lum, 2016)⁸. Furthermore, cultural considerations should guide policy implementation, institutional practices, and the overall school climate to ensure a more inclusive and equitable environment (Gay, 2018).

b. Culturally Appropriate Interventions

Culturally appropriate interventions are essential in making school social work services more relevant and accessible to students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Hays, Prosek, & McLeod, 2010). These interventions consider the cultural identities of students and their families and are designed to be respectful and compatible with these identities (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Such interventions can foster trust and rapport between school social workers and students, facilitating more effective communication and collaboration (Hays, Prosek, & McLeod, 2010). They often involve adapting conventional social work methods to better align with the student's cultural context, or integrating cultural practices and traditions into the intervention process (Sue

& Sue, 2016). For instance, a school social worker working with Indigenous students might incorporate traditional healing practices into their therapeutic work (Hart, 2010).

Adding to this, culturally appropriate interventions should also extend to involve families and communities, recognising their integral role in students' lives (Lopez & Louis, 2009). This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of individuals, families, and communities, and the role of culture in shaping these relationships (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

Lastly, continuous professional development is key for school social workers to keep abreast with evolving cultural perspectives and to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of their interventions (Fong, 2016). This includes being open to feedback, engaging in ongoing self-reflection, and maintaining a lifelong commitment to learning and adapting to new cultural knowledge and understanding (Fong, 2016). By staying informed and culturally responsive, school social workers can better meet the unique needs of their diverse student population and contribute to positive academic and social outcomes (Lum, 2016).

2.1.5 THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SOCIAL WORKERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

i. Collaboration with Teachers

Teachers play a pivotal role in the lives of students, often being the first to observe shifts in behavior or scholastic achievement. Acknowledging this position, school social workers can effectively join forces with teachers to pinpoint those students who may necessitate extra assistance, devise strategies for intervention, and track the progress of these measures (Allen-

Meares, 2013). This collaborative approach can embody routine meetings, collective planning sessions, and constant communication (Bronstein, 2015).

Furthermore, there is a growing body of research that suggests teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards mental health can significantly impact the effectiveness of mental health interventions in schools (Reinke et al., 2015). Therefore, social workers can play a crucial role in providing teachers with professional development opportunities to increase their understanding and awareness of mental health issues. Also, social workers can help teachers develop strategies to manage classroom behaviors and promote a positive learning environment (Gherardi et al., 2017).

Additionally, collaboration with teachers can extend beyond the school environment. School social workers can work with teachers to engage parents and families in supporting students' mental health (Alvarez et al., 2019). 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 at home (Rothì et al., 2016).

Lastly, social workers and teachers can work together to develop school-wide initiatives to promote mental health. This might include implementing programs to reduce stigma associated with mental health, promoting positive peer relationships, and creating an inclusive and supportive school environment (Sulkowski et al., 2020).

ii. Collaboration with Administrators

Administrators hold the key to shaping the school's policies and practices, providing an essential platform for school social workers to work closely with them in advocating for practices that put

students' mental health at the forefront (Bronstein, 2015). This might include advocating for anti-bullying policies or promoting a positive school climate (Fazel et al., 2014). Additionally, social workers can collaborate with administrators to secure resources for mental health services like funding for extra staff or chances for professional development (Owens et al., 2014).

Moreover, administrators can play a crucial role in creating a school environment that supports mental health. This may involve implementing school-wide mental health programs, creating safe spaces for students to discuss mental health issues, or providing staff with training on how to identify and respond to mental health issues (Auerbach et al., 2015).

Furthermore, administrators have the ability to influence the school's culture and climate. School social workers can work with administrators to promote a culture of acceptance and understanding around mental health, which can help reduce stigma and encourage students to seek help when they need it (Kutcher et al., 2016).

Lastly, school social workers can collaborate with administrators to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of mental health policies and interventions. This could involve collecting and analyzing data on student mental health outcomes, conducting surveys to assess the school climate, or implementing evidence-based practices to improve mental health support (Walter et al., 2019).

iii. Collaboration with Community Agencies

Community agencies like mental health clinics and social service agencies often provide a plethora of resources and support for students (Cappella et al., 2013). School social workers can foster relationships with these agencies to streamline services, make referrals, and ensure that

students and their families have access to the support they need (Bruns et al., 2015). This collaboration can involve regular communication, joint planning, and coordination of services to create a seamless continuum of care for students (Stephan et al., 2016).

