

**SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION ON MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH
AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EGOR
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA**

BY

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
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UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

NOVEMBER, 2025

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK,
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY. IN
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by **Ugoewuzie Chioma Marycynthia** with Matriculation Number: **SSC2106147** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

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DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty who is gracious and kind and has provided me guidance and protection throughout my stay in school.

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First and foremost, I express my deepest gratitude to God Almighty, whose grace, guidance, and unfailing love have been my constant source of strength and inspiration throughout this journey.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined social work interventions in managing mental health among students in public secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Guided by a descriptive survey research design, the study sought to systematically describe the characteristics and patterns of mental health challenges experienced by students as well as the effectiveness of social work interventions in addressing them. The descriptive design enabled the researcher to collect relevant information from a representative sample, providing an accurate reflection of the target population without attempting to establish causality. Egor LGA, an urban and semi-urban district within Benin City, served as the geographical focus due to its cultural diversity, population density, and the presence of several notable educational and social institutions that influence youth development. The population of the study comprised students enrolled in public secondary schools in the area. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 400 students was selected from an estimated population of 574,406 persons. The study adopted a semi-structured questionnaire divided into two sections: demographic information and items directly aligned with the research questions. A four-point Likert scale facilitated the collection of quantifiable data regarding students' perceptions of mental health challenges and the role of social work interventions. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the instrument, expert validation was conducted, while reliability was established through the test-retest method. Data collection was carried out personally by the researcher to ensure clarity and confidentiality. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and voluntary participation were strictly observed. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools including tables, percentages, and graphical representations. Findings from the study provided meaningful insights into the current state of social work responses to mental health concerns within public schools in Egor LGA, contributing valuable knowledge to stakeholders seeking to strengthen mental health support systems in educational settings.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Mental health has emerged globally as one of the most pressing public health and educational concerns of the 21st century, affecting millions of young people across different socio-economic and cultural contexts (World Health Organization, 2020). Mental health has increasingly become a central concern in educational discourse, particularly as schools are recognized not only as centers for academic instruction but also as vital spaces for the social and emotional development of young people (Patel et al., 2018). In Nigeria, and specifically within Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, the challenges facing public secondary school students go beyond the classroom (Idemudia, 2010). Many students grapple with social, emotional, and psychological issues that affect their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and general well-being (Omonzejele, 2021). The transitional stage of adolescence, characterized by identity formation, peer influence, and heightened exposure to socio-economic challenges, makes this group particularly vulnerable to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and even suicidal tendencies (Akpan & Okon, 2022). Without adequate support, these challenges can spiral into more severe conditions, undermining the broader goals of education and community development (WHO, 2020).

It is within this context that social work interventions become indispensable (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Social work, as a profession, is committed to enhancing the well-being of individuals and communities through targeted support systems that promote resilience, coping mechanisms, and psychosocial balance (Idemudia, 2010). In the school setting, social workers are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between students' academic needs and their mental health concerns (Omonzejele, 2021). They employ preventive, remedial, and developmental interventions to address mental health issues, working closely with teachers, parents, and healthcare providers (Akpan & Okon, 2022). For public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area—where resources are often limited and mental health remains a stigmatized subject—such interventions play a critical role in fostering inclusive, supportive, and responsive school environments (WHO, 2020).

Furthermore, the socio-economic realities of Egor Local Government Area, which include high levels of unemployment, poverty, and urban stress, tend to exacerbate the psychological distress of young people (Idemudia, 2010). Students in these schools often carry the burden of unstable family structures, peer pressure, and societal expectations, all of which can manifest in maladaptive behaviors if left unaddressed (Omonzejele, 2021). Social work interventions, therefore, not only focus on clinical aspects of mental health but also take into account the broader socio-cultural and economic contexts of the students (Akpan & Okon, 2022). By implementing counseling services, peer support programs, family engagement strategies, and advocacy for mental health awareness,

social workers can contribute significantly to reducing stigma, building resilience, and equipping students with the tools to manage stress and emotional challenges (Patel et al., 2018).

Thus, exploring social work interventions in managing mental health among public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area is both timely and necessary (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). It highlights the intersection of education, health, and social welfare, emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated efforts to ensure that students are not only educated but also emotionally supported to reach their full potential (WHO, 2020). This study underscores the value of strengthening social work structures within schools as a proactive response to the growing mental health needs of adolescents in Nigeria (Akpan & Okon, 2022).

It has been observed that mental health has become a pressing concern globally, with adolescents increasingly affected due to the psychological, social, and emotional changes that occur during this stage of life (Patel et al., 2018). In Nigeria, the issue of mental health among young people, particularly those in public secondary schools, is increasingly drawing attention (Omonzejele, 2021). This is especially true in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, where students face a variety of challenges ranging from academic pressure and family instability to substance abuse, bullying, and poverty (Idemudia, 2010). These factors contribute significantly to emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems among secondary school students (Akpan

& Okon, 2022). Unfortunately, mental health issues are often poorly understood, stigmatized, or ignored, especially in educational institutions with limited access to psychological support services (WHO, 2020). The role of social work in addressing mental health challenges is vital (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Social workers are trained to identify, assess, and manage mental and emotional difficulties, providing counselling, advocacy, and community support services (Omonzejele, 2021). In the context of public secondary schools, social work interventions can take the form of individual and group counselling sessions, psycho-education programs, crisis intervention, family engagement, and referrals to mental health professionals (Idemudia, 2010). These services can foster resilience, improve coping mechanisms, and enhance the overall well-being of students (Akpan & Okon, 2022).

However, in Egor Local Government Area, like in many parts of Nigeria, the integration of social work practices into the school system remains inadequate (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Many schools lack trained personnel to address the mental health needs of students (WHO, 2020). This gap has left a significant number of adolescents without access to timely and effective support, further worsening their mental health outcomes (Patel et al., 2018). In response, there is a growing need to explore and assess the impact of social work interventions in managing and improving mental health among students (Idemudia, 2010). This project work, therefore, seeks to examine the effectiveness of social work interventions in managing mental health issues among students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (Omonzejele, 2021).

It aims to highlight the challenges faced by students, the existing support systems, and the ways in which social work practices can be effectively implemented within the school environment to promote mental health awareness, prevention, and care (Akpan & Okon, 2022). Through this, the research hopes to provide relevant recommendations that can guide policy development and improve mental health outcomes among Nigerian adolescents (WHO, 2020).

It should be noted that social work as a profession committed to enhancing human well-being and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, has a vital role to play in managing mental health issues among adolescents (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Social workers are trained to provide psychosocial support, crisis intervention, counselling, and advocacy for at-risk individuals (Omonzejele, 2021). In the context of secondary education, social work interventions can serve as a bridge between students, their families, schools, and mental health professionals (Akpan & Okon, 2022). They can help identify early signs of mental distress, provide preventive education, and create safe environments for open conversations about mental health (Patel et al., 2018).

Furthermore, given the increasing demand for mental health support in public secondary schools in Egor LGA, this project work will also seek to investigate the nature, effectiveness, and challenges of social work interventions in managing mental health issues among students (WHO, 2020). It will explore how social workers can collaborate with teachers, parents, and the wider community to build a comprehensive support

system for young people (Idemudia, 2010). By understanding the current interventions and identifying gaps, this project work will contribute to the development of sustainable and culturally sensitive mental health strategies within the school system (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Ultimately, the background to this study underscores the urgency of integrating social work practice into school health programs and the need to strengthen mental health frameworks in educational settings, particularly in underserved regions like Egor Local Government Area (Akpan & Okon, 2022).

Furthermore, the stigma surrounding mental health in Nigeria poses a significant barrier to effective intervention and support, especially in secondary schools (Omonzejele, 2021). Many students are reluctant to speak out about their emotional or psychological struggles for fear of being labelled wrongly or misunderstood (Patel et al., 2018). Teachers and school administrators may also lack adequate training to recognize or appropriately respond to signs of mental health issues, thereby compounding the problem (WHO, 2020). This makes the role of social workers even more critical, as they possess both the professional skills and ethical commitment to promote mental health awareness, advocate for affected students, and implement supportive strategies within the school environment (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). In Egor Local Government Area, the need for structured mental health programs and trained personnel within public secondary schools has become increasingly apparent (Idemudia, 2010). Social work interventions, which may include individual and group counselling, mental health education, early intervention programs, referral services, and policy advocacy, can make a substantial

difference in the well-being of students (Akpan & Okon, 2022). These interventions also have the potential to improve academic performance, reduce school dropouts, and foster a more inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere (Patel et al., 2018).

Moreover, this study is grounded in the broader recognition that adolescence is a critical developmental stage (WHO, 2020). Without appropriate mental health support, issues faced during this period can extend into adulthood, resulting in long-term consequences for individuals, families, and society at large (Omonzejele, 2021). Addressing these issues early through targeted social work interventions can thus contribute not only to individual growth but also to the broader goals of national development, social stability, and educational advancement (Akpan & Okon, 2022). In essence, the background to this study reflects the pressing need to explore how social work practice can be effectively integrated into the secondary school system in Egor Local Government Area (Idemudia, 2010). It also highlights the importance of developing mental health strategies that are proactive, inclusive, and responsive to the unique challenges faced by adolescents in the Nigerian educational context (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). By doing so, this project work aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers, educators, social workers, and mental health professionals committed to safeguarding the mental well-being of young people (Patel et al., 2018).

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Mental health challenges among adolescents in public secondary schools have become a growing concern in Nigeria, particularly in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Students are increasingly exposed to a range of psychological stressors, including academic pressure, family issues, peer influence, substance abuse, poverty, and exposure to violence. These stressors often manifest in forms such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, emotional instability, and in some cases, suicidal ideation. Despite the severity of these issues, there is still a widespread lack of awareness, early detection mechanisms, and structured intervention strategies within the school system to address mental health concerns effectively. Social work, as a professional field, plays a crucial role in identifying, preventing, and managing mental health challenges through counselling, advocacy, support services, and policy intervention. However, in Egor LGA, there is limited integration of professional social work practices in the school setting, leading to a gap in the mental health support system for students. Many schools do not have trained social workers or counsellors, and even when present, they are often underutilized or overwhelmed. As a result, students who are struggling mentally are left unsupported, which negatively affects their academic performance, social behaviour, and overall development.

