

**INFLUENCE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING AWARENESS ON MENTAL
HEALTH AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN STUDENTS, EDO STATE**

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EDUCATION EVALUATION AND COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

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**A RESEARCH WORK WRITTEN AND SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

We hereby certify that the project was carried out by **Sherifa Dauda** with matriculation number **EDU2102403** in the department of Educational Evaluation and Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Almighty Allah for his mercy during the course of the project

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of guidance and counselling awareness on mental health among students of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. The main objective was to determine the extent to which students are aware of the available guidance and counselling services and how such awareness relates to their mental health. The study also examined whether differences exist in this relationship based on sex and age.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised undergraduate students of the University of Benin, while a sample of 150 respondents was selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Guidance and Counselling Awareness and Mental Health Scale (GCAMHS). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Fisher's Z-test at a 0.05 level of significance.

Findings revealed that students of the University of Benin are highly aware of the guidance and counselling services available to them. Results further showed a strong positive and significant relationship ($r = 0.884$, $p < 0.05$) between awareness of guidance and counselling services and students' mental health. However, no significant differences were found in the relationship based on sex and age. The study concluded that awareness of guidance and counselling services plays a vital role in promoting students' mental health and emotional stability. It recommended that the university's counselling centre intensify awareness campaigns, integrate counselling into student life activities, and conduct regular mental health sensitization programs.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Guidance and counseling are structured support services aimed at fostering the holistic development of individuals by helping them understand themselves, their environment, and how to make informed, constructive life decisions. While closely related, the two concepts serve distinct but complementary roles in personal development and mental health support. Guidance is primarily developmental and preventive in nature, offering assistance in educational, vocational, and personal decision-making by providing relevant information and helping individuals recognize their abilities and interests. It often involves group-based interventions such as career talks, academic advisement, and orientation programs, focusing on equipping individuals with the tools to make proactive life choices. Counseling, on the other hand, is a more intensive, remedial process that involves a one-on-one, confidential relationship between a

trained counselor and a client, aimed at resolving personal, emotional, psychological, or behavioral issues. As mental health challenges among university students continue to rise globally, the integration of structured guidance and counseling programs within higher education institutions has gained recognition as a critical strategy for fostering psychological well-being and resilience (Adegoke & Eze, 2022). Universities that prioritize guidance and counseling as part of their student support systems have recorded higher levels of mental health literacy, lower incidences of academic burnout, and improved overall student performance. Mental health awareness campaigns and proactive engagement through counseling sessions help reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, encourage early intervention, and create a culture of openness and support (Ibrahim & Okorie, 2023). These interventions are particularly crucial in Nigeria, where mental health remains a sensitive and often misunderstood topic. Incorporating mental health awareness into the broader scope of guidance and counseling ensures that students are not only counseled reactively but are also educated proactively. Seminars, workshops, peer-led discussions, and sensitization programs can demystify mental health, enhance help-seeking behaviors, and build a more mentally resilient student community. Regular assessment of these programs, including feedback from student beneficiaries, is necessary to improve their reach and impact. As the University of Benin continues to expand its academic and social support systems, understanding the influence of guidance and counseling on students' mental health awareness becomes essential for sustainable development and academic excellence. Enhancing mental health awareness through effective guidance and counseling services not only promotes individual well-being but also contributes to the development of a safe, supportive, and academically productive university environment (Chukwu & Adeniran, 2024; Ibrahim & Okorie, 2023).

Student mental health is aided by Guidance and counseling by providing structured psychological and emotional support that helps students cope with academic pressure, social challenges, and personal issues. Within the university environment, students are often confronted with stressors such as high academic expectations, peer pressure, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about the future, all of which can lead to anxiety, depression, or emotional instability if not properly managed (Esuong, 2021). Guidance and counseling services address these concerns by offering safe, confidential spaces where students can express their emotions, receive professional support, and learn adaptive coping strategies. Through one-on-one counseling and group guidance sessions, students are helped to build self-awareness, develop emotional resilience, and acquire skills for effective decision-making and problem-solving. These services also work to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health by educating students about psychological well-being and encouraging them to seek help when needed, thereby fostering a supportive campus climate. Counselors play a critical role in detecting early signs of mental health disorders and providing timely interventions, which help prevent the worsening of psychological issues and support students in sustaining both academic performance and social well-being. Within the context of Nigerian universities, where access to mental health services is often limited, guidance and counselling serve as an accessible and cost-effective strategy for addressing students' psychological needs. This not only enhances academic success and student retention but also promotes overall mental health.