Moreover, working hand in hand with community agencies allows school social workers to tap into a broader network of expertise and specialized services. By collaborating with mental health professionals in the community, school social workers can ensure that students receive the most appropriate and comprehensive support for their mental health needs (Splett et al., 2013). This collaboration can involve sharing information, conducting joint assessments, and developing coordinated treatment plans (Farmer et al., 2013).

Additionally, community agencies can provide valuable resources for preventative and early intervention measures. School social workers can collaborate with these agencies to implement evidence-based programs that promote positive mental health, resilience, and social-emotional skills in students (Atkins et al., 2017). By partnering with community agencies, school social workers can extend their reach beyond the school setting and address the holistic needs of students, including their families and communities (Adelman et al., 2017).

Furthermore, collaboration with community agencies can enhance the effectiveness of mental health services through a comprehensive and integrated approach. School social workers can work with these agencies to develop seamless transitions for students between school-based services and community-based services, ensuring continuity of care and ongoing support (Kolomer et al., 2018). This collaboration can involve joint case conferences, shared treatment

planning, and regular communication to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to student mental health support (Biegel et al., 2018)

2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

School social workers serve as critical components of the school mental health workforce and are the primary providers of social services in educational settings. The significance of their role has been widely recognized and emphasized in many studies (Kelly et al., 2015). The multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) approach, ecological systems perspective, and the promotion of evidence-based practice have informed school social work practice in recent years (Kelly et al., 2015). The MTSS approach, in particular, speaks to the wide range of mental health needs that students bring to school, highlighting the importance of integrating mental health support within the school system (Kelly et al., 2015).

In addition, school social work interventions often target high-needs students, with the aim of improving their social, mental/behavioral health, and academic outcomes (Freeman et al., 2016). Such targeted interventions are supported by activities aimed at primary and secondary prevention to promote positive school climate, school culture, and positive interactions among teachers, students, and parents (Freeman et al., 2016). The wellbeing of parents is also considered, as it can directly and indirectly influence the mental health of students (Freeman et al., 2016).

The work of school social workers is often characterized by a collaborative, cross-systems approach that involves students, families, and staff within educational settings (Teasley et al., 2017). This collaboration is crucial in ensuring that comprehensive mental health support is

available to students (Teasley et al., 2017). There is a growing consensus that comprehensive mental health programs in schools contribute significantly to academic achievement and the development of social skills, leadership, self-awareness, and caring connections to adults in the school community (Teasley et al., 2017).

Furthermore, collaborations between schools and community partners have been found to enhance the academic success of students (Owens et al., 2014). These partnerships not only improve school-wide truancy and discipline rates but also increase high school graduation rates and help create a positive school environment (Owens et al., 2014). Such an environment is conducive to learning and success, both within the school and in the wider community (Owens et al., 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing disruptions to schooling have had far-reaching effects on school-aged children, their families, and school staff (Mazza et al., 2020). Numerous studies have reported increased stress and mental health difficulties among these groups due to fears related to the pandemic (Mazza et al., 2020). Schools and school social workers have been identified as key players in addressing these mental health needs (Mazza et al., 2020).

The unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest of 2020 have been highlighted as potentially traumatic experiences, necessitating a trauma-informed school response (Perfect et al., 2020). This involves addressing various facets of safety during the pandemic and maintaining school-based relationships even during school closures and remote learning (Perfect et al., 2020). The implementation of trauma-informed approaches during and after the pandemic requires collaborative efforts from all school staff (Perfect et al., 2020). The

findings support a unified school model that integrates components of a trauma-informed approach (Perfect et al., 2020).

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory has been widely accepted for its emphasis on understanding individuals within their environmental contexts, including the family, school, community, and society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory illustrates that students' mental health is shaped by various factors across different environmental levels, and effective interventions must address these multiple levels (Cefai, Cavioni, Bartolo, Simoes, & Ridgway, 2014).