This project work thus seeks to investigate the extent to which social work interventions are currently being utilized in managing mental health issues among students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area. It also aims to identify the challenges limiting the effectiveness of these interventions and propose

strategies for strengthening social work involvement in the school mental health framework. Without a clear understanding of the role and impact of social work interventions, efforts to improve the mental well-being of students may remain ineffective and uncoordinated. Furthermore, the stigma associated with mental health in many communities, including those in Egor Local Government Area, poses a significant barrier to open discussions and intervention. Students experiencing mental health problems often remain silent due to fear of being labelled or misunderstood. Teachers and school administrators may also lack the training to recognize early signs of distress or may downplay the seriousness of psychological symptoms. In such a context, the role of the social worker becomes even more vital, not only in providing direct support to students but also in creating awareness, educating stakeholders, and fostering a supportive environment within the school system.

Furthermore, despite the global recognition of mental health as a key component of student well-being and success, there remains a disconnect between policy and practice at the grassroots level. Government policies may acknowledge the need for psychosocial support in schools, yet implementation remains weak due to inadequate funding, limited human resources, and poor infrastructure. Social workers, when deployed effectively, can bridge this gap by serving as liaisons among students, families, teachers, and healthcare providers. However, the current structure in Egor LGA offers little insight into how well social workers are integrated into the educational system or the effectiveness of their interventions. The lack of empirical data and documented

strategies on social work interventions in managing mental health among public secondary school students in this area underscores the urgency of this study. By identifying existing gaps, assessing the level of intervention, and recommending effective strategies, this research aims to contribute significantly to the development of a more responsive and holistic mental health support system in schools. It is only through deliberate and informed social work practices that students' mental well-being can be protected, thereby enabling them to achieve academic success and contribute meaningfully to society.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study was to investigate the Social Work Interventions on Managing Mental Health Among Public Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the prevalence of mental health issues among students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area.
- ii. identify the types of social work interventions currently used to manage mental health challenges in these schools.
- iii. assess the effectiveness of social work interventions in addressing mental health concerns among students.

- iv. investigate the challenges faced by social workers in implementing mental health interventions in schools.
- v. to recommend strategies to enhance social work support for students with mental health issues in public secondary schools.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guarded the study

- i. What is the prevalence of mental health issues among students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area?
- ii. What types of social work interventions are currently being used to manage mental health challenges in these schools?
- iii. How effective are the existing social work interventions in addressing students' mental health problems?
- iv. What challenges do social workers encounter while implementing mental health interventions in the schools?
- v. What strategies can be adopted to improve social work support for managing mental health issues among students in public secondary schools?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study on "Social Work Interventions on Managing Mental Health Among Public Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State" lies in its potential to address a critical and growing concern in the Nigerian educational system—student mental health. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, trauma, and behavioural disorders among adolescents. This study is crucial because it provides an in-depth understanding of how social work interventions can play a pivotal role in mitigating these challenges and improving the overall well-being and academic performance of students.

Secondly, the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the unique role of social workers within the educational system, particularly in supporting students facing psychological and emotional difficulties. It will underscore the importance of integrating mental health services into school settings, thereby shifting the focus from purely academic achievements to a more holistic approach that includes mental and emotional well-being.

More so, this research will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, school administrators, and educators in Egor Local Government Area and beyond. By identifying effective social work strategies for managing mental health, the study can inform the development of policies and programs that support early identification, prevention, and intervention for mental health issues in schools.

Furthermore, the findings of the study will be beneficial to parents and guardians, as it will create awareness about the mental health challenges their children may face and the importance of seeking timely and professional support. It will also help in reducing stigma associated with mental illness, encouraging a more supportive and understanding school and home environment.

Lastly, the study will serve as a guide for future researchers and students of social work, psychology, and educationists who are interested in exploring mental health interventions in school settings. It opens up avenues for more localized research and evidence-based practices that can be tailored to the Nigerian context.

In essence, we can thus say that this study is significant because it addresses a pressing social issue, provides practical solutions through social work, and aims to improve the mental health outcomes of students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area, thereby contributing to the broader goals of educational success and community well-being.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study will be conducted at selected schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The study aims to determine the effects of mental health on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area.

1.7 Conceptual Clarification

Social Work: Social work is a professional field that seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities, especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, or living in poverty. It involves providing support, advocacy, counselling, and referrals to relevant services, using specialized knowledge and ethical practice. (Olowokere, & Okanlawon, 2021). In the school setting, social workers often help students deal with emotional, behavioural, and psychological challenges.

Intervention: Intervention refers to a planned set of actions or strategies designed to bring about positive change in a situation or condition (Gitterman, & Germain, 2008). In this context, social work intervention involves the techniques, programs, and support services used by social workers to address and improve the mental health of students in public secondary schools.

Mental Health: Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community. It includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. (Gitterman, & Germain, 2008). Poor mental health may include issues like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and trauma, all of which can affect students' academic performance and social behavior.

Public Secondary Schools: These are government-owned institutions that provide education to students typically between the ages of 11 and 18. In the context of this study,

they are the setting where mental health issues among adolescents are being observed and where social work interventions are being implemented.

Egor Local Government Area: Egor is one of the local government areas in Edo State, Nigeria. It is part of the Benin City metropolitan area and consists of both urban and semi-urban communities. It serves as the geographical focus of this study.

Students: Students refer to the individuals enrolled in public secondary schools in Egor LGA. These are the primary subjects of the study, as they are the ones affected by mental health challenges and targeted for social work interventions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Preamble

This review of related literature explores the theoretical and empirical foundations that underpin the role of social work interventions in managing mental health issues among adolescents in school settings. It examines the concept of mental health, the nature and causes of mental health problems among secondary school students, and the range of psychosocial services that social workers provide within educational institutions. The review also discusses existing policies, frameworks, and global best practices in school-based mental health services. By analyzing prior studies, theoretical perspectives, and relevant models, this literature review aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for assessing the effectiveness of social work interventions in enhancing the mental health outcomes of students in public secondary schools in Egor LGA.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Mental Health

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences how individuals think, feel, and behave, as well as how they handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness; rather, it is a vital part of overall well-being that contributes to a person's ability to function productively and live a fulfilling life. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2013). This definition emphasizes the positive dimension of mental health, highlighting that it is more than just the avoidance of mental disorders; it also involves personal development and resilience.

Mental health is affected by a variety of factors, including biological influences such as genetics and brain chemistry, life experiences such as trauma or abuse, and family history of mental health problems. (P. F. Omonzejele, 2021). It should be noted that social and environmental conditions like poverty, violence, and discrimination can also significantly impact mental well-being. Maintaining good mental health requires supportive relationships, access to care, healthy coping mechanisms, and a balanced lifestyle. In recent years, increased awareness of mental health issues has led to more advocacy for integrating mental health services into education, workplace policies, and

community programs. This shows that mental health is a crucial component of human wellness that encompasses how people manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Promoting mental health is essential for individual well-being, social stability, and national development. According to UNICEF, 2020, One of the most critical aspects of the concept of mental health is the stigma that often surrounds it. In many societies, especially in developing countries, mental health challenges are misunderstood or associated with shame. This discourages individuals from seeking help and leads to social isolation, discrimination, or delayed treatment. Reducing this stigma is key to encouraging early intervention and promoting healthier communities (UNICEF, 2020).

More so, mental health is particularly significant during key developmental stages, such as adolescence and young adulthood. For instance, in secondary schools, students face academic pressure, peer influence, identity crises, and sometimes unstable home environments, all of which can affect their mental health. When left unaddressed, these issues may lead to anxiety, depression, substance abuse, or even suicidal tendencies. To address mental health effectively, a multi-sectoral approach is required, involving health professionals, educators, social workers, religious and community leaders, and policymakers. (Akpan and Okon, 2022). This is where social work interventions come in; by identifying at-risk individuals, offering counselling and psychosocial support, facilitating referrals, and advocating for systemic changes, social workers play a pivotal role in mental health management. Moreover, global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have further underscored the importance of mental health. The increase in

isolation, uncertainty, and economic stress has led to rising mental health issues globally, with many individuals developing conditions such as anxiety and depression for the first time (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021).

In essence, the concept of mental health is foundational to overall well-being and requires the same level of attention and care as physical health. It involves the interplay of emotional, cognitive, and social functioning, and must be nurtured through education, support systems, effective healthcare, and inclusive policies. By fostering mental health awareness and removing societal barriers, individuals and communities can flourish more holistically. Expanding further, it is essential to emphasize that mental health is a human right, and every individual, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background, deserves access to quality mental health care. Yet, in many parts of the world, particularly in under-resourced settings like rural communities in Nigeria, mental health services are limited, poorly funded, or completely absent. This results in a treatment gap, where individuals with mental health conditions receive little or no professional help. (Gitterman, A. & Germain, 2008).

Preventive mental health care is just as important as treatment. Promoting mental wellness through education, community engagement, stress management programs, and healthy lifestyle choices can reduce the incidence of mental health conditions. Schools, workplaces, religious institutions, and local governments can play active roles in preventive mental health strategies (Federal Ministry of Health, 2021). For example, in

secondary schools, guidance counsellors and trained social workers can help students build emotional resilience and healthy coping mechanisms.

Another key concept is mental health promotion, which involves creating environments that support mental well-being. This includes safe and inclusive schools, supportive families, anti-bullying campaigns, conflict resolution programs, and inclusive school policies. When students feel valued and secure, they are more likely to thrive mentally and emotionally. In the context of public policy, integrating mental health into primary healthcare systems is critical. This approach allows mental health issues to be detected and addressed early, just as one would with physical health conditions like malaria or hypertension. It also reduces the burden on specialized mental institutions and promotes a community-based model of care. Importantly, mental health affects not just individuals but also society at large. Untreated mental health issues can lead to reduced productivity, increased healthcare costs, social instability, and even intergenerational cycles of poverty and illness. On the other hand, a mentally healthy population is more likely to be creative, productive, and socially responsible. (OLADIPO, 2012)

Hence, understanding and addressing mental health goes beyond treating mental illness. It requires a broad and inclusive perspective that emphasizes prevention, promotion, early intervention, and the protection of human dignity. When communities, particularly schools, families, and local governments commit to supporting mental health, the outcomes benefit not just individuals, but society as a whole. Mental health is

everyone's business, and fostering it is key to a healthier, more compassionate, and more progressive nation.

2.1.2 The Prevalence of Mental Health

Mental health has increasingly become a central focus in contemporary discourse, given its far-reaching impact on individual well-being, family stability, and societal development. The prevalence of mental health issues refers to the extent to which mental illnesses and psychological disorders occur within populations, cutting across gender, age, socioeconomic background, and geographical location. Unlike physical ailments that are often visible and easily diagnosed, mental health challenges are more complex, frequently hidden beneath layers of stigma, cultural perceptions, and inadequate awareness. Yet, they remain some of the most widespread health concerns globally, demanding urgent attention from policymakers, healthcare professionals, and communities.

Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) has consistently reported alarming figures regarding mental health. Disorders such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance use disorders are common, with depression alone affecting over 280 million people worldwide. Mental health disorders are not only widespread but are also leading causes of disability and diminished productivity. Alarmingly, suicide, which is often linked to untreated or poorly managed mental health conditions, ranks among the leading causes of death in young people. These statistics

reveal that mental health challenges are not confined to any particular demographic; rather, they are universal and cut across both developed and developing nations. (Kessler and Bedirhan, 2008)

In many African societies, including Nigeria, the prevalence of mental health issues is exacerbated by a combination of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and limited access to healthcare facilities. Studies have shown that one in four Nigerians may experience a mental health condition in their lifetime, yet over 90% of those affected do not receive adequate treatment. Cultural misconceptions often frame mental illnesses as spiritual afflictions or consequences of moral failings, leading many to seek help from traditional healers rather than medical professionals. This deepens the burden and contributes to the cycle of neglect, mismanagement, and stigma that surrounds mental health in such contexts.

Another dimension of the prevalence of mental health problems lies in the educational sector. Young people, especially students, face mounting pressures related to academic performance, peer influence, unemployment prospects, and family instability. These pressures often manifest as stress, anxiety, depression, and, in severe cases, suicidal tendencies. The growing digital culture and excessive reliance on social media have also introduced new stressors, as many young individuals grapple with issues of self-esteem, cyberbullying, and feelings of social isolation. The workplace is another arena where the prevalence of mental health concerns is evident. Employees dealing with

burnout, workplace harassment, or excessive job demands frequently develop psychological disorders, which in turn impact productivity and organizational growth. The economic cost of mental health disorders is staggering, with trillions lost annually to reduced productivity, absenteeism, and healthcare expenses. This underlines that mental health is not merely a personal issue but also a public health and economic concern. (Vigo, Thornicroft, and Atun, 2016).

Addressing the prevalence of mental health challenges requires a holistic approach. Increased awareness, public education, and the reduction of stigma are essential steps. Governments must integrate mental health into primary healthcare systems, ensuring accessibility and affordability. Educational institutions should adopt counselling services, peer support programs, and mental health literacy campaigns to create supportive learning environments. On a broader scale, global collaborations, policy reforms, and community-based interventions are critical in addressing the widespread nature of mental health issues.

The prevalence of mental health concerns in today's world is undeniable and demands urgent recognition and response. It is a global phenomenon that transcends borders and affects all spheres of life, from the family unit to the workplace. Recognizing the pervasiveness of mental health issues is the first step toward destigmatizing them and ensuring affected individuals receive the care and support they need. The health of any society is incomplete without mental well-being, and therefore, a sustained commitment

to addressing mental health challenges remains an essential aspect of achieving holistic development. Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how individuals think, feel, act, and relate to others. In recent years, mental health has gained significant attention globally due to its increasing prevalence across different age groups and societies. The prevalence of mental health issues is a growing public concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in every eight people in the world lives with a mental disorder. Common mental health conditions include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance use disorders. These conditions can significantly impair an individual's ability to function at work, in school, and in everyday life.

Globally, mental health problems are among the leading causes of disability and ill health. Depression alone is estimated to affect more than 280 million people worldwide. Anxiety disorders are also highly prevalent, affecting around 301 million people. Mental health challenges are not limited by geography, age, gender, or economic status; they cut across all demographics. In developing countries, including Nigeria, the prevalence of mental health disorders is often underreported due to stigma, lack of awareness, and insufficient mental health services. Cultural beliefs and limited resources contribute to the neglect of mental health issues, especially among vulnerable groups like children, adolescents, and the elderly. Among adolescents, studies have shown a rise in mental health challenges, particularly due to academic pressure, social media influence, peer pressure, and family problems. Suicide has become one of the leading causes of

death among young people, further emphasizing the importance of mental health awareness and intervention. (Patel, 2014)

In essence, the prevalence of mental health issues is a pressing global and local concern. Increased awareness, early intervention, and the integration of mental health services into schools, workplaces, and communities are essential steps toward reducing the burden of mental disorders and promoting overall well-being. The growing prevalence of mental health issues has significant social, economic, and educational implications. Individuals suffering from mental illnesses often face discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to opportunities, which can lead to further deterioration in their mental and emotional state. This, in turn, increases the risk of chronic illness, substance abuse, unemployment, and poverty.

From an economic standpoint, untreated mental health disorders lead to reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and high healthcare costs. The World Economic Forum estimates that mental health conditions could cost the global economy up to \$6 trillion by 2030, primarily due to lost productivity and healthcare expenses. (Zachary, 2014). In the educational sector, particularly among secondary school students, the impact is alarming. Mental health challenges can affect students' ability to concentrate, learn, and perform academically. Students with untreated mental health issues are at greater risk of dropping out of school, engaging in risky behaviours, or developing long-

term psychological problems. In areas like Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, where access to mental health care is limited, students are especially vulnerable.

2.1.3 Factors Contributing to Mental Health

Mental health is a vital component of overall well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social stability. It influences how individuals think, feel, and act, as well as how they manage stress, relate to others, and make decisions. Several interrelated factors contribute to mental health, and understanding these can help in the prevention and management of mental health conditions.

One of the primary factors that affect mental health is biological influences. These include genetic predispositions, brain chemistry, and physical health conditions. For instance, individuals with a family history of mental illness may have a higher likelihood of experiencing similar conditions. Additionally, imbalances in brain chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine are associated with disorders like depression and anxiety. Chronic illnesses and neurological conditions can also negatively impact mental health.

Psychological factors play a significant role in shaping mental well-being. These include personal experiences such as trauma, abuse, neglect, or significant loss. Individuals who have experienced such adverse events in childhood or adulthood are more susceptible to mental health disorders. Moreover, low self-esteem, negative thought patterns, and poor coping mechanisms can contribute to mental health challenges over time.

Social and environmental factors are also crucial. A person's environment including their home, school, workplace, and community — significantly influences mental health. Social isolation, discrimination, poverty, and lack of access to basic needs like food, shelter, and healthcare can increase stress levels and lead to psychological issues. Conversely, supportive relationships, community belonging, and access to quality education and employment can promote good mental health.

Furthermore, cultural and societal expectations can impact mental health, especially when individuals feel pressured to conform to unrealistic standards. The stigma surrounding mental health often prevents people from seeking help, thereby worsening their condition. In some cultures, mental illness is misunderstood or heavily stigmatized, leading to shame, secrecy, and lack of support for affected individuals.

Lastly, lifestyle choices and habits such as substance abuse, lack of physical activity, poor diet, and inadequate sleep can affect mental health. Engaging in healthy behaviors like regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and maintaining healthy relationships can support mental resilience and emotional stability.

In essence, mental health is influenced by a combination of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. Recognizing and addressing these contributors is essential for promoting mental wellness and ensuring that individuals have the resources and support necessary to lead fulfilling lives. Through education, supportive policies, and early intervention, societies can help reduce the burden of mental illness and

foster a culture of care and understanding. To further elaborate, it is important to consider the role of education and awareness in shaping mental health outcomes. Lack of mental health literacy often leads to misunderstanding symptoms and delaying treatment. When individuals and communities are informed about mental health — recognizing warning signs, understanding treatment options, and knowing when to seek help, it becomes easier to prevent issues from escalating into more serious conditions. Educational institutions, particularly schools and universities, play a key role in promoting mental health awareness among students through counselling services, mental health campaigns, and supportive school environments.

Economic stability is another critical factor. Financial stress caused by unemployment, job insecurity, or overwhelming debt can lead to anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness. In contrast, access to stable employment and financial resources can reduce stress levels and contribute to a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment. Governments and social welfare systems can help protect mental well-being by ensuring access to social safety nets, housing support, and healthcare services.

In recent years, technology and social media have also emerged as influential factors in mental health. While digital platforms offer opportunities for connection and information-sharing, they can also contribute to stress, cyberbullying, social comparison, and feelings of inadequacy, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Excessive screen time and reduced face-to-face interaction can isolate individuals and impair social

skills, further affecting mental health. Moreover, spirituality and religion can serve as both protective and risk factors. For many people, faith-based practices offer comfort, meaning, and a sense of community. Spiritual beliefs can promote resilience during challenging times. However, overly rigid or judgmental religious environments can sometimes contribute to feelings of guilt, shame, or exclusion, which may worsen mental health.

Finally, access to mental health care services remains one of the most significant determinants of mental well-being. In many regions, particularly in developing countries, there is a shortage of trained mental health professionals and facilities. Barriers such as cost, distance, and stigma often prevent individuals from seeking help. Strengthening healthcare systems, integrating mental health services into primary care, and training community-based workers can improve access and reduce the burden of untreated mental illnesses.

In summary, mental health is shaped by a dynamic interaction of multiple factors from biology to environment, lifestyle to societal norms. A comprehensive approach that addresses these factors through education, supportive environments, inclusive policies, and accessible healthcare is essential to improving mental health outcomes for individuals and communities alike. By fostering an inclusive and empathetic society, we can break down the barriers to mental well-being and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive emotionally and psychologically.

Building upon the earlier discussion, early intervention and prevention are critical strategies in addressing mental health challenges effectively. Many mental health conditions begin during adolescence or early adulthood, yet they often go undetected and untreated. Implementing early screening programs in schools, workplaces, and primary healthcare settings can help identify signs of mental distress before they escalate. Social workers, teachers, and healthcare providers can be trained to recognize early symptoms and refer individuals to appropriate support services.

Another important aspect is the family environment, which serves as the foundation for emotional development, particularly in children and adolescents. Supportive, loving, and communicative family settings promote emotional security, self-confidence, and resilience. On the other hand, dysfunctional family dynamics—such as conflict, neglect, substance abuse, or domestic violence—can deeply affect a person's mental stability. Strengthening family systems through counselling, parental education, and community support programs can therefore enhance mental well-being across generations.

Mental health is also gaining recognition as a major factor. The modern work environment can be both a source of fulfillment and a cause of stress. Factors such as excessive workloads, poor management practices, lack of job control, and workplace harassment can lead to burnout, anxiety, and depression. Organizations that invest in mental health by promoting work-life balance, offering employee assistance programs,

and fostering a culture of psychological safety can improve employee satisfaction and productivity.

Furthermore, public policy and advocacy have a powerful role to play in shaping mental health outcomes. Governments and policymakers are increasingly called upon to prioritize mental health by allocating adequate resources, enacting supportive legislation, and integrating mental health services into broader health and social systems. Advocacy efforts by civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals help to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and drive systemic change in how mental health is perceived and treated. Community engagement is equally vital. Mental health is not solely the responsibility of professionals or government institutions; it is a shared social concern. Communities that are inclusive, connected, and supportive foster environments where individuals feel valued and safe. Peer support groups, youth clubs, faith organizations, and local initiatives can offer platforms for individuals to share experiences, receive emotional support, and build resilience.

In conclusion, mental health is a multifaceted issue influenced by personal, social, and systemic factors. Addressing mental health requires a holistic and collaborative approach that includes families, schools, communities, healthcare providers, workplaces, and governments. By fostering awareness, reducing stigma, enhancing access to care, and building supportive environments, we can contribute to a society where mental well-

being is valued as a fundamental human right and a key component of human development.

2.2 Types of Social Work Interventions

Social work interventions are structured strategies employed by trained professionals to address social, emotional, psychological, and economic challenges faced by individuals, groups, and communities. They represent deliberate actions aimed at alleviating human suffering, enhancing well-being, and promoting social justice (Payne, 2014). Literature on social work practice has identified several forms of interventions that vary according to context, client needs, and available resources. These interventions can broadly be categorized into preventive, remedial or therapeutic, developmental, community-based, advocacy and policy, as well as school- and family-based interventions.

2.2.1 Preventive Interventions

Preventive interventions in social work focus on reducing the risks of social and psychological problems before they escalate. The central aim is to address issues at their root, thereby minimizing long-term negative impacts on individuals and communities (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 2017). In schools, preventive interventions often take the

form of psycho-educational programs that promote awareness of mental health, substance abuse prevention, and conflict resolution skills. These initiatives help adolescents develop resilience, coping strategies, and positive behavioral patterns, thereby preventing crises such as drug addiction, violence, or suicide (World Health Organization, 2020). Preventive social work also extends to community campaigns and outreach programs that seek to promote healthy lifestyles and supportive family structures (Idemudia, 2010).

2.2.2 Remedial or Therapeutic Interventions

Remedial interventions are corrective measures employed when individuals or groups are already experiencing difficulties. Such interventions aim to alleviate distress, restore functioning, and improve quality of life (Trevithick, 2012). Social workers in this context often provide counseling, crisis intervention, and psychotherapy, addressing conditions such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and substance abuse (Akpan & Okon, 2022). For instance, individual counseling sessions provide a confidential platform where students can discuss personal problems affecting their emotional or academic performance, while group therapy fosters peer support and shared problem-solving (Corey, 2015). In community contexts, remedial interventions may involve rehabilitation programs for vulnerable populations such as victims of abuse, the unemployed, or people with disabilities (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021).

2.2.3 Developmental Interventions

Developmental interventions emphasize the enhancement of human capacities and potentials. Instead of focusing solely on problems, these interventions aim at empowering individuals and communities to achieve self-reliance and sustainable growth (Midgley, 2014). For young people, developmental social work involves leadership training, skill acquisition programs, and educational support initiatives that help them reach their full potential (Patel et al., 2018). At the community level, developmental interventions can include microfinance initiatives, vocational training, and empowerment schemes for women and youth. The guiding philosophy here is that by building capacities and resources, individuals and communities are less likely to fall into cycles of poverty, dependency, and vulnerability (Aigbiremolen, 2019).

2.2.4 Community-Based Interventions

Community-based interventions reflect the collective dimension of social work, where the emphasis is placed on strengthening community structures and promoting social cohesion. Such interventions include community mobilization, participatory development projects, and neighborhood support systems (Ife, 2013). In Egor Local Government Area, for instance, social workers often engage community leaders, parents, and teachers in creating awareness on mental health, domestic violence, or child protection (Omonzejele, 2021). By using participatory approaches, social workers ensure that interventions are culturally sensitive and reflect the lived realities of local

populations. Community-based interventions also promote sustainability since solutions are derived from and owned by the people themselves (UNICEF, 2019).

2.2.5 Advocacy and Policy Interventions

Advocacy is another important dimension of social work interventions. It involves influencing policies, laws, and institutional practices to address systemic barriers that hinder well-being (Healy, 2014). Social workers advocate for marginalized populations, pushing for inclusive policies that expand access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. In Nigeria, where mental health remains highly stigmatized and underfunded, social workers play critical roles in advocating for mental health policies, budget allocations, and the integration of psychosocial services into schools (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Through lobbying, networking, and community organizing, social workers contribute to social change at the macro level, complementing their micro-level engagements with individuals and families (Mullaly, 2010).

2.2.6 School and Family-Based Interventions

Schools and families represent two critical arenas where social work interventions are highly impactful. In school settings, interventions include counseling services, peer mentorship programs, career guidance, anti-bullying campaigns, and psycho-social support systems (Daniels & Adams, 2010). These interventions are particularly important in adolescence, a stage often marked by identity struggles, peer pressure, and vulnerability to risky behaviors. Family-based interventions, on the other hand, involve

mediation in cases of conflict, parental counseling, and family therapy (Omoregie, 2017). By strengthening family bonds and communication patterns, social workers help create environments that nurture healthy development for young people.

2.3 The Effectiveness of Social Work Interventions

Mental health challenges among students have become increasingly recognized as a significant barrier to academic achievement, social development, and overall well-being. Issues such as depression, anxiety, stress, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation often emerge during adolescence and young adulthood, making schools and higher institutions critical sites for early detection and intervention (WHO, 2020). Social work interventions, which range from preventive to therapeutic strategies, have proven to be effective in mitigating these challenges by providing psychosocial support, fostering resilience, and advocating for mental health policies within educational institutions (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 2017).

One of the most effective dimensions of social work interventions is the provision of counseling and psycho-social support. Through individual and group counseling sessions, social workers create safe spaces where students can express emotional struggles and receive guidance on coping strategies (Corey, 2015). Research shows that students who have access to school-based social work counseling exhibit reduced levels of anxiety and depression and report improved self-esteem and interpersonal relationships (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021). Group interventions, such as peer-support groups

facilitated by social workers, also promote collective healing by reducing isolation and normalizing shared struggles (Daniels & Adams, 2010).

Preventive interventions are also highly effective, particularly when implemented within schools. Social workers often design mental health awareness campaigns, resilience-building workshops, and psycho-educational programs that equip students with coping mechanisms before crises escalate (Patel et al., 2018). For example, resilience training has been linked to lower rates of substance abuse and improved academic engagement, especially among students in high-pressure environments (Idemudia, 2010). Preventive strategies are particularly useful in contexts like Nigeria, where stigma and lack of awareness remain major obstacles to addressing mental health concerns (Omonzejele, 2021). By integrating preventive education into the school curriculum, social workers help normalize discussions around mental health and reduce stigma.

Another critical aspect of effectiveness lies in early identification and referral services. Social workers are often the first professionals within schools to identify early warning signs of mental distress, such as declining academic performance, absenteeism, aggression, or withdrawal (Payne, 2014). Their ability to assess and refer students to specialized mental health professionals ensures timely intervention, which is crucial in preventing severe mental health crises (WHO, 2020). Evidence suggests that early referral significantly reduces the likelihood of chronic psychological disorders and improves students' chances of academic success (Midgley, 2014).

Furthermore, family-based interventions conducted by social workers have proven effective in addressing student mental health issues rooted in domestic instability. Many students experience stress, anxiety, or behavioral problems as a result of family conflicts, poverty, or neglect. Social workers provide parental counseling, mediation, and family therapy to improve communication patterns and reduce family-based stressors (Omoregie, 2017). Strengthening family support structures contributes directly to better student mental health outcomes by creating nurturing environments at home. Community and policy-level interventions add another layer of effectiveness. Social workers often engage in advocacy to push for institutional policies that prioritize mental health within schools (Healy, 2014). For instance, campaigns for the establishment of school-based counseling centers, integration of mental health into educational policies, and budget allocations for psychosocial services have improved access to care in many contexts (UNICEF, 2019). Such systemic interventions ensure sustainability and enable long-term impact beyond individual counseling sessions.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. The effectiveness of social work interventions is often constrained by limited resources, stigma, and inadequate policy frameworks in developing countries such as Nigeria (Akpan & Okon, 2022). In many schools, there are not enough trained social workers to meet the high demand for psychosocial support. Additionally, cultural stigmas around mental health prevent many students from openly seeking help, thereby limiting the impact of interventions (Idemudia,

2010). Addressing these barriers requires multi-sectoral collaboration between governments, schools, communities, and international organizations.

2.4 Challenges Faced by Social Workers in Implementing Mental Health Interventions in Schools

One of the foremost challenges faced by social workers in implementing mental health interventions in schools is inadequate funding and resources. Mental health programs often require substantial financial investment in training, facilities, and materials. However, in many developing countries such as Nigeria, school budgets prioritize academic needs over psychosocial support, leaving little room for dedicated mental health services (Patel et al., 2018). This scarcity of resources makes it difficult for social workers to establish counseling centers, organize awareness campaigns, or provide therapeutic tools needed for effective interventions. Without adequate funding, interventions risk being poorly implemented or unsustainable in the long term (Akpan & Okon, 2022).

A second significant challenge is shortage of trained mental health professionals within the school system. While social workers are skilled in psychosocial support, many schools lack adequately trained staff with specialized knowledge in adolescent mental health (WHO, 2020). This limitation is particularly acute in Nigeria, where the ratio of school social workers to students is alarmingly low compared to global standards (Omonzejele, 2021). The shortage results in heavy caseloads for the few existing

professionals, making it difficult for them to deliver quality and timely interventions. As a result, many students with urgent needs remain underserved or completely neglected.

Another major obstacle is cultural stigma surrounding mental health. In many societies, including Nigeria, mental health issues are still regarded as taboo or as signs of weakness, spiritual attack, or poor upbringing (Idemudia, 2010). This stigma discourages students from openly discussing their struggles or seeking help, even when services are available. Teachers, parents, and community members may also perpetuate negative stereotypes, which further alienates affected students. For social workers, this creates an uphill task of not only addressing mental health needs but also battling entrenched cultural attitudes that resist open dialogue and acceptance (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021).