School social workers, who are primarily responsible for addressing student social and emotional needs, have often employed the ecological systems perspective in their practice (Kelly, Frey, Alvarez, & Berzin, 2010). This perspective enables them to understand their clients' values, traditions, and historical context, and integrate this knowledge into social work assessments and interventions (Kelly et al., 2010).

Several scholars have expanded on the Ecological Systems Theory in relation to school social work and students' mental health. For example, Alvarez et al. (2013) emphasized the role of school social workers in bridging the gap between students' home and school environments, which are two crucial microsystems in Bronfenbrenner's model¹. They also suggested that school social workers, with their unique position in the mesosystem, can facilitate the collaboration between different microsystems to support students' mental health¹.

Kelly et al. (2015) discussed the importance of the macrosystem, which includes societal attitudes and policies, in shaping students' mental health outcomes². They argued that school social workers, as agents of change, can advocate for policies that promote mental health at the school, community, and societal levels².

In the context of Uselu Secondary Schools in Benin City, Edo State, the Ecological Systems Theory can further guide school social workers in considering the broader macrosystem in their practice. For example, they might advocate for policies that reduce stigma and discrimination related to mental health, or that increase access to mental health services in the community³.

Moreover, the Ecological Systems Theory can inform the development of school social work interventions that address the interactions between different environmental systems. For example, a school social worker might develop a home-school collaboration program that involves parents in their children's mental health support, or a community engagement program that leverages local resources to promote students' mental health⁴.

a. Strengths-Based Practice

The Strengths-Based Practice, which emphasizes the strengths and resources of individuals rather than their problems or deficits, is often implemented in school social work to help students develop resilience, self-esteem, and coping skills, which are essential for mental health (Saleebey, 2013).

Strengths-based social work practice, as an overarching philosophical approach to social work practice, is a collaborative process between the person supported by services and those providing

support, allowing them to work together to determine an outcome that utilizes the person's strengths and assets (Saleebey, 2013).

Several scholars have highlighted the effectiveness of the Strengths-Based Practice in school social work. For example, Saleebey (2013) argued that focusing on students' strengths and resources can empower them to take control of their mental health and wellbeing⁵. He suggested that this approach can foster students' resilience, self-esteem, and coping skills, which are crucial for their mental health. Munson et al. (2015) demonstrated the practical use of the Strengths-Based Practice in school social work. They outlined a range of strengths-based interventions, such as individual counseling, group therapy, and peer support programs, that can help students manage their mental health.

In the context of Uselu Secondary Schools in Benin City, Edo State, the Strengths-Based Practice can further guide school social workers in developing interventions that build on students' strengths and resources. For example, they might implement a peer support program that fosters students' mutual help and collective problem-solving, or a resilience training program that develops students' ability to cope with stress and adversity⁷.

Moreover, the Strengths-Based Practice can inform the development of a school mental health culture that values and nurtures students' strengths. For example, a school social worker might advocate for school policies and practices that recognize students' strengths, or that create a positive and supportive school environment.

Sure! Here's a revised version of Chapter Three of an academic project on the topic "Impact of School Social Work on Mental Health of Secondary School Students in Uselu Secondary Schools, Benin City, Edo State." I have made the necessary changes to the topic, population, and language to reflect a proposal with a future-oriented perspective. I have also paraphrased the content to provide a fresh and original version.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology that will be employed in conducting the study. It includes details on the research design, population, sampling technique, research instrument, data collection method, and data analysis techniques.

Research Design

The research will adopt a survey research design to gather information on the impact of school social work on the mental health of secondary school students in Uselu Secondary Schools, Benin City, Edo State. This design will allow for the collection and analysis of data through questionnaires, which will provide valuable insights into the research topic.

Population

The population is the entire group from which conclusion was drawn from. Shukla (2020) defined population as set or group of all the units, which possess a variable characteristic under study.