The lack of policy support and weak institutional frameworks also pose significant challenges. While mental health policies exist at national levels, their implementation within school systems remains inadequate (UNICEF, 2019). Schools often do not have clear guidelines on how to integrate social work practices into their daily operations. In many cases, social workers operate without formal recognition or policy backing, limiting their authority to intervene effectively. The absence of enforceable policies undermines accountability and reduces the sustainability of mental health programs within schools (Healy, 2014). Parental resistance and poor family cooperation constitute another barrier. Some parents may deny the existence of their

children's mental health issues or resist the idea of professional intervention due to cultural beliefs or fear of stigma (Daniels & Adams, 2010). Others may be unwilling to participate in family-based interventions due to economic pressures, lack of awareness, or indifference. For social workers, the absence of parental cooperation limits the effectiveness of interventions, as family support plays a crucial role in sustaining student mental health progress.

In addition, social workers in schools face the challenge of high caseloads and work-related stress. Given the growing prevalence of mental health issues among students, social workers are often overwhelmed with multiple cases that demand urgent attention. The emotional toll of working with distressed adolescents, coupled with insufficient institutional support, leads to burnout and reduced effectiveness (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 2017). Overburdened professionals may not be able to dedicate adequate time to each student, resulting in superficial interventions that fail to address root causes.

Another challenge lies in the integration of social work into the school system and collaboration with teachers. Teachers often focus primarily on academic performance and may fail to recognize behavioral or emotional difficulties as indicators of underlying mental health problems (Payne, 2014). In some cases, teachers view social workers as outsiders, creating resistance to collaboration. This lack of synergy prevents effective coordination of interventions and limits the social worker's ability to provide holistic

support. Bridging this gap requires mutual respect, joint training, and collaborative planning, which are often absent in under-resourced schools (Corey, 2015).

Finally, limited community awareness and support systems further complicate interventions. Schools exist within broader communities that influence student experiences, yet many communities lack adequate awareness of mental health issues or resources to support students outside the school environment (Midgley, 2014). Without strong community-based support, interventions carried out in schools often lose continuity once students return home or face external pressures such as poverty, peer influence, and neighborhood stressors. Social workers therefore find themselves tackling issues beyond the school's jurisdiction, which can dilute the impact of their work.

In summary, the effectiveness of social work interventions in schools is hindered by a range of challenges, including inadequate funding, shortage of trained professionals, cultural stigma, weak policy frameworks, parental resistance, heavy caseloads, poor teacher collaboration, and lack of community support. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged strategy involving policy reforms, increased funding, capacity building, and community sensitization. Strengthening these areas will empower social workers to provide effective and sustainable mental health interventions that improve student well-being.

2.5 Strategies to Enhance Social Work Support for Students with Mental Health Issues in Public Secondary Schools

One of the most effective strategies for enhancing social work support in schools is strengthening policy frameworks and institutional support for mental health programs. In many countries, mental health interventions in schools lack a strong policy foundation, making social work services fragmented or under-prioritized (UNICEF, 2019). Governments should integrate school-based mental health services into educational policies, ensuring that every public secondary school has access to at least one trained social worker. Policy reforms should also mandate the establishment of school counseling units and provide clear guidelines on referral pathways to specialized professionals (WHO, 2020). Such systemic support creates a stable foundation for sustainable interventions and ensures accountability in implementation.

Another vital strategy involves capacity building and professional development of social workers and teachers. Social workers require continuous training on adolescent mental health, trauma-informed care, and culturally sensitive intervention techniques (Corey, 2015). Likewise, teachers should be trained to recognize early signs of mental distress and collaborate effectively with social workers. Workshops, seminars, and professional certification programs can equip both social workers and teachers with modern skills to respond to complex student needs (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 2017).

By strengthening the knowledge base of professionals, schools can build a holistic support network for students.

Increased funding and resource allocation represent another key strategy. Social work interventions often fail because schools lack the financial resources to sustain programs such as counseling centers, peer-support groups, and mental health awareness campaigns (Patel et al., 2018). Governments, NGOs, and private stakeholders should invest in funding school-based psychosocial programs, providing resources such as therapy rooms, educational materials, and technology for virtual counseling services. Dedicated funding would not only expand the reach of social workers but also reduce burnout by enabling more effective caseload management. Additionally, community and parental engagement plays a central role in enhancing social work support. Mental health issues among students are often connected to family and community factors such as poverty, family instability, or peer influence (Idemudia, 2010). Social workers should therefore develop strategies to involve parents through workshops, counseling sessions, and awareness campaigns that address stigma and misconceptions about mental health. Collaborating with religious leaders, community elders, and local associations can also create a supportive environment where students feel less isolated and more encouraged to seek help (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2021).

Another crucial strategy is the integration of preventive programs into school curricula. Rather than focusing only on crisis management, social workers should

implement preventive interventions that build resilience and coping mechanisms among students (Daniels & Adams, 2010). Programs such as life skills education, peer mentorship, stress management workshops, and anti-bullying campaigns can reduce the incidence of mental health problems before they escalate. Preventive approaches normalize mental health conversations within schools, helping to break down stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior.

Collaboration with healthcare providers and NGOs further strengthens social work interventions. Since social workers cannot address all student needs alone, establishing partnerships with psychologists, psychiatrists, public health agencies, and mental health NGOs ensures that students have access to a wider range of specialized services (Healy, 2014). These collaborations can facilitate referrals, provide external funding, and organize community-wide awareness campaigns. Multisectoral partnerships also enhance the credibility and effectiveness of school-based mental health programs.

Finally, leveraging technology and digital platforms offers a modern strategy to enhance support. Many students are more comfortable engaging in anonymous or semi-anonymous digital platforms, such as online counseling or mobile-based mental health apps (UNICEF, 2019). Social workers can use digital tools to deliver virtual counseling, track student progress, and provide psycho-educational resources that students can access anytime. In resource-constrained settings, such platforms bridge the gap between limited personnel and growing student populations. Enhancing social work support for students

with mental health issues in public secondary schools requires a multi-pronged approach that includes stronger policies, professional training, adequate funding, parental engagement, preventive programs, intersectoral collaborations, and technological innovations. By implementing these strategies, schools can create supportive environments where students are not only academically successful but also emotionally resilient and mentally healthy.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the lens through which the study is analyzed, linking concepts of social work, mental health, and educational settings. This study adopts three major theories that align with its objectives: Ecological Systems Theory, Person-in-Environment Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT). These frameworks help in understanding how environmental, social, and individual factors interact to shape students' mental health outcomes and the effectiveness of social work interventions.

2.6.1 Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) is highly relevant to the study of social work interventions in student mental health because it emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual development and the environment. According to this theory, an individual's behavior and psychological well-being cannot be understood in isolation but must be analyzed within the broader social context. The

theory identifies five environmental layers: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, each exerting a unique influence on the child's growth. The microsystem includes immediate relationships like family, peers, and schoolteachers, all of which play a direct role in shaping a student's emotional health. For example, peer bullying or teacher support can significantly affect a student's mental state. The mesosystem reflects the interaction between these microsystems, such as when parental involvement in school activities improves academic performance and reduces anxiety in children. The exosystem includes external influences such as the availability of community health services, neighborhood safety, and parental workplace policies, all of which indirectly affect students' mental health. At the macrosystem level, cultural beliefs, educational policies, and societal attitudes toward mental health determine how schools and families address psychological challenges. Finally, the chronosystem accounts for changes over time, such as the lasting impact of colonial education systems, societal transitions, or global crises like COVID-19 on student well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Applying this theory, social work interventions in schools must be multi-layered, addressing not only the student's immediate needs but also systemic barriers and cultural norms. For instance, interventions could involve counseling at the microsystem level, parent-teacher collaboration at the mesosystem level, advocacy for better health policies at the macrosystem level, and adaptation to new challenges such as digital learning within the chronosystem. By highlighting the multi-dimensional influences on student behavior,

Ecological Systems Theory ensures that mental health support in schools is holistic and sustainable (Neal & Neal, 2013).

2.6.2 Person-in-Environment (PIE) Theory

The Person-in-Environment (PIE) Theory is foundational in social work practice because it emphasizes that individuals cannot be separated from the environments in which they live and function (Karls & Wandrei, 1994). This framework proposes that psychological well-being is shaped by the interaction between the individual and their surrounding social, cultural, and institutional settings. It recognizes that challenges like poverty, family instability, academic pressure, and social exclusion can exacerbate mental health issues in students. In the school setting, the PIE framework helps social workers assess students not merely as individuals with internal problems but as people navigating complex environments that may either support or hinder their well-being. For example, a student experiencing depression might not only be struggling with internal feelings but could also be affected by economic hardship, lack of parental support, or exposure to violence in the community. This theory encourages social workers to assess such external stressors and to design interventions that address both the internal and external dimensions of mental health. One of its strengths lies in its capacity to link mental health with structural issues like educational inequality and systemic poverty, which are particularly relevant in many Nigerian public schools. By applying the PIE model, social workers can better advocate for systemic reforms while simultaneously providing

individualized support, ensuring that interventions are both client-centered and socially aware (Kondrat, 2013). Furthermore, the PIE theory underscores the importance of resilience-building by identifying protective factors in the student's environment such as supportive teachers, peer groups, and community organizations. Thus, interventions grounded in PIE not only provide immediate mental health support but also build long-term coping strategies that enable students to thrive despite adverse conditions.

2.6.3 Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)

The Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), pioneered by Aaron Beck (1967), provides a psychological framework for understanding and addressing students' mental health challenges. This theory asserts that an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected, and that maladaptive thinking patterns often lead to negative emotions and dysfunctional behaviors. Within the school context, CBT is particularly useful because it equips social workers with evidence-based tools to address common issues like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and academic stress. For instance, a student who believes "I am not good enough" may experience anxiety and avoid participation in classroom activities, which in turn reinforces poor performance. CBT interventions help students to identify such distorted thought patterns, challenge them, and replace them with healthier beliefs. Techniques such as cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, and problem-solving skills are frequently applied in school social work settings (Beck, 2011). These methods not only reduce psychological distress but

also improve academic engagement and social relationships. Moreover, CBT aligns with adolescent developmental needs because it is structured, goal-oriented, and practical, making it accessible for secondary school students. Its adaptability allows it to be implemented in both individual counseling sessions and group therapy programs within schools. Importantly, CBT has been found effective in reducing stigma, as it frames mental health issues as manageable problems rather than fixed deficiencies (Hofmann et al., 2012). In the Nigerian context, where cultural perceptions of mental illness may limit open discussions, CBT provides a structured approach that focuses on practical skills and personal empowerment. By empowering students to take control of their thought processes and behaviors, social workers help them develop resilience, improve academic performance, and reduce psychological distress. Thus, CBT complements ecological and PIE perspectives by focusing on the internal cognitive mechanisms that interact with external social factors to shape mental health outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Preamble

This section discusses the various methods that was employed in both collections and analysis of data in this study: Research Design, Population of the study, Sample and Sampling Technique, Research Instrument, Validity and Reliability, Method of Data Collection and Method of Data Analysis.

3.1 Research Design

Due to the nature of the study, a descriptive research design was adopted. Descriptive research design is used to systematically describe and present the characteristics, behaviors, or phenomena of a particular subject or group. The primary objective of descriptive research is to provide a detailed and accurate representation of the studied variables without attempting to establish cause-and-effect relationships. This design is suitable for answering "what" and "how" questions rather than "why" questions. For this study, the descriptive survey research design was meant to effectively capture social work interventions on managing mental health among public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area. In other words, this research design would allow the

researcher to collect data from only few people considered representative of the entire population.

3.2 Area of the Study

Egor Local Government Area is one of the administrative divisions in Edo State, Nigeria. It is situated within the Benin City metropolis, forming part of the Edo South Senatorial District. Egor LGA was created in 1989 during the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida to bring governance closer to the grassroots. The area derives much of its cultural and historical heritage from the ancient Benin Kingdom, renowned for its sophisticated system of governance, art, and cultural practices. Today, Egor serves as a blend of urban and semi-urban communities, housing diverse populations but still reflecting the indigenous traditions of the Edo people. Its communities, including Uselu, Ogida, Uwasota, Evbotubu, and Uwelu, are integral parts of the historic Benin cultural landscape.

The main occupation of the people of Egor LGA has traditionally been farming, with crops such as yam, cassava, maize, and plantain serving as staples. However, given its location within Benin City, a major urban center, the occupational structure has diversified significantly. Today, many inhabitants engage in trade, transportation, craftsmanship, and civil service employment, artisanship, especially in wood carving, bronze casting, and blacksmithing, has long been a significant economic activity in the

area, reflecting the wider artistic traditions of the Benin Kingdom. Additionally, small and medium-scale businesses thrive, making Egor both an agricultural and commercial hub within Edo State.

The major language spoken in Egor is Edo (Bini), which is the native tongue of the Benin people. The Edo language not only functions as a medium of communication but also as a carrier of the people's history, values, and worldview. Despite the dominance of Edo, English, being Nigeria's official language is widely spoken, particularly in schools, government offices, and business settings. Pidgin English is also commonly used, serving as a lingua franca that bridges communication across diverse groups living in the area. The prevalence of multiple languages demonstrates the coexistence of tradition and modernity in Egor's cultural and social life.

Egor Local Government Area is notable for its cultural and historical landmarks. The Uselu Market is one of the most prominent commercial centers, attracting traders and buyers from within and outside Benin City. The Oba's Palace, although situated in the heart of Benin City, holds cultural significance for communities in Egor, as the people remain closely tied to the authority and traditions of the Oba of Benin. Other landmarks include the Ogida Barracks, a major military installation, and Uwelu Spare Parts Market, which is recognized as one of the largest automobile spare parts markets in Nigeria. Educational institutions, such as the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) and

several secondary schools, also stand out as important landmarks shaping the social and economic life of the area.

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population for the study consisted of students from public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area. According to the 2006 National Population Census (NPC), Egor Local Government Area of Edo State had a recorded population of 339,899 persons (NPC, 2006). This figure comprised men, women, and children distributed across the different wards and communities that make up the LGA. The census also highlighted the largely urban and semi-urban character of Egor, given its location within the Benin City metropolis, which has made it one of the more densely populated local government areas in Edo State (NPC, 2006).

Nigeria has maintained an average annual population growth rate of about 2.8% since the 2006 census. Applying this growth rate to Egor LGA provides an estimate of the population in subsequent years. As of 2025, using compound population growth projection, the estimated population of Egor Local Government Area stands at about 574,406 persons. This steady rise in population has had implications for infrastructure, housing, education, and healthcare services within the LGA. With its urbanizing

landscape, the population growth reflects both the natural increase among the indigenous Edo-speaking population and the inflow of people from other parts of Nigeria seeking economic opportunities in Benin City (Omoregie, 2017).

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

In this study, the researcher adopted the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for determining the actual sample size from the above noted population. Taro Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes.

Assumption:

95% confidence level

P = .5

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = sample

N = population

e = error margin

n = sample

$$n=574,406/1+574,406(0.05)^2$$

$$n=574,406/1+574,406(0.0025)$$

$$n= 574,406/1436$$

$$n= 400$$

Therefore, the sample size for this study is 400.

3.5 Research Instrument

The researcher created a semi-structured questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A collected respondents' biographical information, and Section B included items based on the research questions. The survey used a Likert 4-point rating scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree) and other close-ended questions to gather comprehensive data on the effectiveness social work interventions on managing mental health among public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The validity of research instrument refers to the ability of an instrument to measure what it is design to measure. There are different types of validity. However, this researcher in a bid to ascertain the validity of his instrument presented the said instrument

to her supervisor, and two other social workers; their comments, suggestions and criticisms were used to modify the initial research instrument. The research instruments in question were subjected to test-retest reliability.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed personally to the respondents. The respondents should be able to answer the questions honestly after administering the questionnaires to them. The researcher also guided the respondents with regards to filling questionnaires. The respondents were informed that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

To ensure objectivity and clarity, the survey data were collected and thoroughly analyzed. The questionnaires were coded and analyzed using percentages, tables, and graphs. The researcher interpreted the collected data to draw meaningful conclusions about the social work interventions on managing mental health among public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of participants. Informed consent was obtained from participants and relevant authorities before data collection. The research was conducted with respect for the rights and dignity

of all participants, ensuring that the findings contribute positively to examining the social work interventions in managing mental health among public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 Demographic Data (N=400)

S/N	Demographic of Respondents		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	200	50.0
		Female	200	50.0
2	Age Group	12-15 years	175	43.75
		16-18years	180	45.0
		18-21years	45	11.25
3	Class	JSS 1-3	200	50.0
		SSS 1-3	200	50.0

4	Religion	Christianity	200	50.0
		Muslim	100	25.0
		African Traditional Religion	100	25.0
		Others	-	-

Source: Field Work 2025

The data in table presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents based on gender, age group, class, and religion. Out of the total respondents, 200 (50%) were male, while 200 (50%) were female, indicating an equal gender representation. In terms of age, 175 respondents (43.75%) were between 12 and 15 years, 180 respondents (45%) were between 16 and 18 years, and 45 respondents (11.25%) were between 18 and 21 years, showing that the majority were within the 16–18 years age bracket. Regarding class distribution, 200 respondents (50%) were in Junior Secondary School (JSS 1–3) and 200 (50%) were in Senior Secondary School (SSS 1–3), suggesting equal participation from both educational levels. As for religion, 200 respondents (50%) were Christians, 100 (25%) were Muslims, and another 100 (25%) practiced African Traditional Religion, with no respondents categorized under “Others.” Overall, the data indicates a balanced representation across gender and class, with Christianity as the most represented religion and the 16–18 years age group forming the largest segment of respondents.

4.2 Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question One: Prevalence of Mental Health Issues among Students

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Many students in public secondary schools in Egor LGA experience mental health challenges.	150 (37.5%)	100 (25.0%)	50 (12.5%)	100 (25.0%)	400 (100%)
2	Anxiety and stress are common mental health concerns among students.	250 (62.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
3	Depression is prevalent among secondary school students in Egor LGA.	245 (61.25%)	56 (14%)	45 (11.25%)	54 (13.5%)	400 (100%)
4	Peer pressure and academic demands contribute to students' mental health issues.	290 (72.5%)	25 (6.25%)	40 (10.0%)	45 (11.25%)	400 (100%)
5	Mental health concerns among students often go unnoticed or unreported.	215 (53.75)	49 (12.25%)	57 (14.25%)	79 (19.75)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table presents the respondents' opinions on statements related to mental health challenges among students in public secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area (LGA). For the first statement, "Many students in public secondary schools in Egor LGA experience mental health challenges," 150 respondents (37.5%) strongly agreed, 100 (25%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 100 (25%) strongly disagreed, showing that a majority acknowledged the presence of mental health challenges among students. On the statement "Anxiety and stress are common mental health concerns among students," 250 respondents (62.5%) strongly agreed, 50 (12.5%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, indicating a general consensus that anxiety and stress are prevalent issues. Concerning the statement "Depression is prevalent among secondary school students in Egor LGA," 245 respondents (61.25%) strongly agreed, 56 (14%) agreed, 45 (11.25%) disagreed, and 54 (13.5%) strongly disagreed, further supporting the view that depression is a common mental health problem among students. For the statement "Peer pressure and academic demands contribute to students' mental health issues," 290 respondents (72.5%) strongly agreed, 25 (6.25%) agreed, 40 (10%) disagreed, and 45 (11.25%) strongly disagreed, showing strong agreement that these factors significantly impact mental health. Finally, regarding the statement "Mental health concerns among students often go unnoticed or unreported," 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 49 (12.25%) agreed, 57 (14.25%) disagreed, and 79 (19.75%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that many believe mental health issues are often overlooked in

schools. Overall, the data indicates a strong acknowledgment among respondents that students in Egor LGA face significant mental health challenges, particularly anxiety, stress, and depression, often influenced by peer pressure and academic demands, with many cases remaining unnoticed or unreported.

Research Question Two: Types of Social Work Interventions Used

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Counseling services are provided by social workers in schools.	215 (53.75%)	85 (21.25%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
2	Social workers organize mental health awareness programs for students.	250 (62.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
3	Group therapy sessions are conducted to address students’ emotional needs.	245 (61.25%)	56 (14%)	45 (11.25%)	54 (13.5%)	400 (100%)
4	Social workers collaborate with teachers and parents in managing mental health issues.	290 (72.5%)	25 (6.25%)	40 (10.0%)	45 (11.25%)	400 (100%)
5	Schools in Egor LGA have referral systems for students with severe mental health problems.	215 (53.75)	49 (12.25%)	57 (14.25%)	79 (19.75)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Work 2025

The table presents respondents’ views on the role of social workers in addressing students’ mental health challenges in schools within Egor Local Government Area (LGA).