It is the complete set group or pool of individuals from which statistical sample is drawn. The population for this study consist of a total of Eight Hundred and Ninety Seven (897) senior secondary school two (SSS2) students in three (3) selected secondary schools in Uselu Community, Edo State. The population of the students in the schools are listed by gender in table 1 below:

Table 1: Distribution of the population of students by gender

S/N	Name of school	Males	Females	Total
1.	Uselu Secondary school	206	272	478
2.	Eagles Education Centre	81	146	227
3.	Spring Field High School	88	104	192
	Total	375	522	

Sample and Sampling Technique

According to Shukla (2020), a sample is a part of population that represents it completely, representing all its characteristics. It is a sub set of a population which represents all the elements in a population. The process of selecting a sample from a population is sampling. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, the sample size for a population of 897 which is approximately 900 at 95% confidence level and 5% degree of accuracy is two hundred and sixty nine (269). Through a simple random sampling technique, participants were selected. The questionnaire was administered using the ratio to determine how many goes to each school. Table 2 below shows the sample size and schools by gender:

Table 2: Distribution of the sample size by school and gender

S/N.	Name of school	Males	Females	Total
1.	Uselu Secondary school	62	81	143
2.	Eagles Education Centre	24	44	68
3.	Spring Field High School	27	31	58
	Total	113	156	269

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, it will be reviewed by experts in the field of social work and mental health. Their feedback and suggestions will be considered in refining the questionnaire. To assess the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study will be conducted with a small sample of students. The data obtained from the pilot study will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Method of Data Collection

The data will be collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed to the selected participants. The questionnaires will be delivered to the participants in their respective school settings, and they will be given ample time to complete them. The researchers will be available to answer any questions and provide clarification if needed.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages will be used to summarize the demographic information and responses to the questionnaire items. Inferential statistical analysis, such as chi-square tests or t-tests, may be used to determine the relationship between variables and to test the research hypotheses.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. Informed consent will be obtained from the participants, and strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. The participants will be assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from self-administered questionnaires to two hundred and sixty nine (269) students across senior secondary school II in Uselu community Edo State. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data in tables. The use of table was the most appropriate means of interpreting information for easy understanding. In analyzing the data, judgement was based on the number of favorable or unfavorable responses received on each statement in the questionnaire. Generally the favorable responses is "yes" while the unfavorable responses are "no and undecided". The results of the data are analyzed below based on each research questions.

4.1.1 Socio -Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic variables that pertained to this study and assessed by the researcher were gender, age, family size, and parenting style. Table 4.1 shows the general information of the respondents with respect to the afore-listed variables.

Table.4.1. Demographic Information of Respondent

S/N	Variables	Attributes	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Gender	Male	129	47.9
		Female	140	52.0
2	Age	16-20 years	119	44.2
		21-25 years	150	55.8
		26 years & above	-	-
3	Family Size	1-5	125	46.5
		6-10	102	37.9
		11 & above	41	15.2
5	Parenting Style	Dual Parenting	196	72.9
		Single Parenting	73	27.1

Source: Field work, 2024

Data in Table 4.1 revealed that out of 269 respondents that were sampled in this study, 155 (57.6%) were males while 141 (52.4%) 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 24 years. In terms of family size, 125 (46.5%) are in a family size of between 1 and 5, 102 (37.9%) are in a family size of 6 to 10 while 41 (15.2%) are in a family size of above 10. In terms of parenting style, 196 (72.9%) have dual parenting style while 73 (27.1%) have single parenting style.

Figure 4.1 Gender of Respondents

Table 4.1 and figure 4.1 above shows the sex of respondents. From the 269 respondents, 129 respondents representing 42.1% were male while 140 respondents representing 52% were females. This results therefore established that majority of the respondents were females.

Figure 4.2 Age of Respondents

Table 4.1 and figure 4.2 above shows the age of respondents. From the 269 respondents, 119 respondents representing 44.2% were within the age of 16 to 20 years, while 150 of the respondents representing 55.8% were within the age of 21 to 25 years, none of the respondents were within the age of 26 years and above. This research implies that majority of the respondents were within the ages of 21 to 25 years.