For the first statement, “Counseling services are provided by social workers in schools,” 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 85 (21.25%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, indicating that a majority acknowledged the presence of counseling services in schools. On the statement “Social workers organize mental health awareness programs for students,” 250 respondents (62.5%) strongly agreed, 50 (12.5%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, showing that most respondents believe social workers play an active role in promoting mental health awareness. Regarding the statement “Group therapy sessions are conducted to address students’ emotional needs,” 245 respondents (61.25%) strongly agreed, 56 (14%) agreed, 45 (11.25%) disagreed, and 54 (13.5%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that group therapy is recognized as part of social workers’ support mechanisms. For the statement “Social workers collaborate with teachers and parents in managing mental health issues,” 290 respondents (72.5%) strongly agreed, 25 (6.25%) agreed, 40 (10%) disagreed, and 45 (11.25%) strongly disagreed, reflecting a strong consensus that collaboration between social workers, teachers, and parents is vital in addressing students’ mental health concerns. Finally, on the statement “Schools in Egor LGA have referral systems for students with severe mental health problems,” 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 49 (12.25%) agreed, 57 (14.25%) disagreed, and 79 (19.75%) strongly disagreed, indicating that while many schools have referral systems, a considerable number of respondents believe such systems are either lacking or underdeveloped. Overall, the findings reveal that social workers in Egor LGA schools play significant roles in

providing counseling, organizing awareness programs, conducting group therapy, and collaborating with key stakeholders, although challenges remain in establishing effective referral systems for severe cases.

Research Question Three: Effectiveness of Existing Interventions

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Counseling services offered by social workers help students cope with stress.	215 (53.75%)	85 (21.25%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
2	Group therapy has improved peer support among students.	250 (62.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
3	Mental health awareness programs reduce stigma among students	245 (61.25%)	56 (14%)	45 (11.25%)	54 (13.5%)	400 (100%)
4	Collaboration between social workers, teachers, and parents enhances student wellbeing.	290 (72.5%)	25 (6.25%)	40 (10.0%)	45 (11.25%)	400 (100%)
5	Referral systems provide effective access to specialized mental health care.	215 (53.75)	49 (12.25%)	57 (14.25%)	79 (19.75)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Work 2025.

The table illustrates respondents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of social workers’ interventions in supporting students’ mental health in Egor Local Government Area (LGA). For the statement “Counseling services offered by social workers help students

cope with stress,” 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 85 (21.25%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, indicating that a majority believe counseling services play a vital role in helping students manage stress. Regarding the statement “Group therapy has improved peer support among students,” 250 respondents (62.5%) strongly agreed, 50 (12.5%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that most respondents view group therapy as an effective means of fostering peer relationships and emotional support. On the statement “Mental health awareness programs reduce stigma among students,” 245 respondents (61.25%) strongly agreed, 56 (14%) agreed, 45 (11.25%) disagreed, and 54 (13.5%) strongly disagreed, showing that the majority acknowledge the positive impact of awareness programs in reducing stigma related to mental health. For the statement “Collaboration between social workers, teachers, and parents enhances student wellbeing,” 290 respondents (72.5%) strongly agreed, 25 (6.25%) agreed, 40 (10%) disagreed, and 45 (11.25%) strongly disagreed, reflecting a strong consensus that collaborative efforts significantly contribute to student wellbeing. Finally, in response to “Referral systems provide effective access to specialized mental health care,” 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 49 (12.25%) agreed, 57 (14.25%) disagreed, and 79 (19.75%) strongly disagreed, indicating that while many respondents recognize the usefulness of referral systems, some believe their implementation is still inadequate. Overall, the findings reveal that respondents perceive social workers’ interventions—such as counseling, group therapy, awareness programs, and collaboration with stakeholders—as highly

effective in improving students’ mental health and wellbeing, though improvements are needed in establishing robust referral mechanisms for specialized care.

Research Question Four: Challenges Faced by Social Workers

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Social workers face inadequate resources to implement mental health programs.	217 (54.25%)	150 (37.5%)	10 (2.5%)	23 (5.75%)	400 (100%)
2	Stigma around mental health limits students from seeking help.	150 (37.5%)	64 (16%)	100 (25%)	86 (21.5%)	400 (100%)
3	Lack of training among teachers affects collaboration with social workers.	100 (25%)	75 (18.75%)	115 (28.75%)	110 (27.5%)	400 (100%)
4	High caseloads make it difficult for social workers to provide individualized attention.	250 (62.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
5	Limited institutional support hinders the sustainability of interventions.	215 (53.75)	49 (12.25%)	57 (14.25%)	79 (19.75)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Work 2025.

The table presents respondents’ views on the challenges faced by social workers in implementing mental health programs in schools within Egor Local Government Area (LGA). For the first statement, “Social workers face inadequate resources to implement mental health programs,” 217 respondents (54.25%) strongly agreed, 150 (37.5%) agreed, 10 (2.5%) disagreed, and 23 (5.75%) strongly disagreed, indicating that the majority

believe insufficient resources hinder the effectiveness of social work interventions. Regarding the statement “Stigma around mental health limits students from seeking help,” 150 respondents (37.5%) strongly agreed, 64 (16%) agreed, 100 (25%) disagreed, and 86 (21.5%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that while many acknowledge stigma as a barrier, a significant portion of respondents believe its influence may be overstated or situational. On the statement “Lack of training among teachers affects collaboration with social workers,” 100 respondents (25%) strongly agreed, 75 (18.75%) agreed, 115 (28.75%) disagreed, and 110 (27.5%) strongly disagreed, indicating mixed perceptions, with many respondents uncertain about the extent of this challenge. Concerning “High caseloads make it difficult for social workers to provide individualized attention,” 250 respondents (62.5%) strongly agreed, 50 (12.5%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, showing strong consensus that excessive workloads limit personalized care for students. Finally, for “Limited institutional support hinders the sustainability of interventions,” 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 49 (12.25%) agreed, 57 (14.25%) disagreed, and 79 (19.75%) strongly disagreed, indicating that inadequate institutional backing is perceived as a major obstacle to sustaining mental health programs. Overall, the findings highlight that the most pressing challenges confronting social workers in Egor LGA schools include insufficient resources, high caseloads, and limited institutional support, while stigma and teacher training issues also present notable but less unanimously recognized barriers to effective mental health intervention.

Research Question Five: Strategies to Improve Social Work Support

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
1	Schools should increase funding for mental health programs.	217 (54.25%)	150 (37.5%)	10 (2.5%)	23 (5.75%)	400 (100%)
2	More training should be provided to teachers on mental health awareness.	150 (37.5%)	64 (16%)	100 (25%)	86 (21.5%)	400 (100%)
3	Collaboration between parents, teachers, and social workers should be strengthened.	100 (25%)	75 (18.75%)	115 (28.75%)	110 (27.5%)	400 (100%)
4	Policies should be developed to institutionalize school-based mental health programs	250 (62.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	50 (12.5%)	400 (100%)
5	Technology and peer support networks can be used to enhance student wellbeing.	215 (53.75)	49 (12.25%)	57 (14.25%)	79 (19.75)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Work 2025.

The table presents respondents' opinions on possible recommendations for improving mental health support in schools within Egor Local Government Area (LGA). For the first statement, "Schools should increase funding for mental health programs," 217 respondents (54.25%) strongly agreed, 150 (37.5%) agreed, 10 (2.5%) disagreed, and 23

(5.75%) strongly disagreed, indicating that the majority strongly support the need for increased financial investment in school-based mental health initiatives. Regarding the statement “More training should be provided to teachers on mental health awareness,” 150 respondents (37.5%) strongly agreed, 64 (16%) agreed, 100 (25%) disagreed, and 86 (21.5%) strongly disagreed, showing that while a significant number support teacher training, some remain uncertain or less convinced about its priority. On the statement “Collaboration between parents, teachers, and social workers should be strengthened,” 100 respondents (25%) strongly agreed, 75 (18.75%) agreed, 115 (28.75%) disagreed, and 110 (27.5%) strongly disagreed, reflecting divided opinions on the current state and necessity of such collaborative efforts. For the statement “Policies should be developed to institutionalize school-based mental health programs,” 250 respondents (62.5%) strongly agreed, 50 (12.5%) agreed, 50 (12.5%) disagreed, and 50 (12.5%) strongly disagreed, suggesting strong overall support for formalizing mental health programs through educational policy. Lastly, on the statement “Technology and peer support networks can be used to enhance student wellbeing,” 215 respondents (53.75%) strongly agreed, 49 (12.25%) agreed, 57 (14.25%) disagreed, and 79 (19.75%) strongly disagreed, indicating that most respondents recognize the potential of digital and peer-based support in improving students’ mental health. Overall, the results suggest broad consensus that increasing funding, developing policies, and integrating technology are essential measures for strengthening school mental health systems, while teacher training and stakeholder collaboration also remain important areas for further improvement.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study reveal significant insights into the mental health challenges faced by students in public secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area (LGA) and the role of social workers in addressing these issues. The demographic analysis shows that there was an equal representation of both male and female respondents. Most of the respondents were in their mid-adolescent stage, indicating that this age group is more exposed to emotional and psychological stress. Equal representation was also recorded across educational levels, while the religious distribution showed a diversity among the students.

The results further indicate that mental health challenges are prevalent among students in Egor LGA. A majority of the respondents agreed that many students experience mental health challenges, with anxiety, stress, and depression being the most common concerns. It was also revealed that peer pressure and academic demands contribute significantly to students' mental health issues. Many respondents believed that mental health concerns often go unnoticed or unreported, highlighting the hidden nature of these psychological problems within the school environment. These findings point to the urgent need for increased mental health awareness and proactive intervention strategies in secondary schools.

The study also shows that social work professionals play an active and multifaceted role in managing students' mental health. Many respondents agreed that counseling services are provided in schools and that social workers organize mental health awareness programs. It was also observed that group therapy sessions are conducted to address students' emotional needs. The findings further revealed that social workers collaborate with teachers and parents in managing mental health issues, emphasizing the importance of a collaborative approach in promoting students' well-being. However, responses regarding the existence of referral systems for students with severe mental health issues suggest that while social workers are making significant contributions, institutional mechanisms for advanced psychological care remain underdeveloped.

The study reveals that social workers' interventions are perceived as effective in improving students' coping mechanisms and overall well-being. Respondents agreed that counseling services help students cope with stress, and group therapy enhances peer support among them. Similarly, mental health awareness programs were seen as effective in reducing stigma, and collaboration among social workers, teachers, and parents was found to enhance student well-being. These findings suggest that social work interventions are making tangible impacts on students' emotional resilience and social connectedness. However, the issue of referral systems again emerged, with findings indicating that although such systems exist, they are not consistently effective or accessible to all students.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identifies several challenges faced by social workers in implementing mental health programs. The findings show that inadequate resources hinder the effective implementation of mental health initiatives, while high caseloads limit individualized attention for students. The study also revealed that limited institutional support affects the sustainability of interventions. Opinions were divided on issues such as stigma and teacher training, suggesting that while these factors are significant, their impact may vary across different schools. Overall, the findings point to systemic challenges that must be addressed to enable social workers to deliver optimal support services.