Figure 4.3 Family Size of Respondents

Table 4.1 and figure 4.3 above shows the family size of the respondents. From the 269 respondents, 125 respondents representing 46.5% had a family size between 1 to 5 members, 102 respondents representing 37.9% had a family size between 6 to 10 members, and 41 of the respondents representing 15.2% of the respondents had a family size of 11 and above members. This research implies that majority of the respondents had a family size of 1 to 5 members.

Figure 4.4 Parenting Style of Respondents

Table 4.1 and figure 4.4 above shows the parenting style of the respondents. From the 269 respondents, 196 respondents representing 72.9% were dual parenting, while 73 respondents representing 27.1% of the respondents were single parenting. This research therefore showed that majority of the respondents were dual parents.

4.1.1 Analysis of Research Questions

The analysis of this study was based on the research questions. Consequently, the four (4) research questions of the study were duly analyzed. The results were shown in Tables 4.2 to 4.5.

4.1.2 Research Question One: What is the current state of students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools in Egorlocal government area of Edo state?

Table 4.2: Do you believe that your mental health is an important aspect of your overall well-being?

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

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 4.2 showed that majority representing 82% of the total respondents believes that mental health is important to the overall well-being of students and 9.1% of the total respondents doesn't believe that mental health is important to the overall well-being of students, and 8.9% were undecided in their responses if mental health is important 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.

4.1.3 Research Question Two: What are the main factors contributing to students' mental health issues in Uselu Secondary schools?

Table 4.3: Are you aware of the main factors that contribute to mental health issues among students in your school?

	Frequency	Percent
YES	245	91%
NO	19	7%
UNDECIDED	5	2%
Total	269	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.3 above, showed that 91% of the total students responded that they are aware of the main factors that contribute to mental health issues among students in secondary schools, and 7% of the total students responded that they are not aware of the main factors that contribute to mental health issues among students in secondary schools, and 2% of tthe students were undecided with

their responses if they are aware of the main factors that contribute to mental health issues among secondary school students. This therefore implies that the majority of the students are aware of the main factors that contribute to mental health issues among secondary school students.

4.1.4 Research Question Three: What are the current school social work interventions in place to support students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools?

Table 4.4. Are there existing school social work interventions in place to support students' mental health in your school?

	Frequency	Percent
YES	50	18.6%
NO	159	59.1%
UNDECIDED	60	22.3%
Total	269	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.4. above, it showed that 18.6% of the total students agreed that there are existing social work intervention in place to support student's mental health in schools, and 59.1% of the total students disagreed that there are existing social work intervention in place to support student's mental health in schools, and 22.3% of the total students were undecided in their responses if there are existing social work intervention put in place to support student's mental health in schools. This therefore implies that majority of the students disagreed that there are existing social work intervention put in place to support student's mental health in schools

4.1.5 Research Question Four: How effective are the existing school social work interventions in addressing students' mental health issues in Uselu Secondary schools?

Table 4.5. Have you personally received support or counseling from a school social worker for your mental health concerns?

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

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.5 above, showed that 51.3% of the total students agreed that they have personally received support and counselling 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 counselling 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 counselling from school social workers regarding their mental health concern. This therefore implies that majority of the students have experienced personal support and counselling from school social workers regarding their mental health concern.

Table 4.6. Have you noticed any change in your engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the 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

Table 4.6 above, showed that 23.7% of the total students agreed that they have noticed a change 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 any change 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 any change 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.

4.1.6 Research Question Five: What are the potential areas of improvement for school social work interventions to better support students' mental health in Uselu Secondary schools?

Table 4.7. 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

Table 4.7 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.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 4.2: 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.

Table 4.3: 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. This aligns with the study by Candelaria, Mee-Lee, and Jones (2014), which underscores the importance of understanding the causes of mental health issues for effective prevention and intervention strategies. 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.

Table 4.4: 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). Additionally, Cappella et al. (2013) highlighted the role of community agencies like mental health clinics and social service agencies in providing resources and support for students,

suggesting that school social workers can foster relationships with these agencies to streamline services and ensure that students and their families have access to the support they need.

Table 4.5: 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. This finding is in line with the study by White, Roach, and Pybis(2014), which found that peer support in mental health services can have a positive impact on psychosocial outcomes. Moreover, 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.

Table 4.6: 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.

Table 4.7: The table 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.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The document titled "The Role of School Social Workers in Fostering Student Mental Health" provides an in-depth analysis of the importance of school social workers in promoting mental health among students. The research was conducted with several key objectives: to understand the impact of school social workers on students' mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes, to explore the strategies for creating a supportive school climate, to monitor the effectiveness of mental health interventions, and to evaluate the role of community agencies in providing comprehensive care. In addition, the study aimed to shed light on the challenges faced by school social workers in their daily practice and the resources they need to effectively support students. The research also sought to identify gaps in current practices and propose recommendations for improving the role of school social workers in fostering student mental health.

The study was conducted across various educational settings, with a focus on the role of school social workers. A random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample from different schools. The primary tool for data collection was a questionnaire, and the collected data was analyzed using percentage evaluations. The study also incorporated relevant literature and documents for additional insights. The questionnaire covered a range of topics, including the social workers' roles and responsibilities, their interactions with students, and their perceptions of the school climate. The literature review provided a broader context for the study, highlighting previous research on the role of school social workers in promoting student mental health and identifying gaps in the existing literature.

The findings were significant and highlighted the crucial role of school social workers in fostering mental health support for students. It was found that school social workers significantly impact students' mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The study recommended that school social workers should collaborate with school administrators and community agencies to create a supportive school climate. It also suggested that schools should monitor mental health interventions and leverage community resources for comprehensive care. The study also 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.

Furthermore, it was proposed that schools should adopt evidence-based practices informed by multi-tiered systems of support and ecological systems perspectives. These professionals are also needed to provide case management and counseling to students and their families, especially during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study 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 and supports. The research also underscored the importance of collaboration between schools and community agencies, suggesting that such partnerships can enhance the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of mental health supports.

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 well-being. 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

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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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APPENDIX ONE
QUESTIONNAIRE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY

CONSENT FORM

RE: IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN USELU SECONDARY SCHOOLS, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE.

Dear Madam/Sir,

My name is Egbabor-Fred Ewomazino Freda; a B.Sc. student in the Department of Social work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. As part of the requirements for the award of B.Sc. in Social Work, I am required by the University to develop and conduct a research dissertation under the supervision of DR.(BARR). YESUFU. S. This consent form is one of the first steps in fulfilling this requirement. I will greatly appreciate your participation in the study titled:**Impact Of School Social Work on the Mental Health Of Secondary School students in Uselu Secondary Schools, Benin City, Edo State.**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary not compulsory. All information that you provide will be treated as confidential and anonymous. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be given a questionnaire which comprises seven (2) sections, A-B. Upon the completion of this research, you will be invited to read my findings because it will be useful to government agencies, non-governmental organizations international, national and local policy makers including social workers.

I have read and understood the above consent requirement and desire shall freely participate in study. Please tick the column of your choice below: Yes () No () Undecided ()

SECTION A: SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

AGE: 18 -23 years () 24 – 29 years() 30 – 35 years () 36 years and above()

GENDER: Male: () Female: ()

RELIGION: Christian: () Muslim: () Traditional Worshipper: ()

Marital Status: Single : () Married : () Divorced : ()

SECTION B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that your mental health is an important aspect of your overall well-being?

Yes () No () Undecided ()

2. Are you aware of the main factors that contribute to mental health issues among students in your school? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

3. Are there existing school social work interventions in place to support students' mental health in your school? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

4. Do you think the current school social work interventions effectively address students' mental health issues in your school? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

5. Have you personally received support or counseling from a school social worker for your mental health concerns? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

6. Do you think the existing school social work interventions have improved your emotional well-being? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

7. Have you noticed any change in your engagement with school activities or academics as a result of the school social work interventions? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

8. Do you believe that school social work interventions should be improved to better support students' mental health in your school? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

9. Are you aware of any areas where school social work interventions can be improved to better support students' mental health in your school? **Yes () No () Undecided ()**

10. Do you think that increased collaboration among educators, mental health professionals, parents, and community leaders can improve students' mental health in your school?

Yes () No () Undecided ()