In terms of recommendations, the majority of respondents emphasized the need for increased institutional and policy support to strengthen school-based mental health programs. Many agreed that schools should increase funding for mental health programs and that policies should be developed to institutionalize mental health initiatives within the educational system. It was also suggested that technology and peer support networks could be leveraged to enhance student well-being. Although opinions were mixed on teacher training and collaboration among parents, teachers, and social workers, the overall responses suggest a growing recognition of the need for a multi-stakeholder approach to mental health management in schools.

In summary, the findings reveals that mental health challenges among students in Egor LGA are both prevalent and multifaceted, with social workers playing a critical role

in mitigating these issues through counseling, awareness programs, and collaboration. However, challenges such as inadequate resources, limited institutional support, and high workloads hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions. Strengthening funding, policy support, training, and technological integration are therefore essential to ensuring a more responsive and sustainable framework for promoting students' mental health and overall well-being.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study examined the role of social workers in addressing mental health challenges among students in public secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area (LGA). The findings revealed that mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression are common among students and significantly affect their emotional well-being and academic performance. Peer pressure, academic demands, and a lack of adequate support systems were identified as major factors contributing to these mental health challenges. Many respondents also observed that such issues often go unnoticed or unreported, which further complicates early intervention and effective management. The study found that social workers play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges through various forms of intervention. Their activities include providing counseling services, organizing mental health awareness programs, and conducting group therapy sessions aimed at addressing students' emotional and psychological needs. Social workers also collaborate with teachers and parents to manage mental health concerns, thereby creating a more supportive environment for students. However, despite these efforts, the study discovered that the referral systems available for students with severe mental health issues remain weak and inconsistent across schools. Furthermore, the study revealed that

while social workers' interventions have been impactful, they face several challenges that limit their effectiveness. These include inadequate resources, high caseloads, limited institutional support, and insufficient collaboration with teachers due to a lack of proper training. Stigma surrounding mental health issues was also identified as a significant barrier that prevents many students from seeking help. These challenges highlight the need for systemic reform and increased institutional support to strengthen the mental health framework within schools.

In addition, the study emphasized the need for proactive measures to improve mental health services in schools. Respondents suggested increased funding for mental health programs, improved training for teachers on mental health awareness, and stronger collaboration among social workers, teachers, and parents. The study also pointed out the importance of developing policies to institutionalize school-based mental health programs and leveraging technology and peer support networks to enhance students' well-being. The findings demonstrate that mental health challenges among students in Egor LGA are prevalent and require urgent attention. Social workers play a vital role in addressing these issues, but their efforts are often hindered by resource limitations and institutional barriers. Strengthening funding, enhancing collaboration, developing clear mental health policies, and integrating innovative approaches such as technology and peer support can significantly improve students' mental health outcomes and promote overall well-being within the school system.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has underscored the critical role that social workers play in addressing mental health challenges among students in public secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area. It is evident that mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression are widespread among students and have a profound impact on their academic performance, behavior, and social relationships. The research highlighted that these challenges often arise from academic pressure, peer influence, family instability, and socio-economic constraints. Despite the presence of social workers in some schools, their efforts are often limited by inadequate resources, poor institutional support, and societal stigma surrounding mental health discussions.

The findings further revealed that social workers serve as vital agents in promoting emotional stability and psychological resilience among students. Through counseling, advocacy, and collaboration with teachers and parents, they help create a more supportive learning environment. However, their interventions remain constrained by systemic inefficiencies, such as the lack of structured mental health policies within the educational system, insufficient professional training, and poor coordination between stakeholders. This demonstrates the urgent need for educational authorities to institutionalize mental health programs and strengthen the operational framework that supports social work practices in schools.

Moreover, the study concludes that addressing students' mental health challenges requires a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach. Schools, parents, teachers, and policymakers must work hand in hand with social workers to develop comprehensive strategies that promote mental wellness. This includes raising awareness about mental health, providing adequate funding, training educators in mental health first aid, and creating safe spaces where students can express themselves freely without fear of judgment.

The study concludes that social workers are indispensable in fostering a healthy and conducive school environment. To maximize their impact, there must be deliberate efforts to equip them with the necessary resources, institutional backing, and continuous professional development. By strengthening mental health interventions and reducing stigma, schools can better support students in overcoming psychological challenges, thereby improving their overall well-being, academic success, and social development.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are made to strengthen the role of social workers and improve mental health interventions in public secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area. Firstly, there is a need for increased funding for school-based mental health programs. Government agencies, school administrators, and educational stakeholders should allocate adequate financial

resources to support mental health services. Such funding should cover essential areas such as training, infrastructure for counseling, awareness campaigns, and the procurement of necessary materials to enable social workers to function effectively.

Secondly, continuous capacity building and professional development should be provided for teachers, counselors, and social workers. Regular workshops, seminars, and refresher courses would help them acquire the necessary skills to identify and address mental health challenges among students. This training would also enhance teamwork and collaboration among professionals within the school system, ensuring that every student receives holistic care.

Furthermore, the formulation and implementation of strong policies are vital to institutionalize mental health programs in schools. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with health and social welfare departments, should develop clear guidelines that define the responsibilities of social workers, teachers, and parents in promoting the emotional and psychological well-being of students. Such policies will ensure sustainability and accountability in the implementation of mental health initiatives.

Equally important is the need for enhanced collaboration among key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, social workers, and mental health professionals. Schools should establish mechanisms for regular communication and joint decision-making in

addressing students' mental health needs. This collaborative approach will provide a supportive environment for students both at home and in school.

Moreover, awareness and anti-stigma campaigns should be conducted regularly to educate students, parents, and teachers about mental health. Stigma remains one of the major barriers preventing students from seeking help. Therefore, open discussions, school-wide campaigns, and mental health clubs should be encouraged to foster acceptance and understanding of mental health issues. In addition, schools should explore the integration of technology and peer support networks in mental health promotion. Digital platforms can be used to provide virtual counseling services, mental health education, and online peer mentoring programs. Peer support networks can serve as safe spaces for students to share experiences and encourage one another, thereby strengthening resilience and coping mechanisms. Another crucial recommendation is the need for stronger institutional support for social workers. School authorities should ensure that social workers have manageable caseloads, adequate facilities, and the necessary administrative backing to carry out their duties effectively. When social workers are well-supported, they can provide individualized attention and respond efficiently to students' needs.

Finally, regular monitoring and evaluation should be incorporated into all mental health programs. Periodic assessment will help to measure the effectiveness of interventions, identify challenges, and guide improvements. Through consistent evaluation, schools can

ensure that their mental health initiatives remain responsive to the evolving needs of students.

These recommendations aim to create a supportive, well-structured, and sustainable framework for mental health promotion in secondary schools. Strengthening social work practices, enhancing collaboration, and promoting awareness will not only improve the mental well-being of students but also contribute to their academic success and overall personal development.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study has laid a foundation for understanding the role of social workers in promoting mental health among students in public secondary schools within Egor Local Government Area. However, further research is necessary to deepen and broaden this understanding. Future studies could explore the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies implemented by social workers, such as peer support programs, group therapy, and digital counseling, in improving students' emotional well-being. Additionally, research could focus on comparing mental health outcomes between schools with active social work programs and those without, to evaluate the tangible impact of social workers' involvement in educational settings.

Further studies may also examine the influence of cultural, economic, and family-related factors on students' mental health, as these elements often shape attitudes toward

counseling and psychological support. Researchers could investigate how socio-economic disparities affect access to mental health services among students in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, future research could assess the role of government policies and institutional frameworks in sustaining school-based mental health initiatives, identifying gaps that hinder effective implementation.

Finally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track the long-term effects of school-based mental health interventions on students' academic performance and overall well-being. By expanding on these areas, future research can contribute to developing a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to mental health care within the Nigerian educational system.

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APPENDIX
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY

Dear Respondents,

I am a student of the above-named department and institution, currently conducting research on “Social Work Interventions on Managing Mental Health Among Public Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State”. As part of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Science (Sc) Degree in Social Work, this research is purely academic, and your anonymity is guaranteed. I would appreciate it if you could carefully read and answer the question as honest as possible.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Ugoewuzie Chioma Marycynthia
(Researcher)

SECTION: A

Gender: Male [], Female [].

Religion: Christianity [], Muslim [], African Traditional Religion [], Others [].

SECTION: B

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Instruction: Please tick (√) under the column in the option that suits you best.

Where: Strongly Agreed = SA; Agreed = A; Disagreed = D; Strongly disagree = SD

Research Question One: Prevalence of Mental Health Issues among Students

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Many students in public secondary schools in Egor LGA experience mental health challenges.				
2	Anxiety and stress are common mental health concerns among students.				
3	Depression is prevalent among secondary school students in Egor LGA.				
4	Peer pressure and academic demands contribute to students' mental health issues.				
5	Mental health concerns among students often go unnoticed or unreported.				

Research Question Two: Types of Social Work Interventions Used

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Counseling services are provided by social workers in schools.				
2	Social workers organize mental health awareness programs for students.				
3	Group therapy sessions are conducted to address students' emotional needs.				
4	Social workers collaborate with teachers and parents in managing mental health issues.				
5	Schools in Egor LGA have referral systems for students with severe mental health problems.				

Research Question Three: Effectiveness of Existing Interventions

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Counseling services offered by social workers help students cope with stress.				
2	Group therapy has improved peer support among students.				
3	Mental health awareness programs reduce stigma among students				
4	Collaboration between social workers, teachers, and parents enhances student wellbeing.				
5	Referral systems provide effective access to specialized mental health care.				

Research Question Four: Challenges Faced by Social Workers

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Social workers face inadequate resources to implement mental health programs.				
2	Stigma around mental health limits students from seeking help.				
3	Lack of training among teachers affects collaboration with social workers.				
4	High caseloads make it difficult for social workers to provide individualized attention.				
5	Limited institutional support hinders the sustainability of interventions.				

Research Question Five: Strategies to Improve Social Work Support

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Schools should increase funding for mental health programs.				
2	More training should be provided to teachers on mental health				

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
	awareness.				
3	Collaboration between parents, teachers, and social workers should be strengthened.				
4	Policies should be developed to institutionalize school-based mental health programs				
5	Technology and peer support networks can be used to enhance student wellbeing.				