Mental health encompasses a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and act, particularly in their interactions with others and how they handle stress (World Health Organization, 2018). It is an essential component of overall health and well-being, not merely the absence of mental illness. Good mental health

allows individuals to realize their potential, work productively, cope with the normal stresses of life, and contribute meaningfully to society. However, when mental health is compromised—due to biological factors such as genetics and brain chemistry, life experiences like trauma or abuse, or chronic stress from poverty and discrimination it can lead to mental disorders including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (National Institute of Mental Health , 2020). In Nigeria and many developing countries, mental health issues are often misunderstood and stigmatized, with cultural beliefs sometimes attributing mental illness to spiritual causes rather than medical or psychological factors. This stigma significantly reduces the likelihood of individuals seeking professional help, especially in academic settings where mental stressors are high. The shortage of mental health professionals and limited access to services in rural and urban areas alike have exacerbated the challenge of early detection and treatment (WHO, 2019). Therefore, there is an urgent need for public education, school-based interventions, and national policies that prioritize mental health as a fundamental aspect of human development, all of which depend heavily on sustained efforts to increase mental health awareness.

Awareness of guidance and counseling in relation to mental health among students at the University of Benin is a growing but still evolving concern, influenced by a range of socio-cultural, institutional, and informational factors. While the university has established counseling units intended to support students' psychological and emotional well-being, many students remain unaware of the availability, purpose, and benefits of these services. This lack of awareness is often compounded by prevailing stigmas around mental health in Nigerian society, where seeking psychological help is sometimes misinterpreted as a sign of weakness or mental instability. As a result, students who struggle with stress, anxiety, or depression may be reluctant to utilize counseling services, even when they are readily available on campus. Studies have

shown that students' awareness and utilization of counseling services are significantly correlated with their exposure to mental health education and institutional efforts to promote counseling programs (Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2020). At the University of Benin, efforts such as orientation programs and mental health campaigns have attempted to sensitize students to the importance of seeking help, yet many students still either lack accurate information or hold misconceptions about what guidance and counseling entail. To enhance awareness, it is essential that the university strengthens its outreach strategies, integrates mental health literacy into academic and social activities, and normalizes help-seeking behavior as a critical component of student success and well-being. Improving students' understanding and acceptance of guidance and counseling services is not only vital for addressing mental health challenges but also for fostering a healthier and more productive academic environment.

In conclusion, guidance and counseling play a pivotal role in supporting student mental health by offering structured emotional and psychological support within the demanding environment of Nigerian universities. These services help students navigate academic pressures, personal challenges, and social stressors, while also fostering essential life skills such as self-awareness, resilience, and effective problem-solving. In contexts like the University of Benin, where mental health resources are limited and stigma remains a barrier, guidance and counseling serve as vital, cost-effective tools for early intervention and sustained well-being. However, the effectiveness of these services is closely tied to student awareness, which remains insufficient due to cultural misconceptions, limited information, and underutilization of available counseling units. For guidance and counseling to achieve their full potential in promoting mental wellness, universities must intensify their mental health education efforts, dismantle stigma, and embed help-seeking behavior into campus culture. Ultimately, enhancing awareness is key to ensuring

that students not only understand the value of guidance and counseling but also feel empowered to access the support they need for a healthy and successful academic journey.

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of mental health in academic environments, the influence of guidance and counseling on mental health awareness among students at the University of Benin remains inadequately explored and understood. A significant concern is the low level of awareness among students regarding the existence and role of university-based counseling services, which hinders their willingness or ability to seek help when facing emotional or psychological challenges. This issue is further compounded by the cultural stigma associated with mental health in Nigeria, where seeking counseling is often misconstrued as an admission of weakness or mental instability. As a result, many students may avoid utilizing these services altogether, even when experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, or academic burnout. Additionally, the counseling units themselves often suffer from limited accessibility due to underfunding, understaffing, or poor publicity, making it difficult for students to engage with them effectively. The lack of trained professional counselors also compromises the quality and scope of support available, while negative perceptions of counseling as being reserved only for severe cases continue to deter students from seeking early intervention. Compounding these challenges is the apparent lack of sustained institutional commitment to promoting mental health awareness through consistent programming and integration into academic life. Consequently, these issues create a gap in both the utilization and impact of guidance and counseling services on student well-being, underscoring the need for a comprehensive investigation into how these services influence mental health awareness and what

measures can be taken to enhance their visibility, accessibility, and effectiveness within the University of Benin.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent are students of the University of Benin aware of the guidance and counseling services available to them?
2. What is the relationship between guidance and counseling and mental health among UNIBEN students?
3. What is the relationship between guidance and counseling and mental health among UNIBEN students based on sex?
4. What is the relationship between guidance and counseling and mental health among UNIBEN students based on academic level?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between guidance and counseling and mental health among UNIBEN students
2. There is no significant relationship between guidance and counseling and mental health among UNIBEN students based on sex
3. There is no significant relationship between guidance and counseling and mental health among UNIBEN students based on academic level

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the Influence of Guidance and Counseling Awareness on Mental Health among University of Benin Students. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- **To determine the extent to which students of the University of Benin are aware of the guidance and counseling services available to them.**
- **To examine the relationship between guidance and counseling services and mental health among students of the University of Benin.**
- **To investigate the relationship between guidance and counseling services and mental health among University of Benin students based on sex.**
- **To analyze the relationship between guidance and counseling services and mental health among University of Benin students based on academic level.**

Significance of the Study

The primary beneficiaries of this study are the students of the University of Benin, University's counseling unit and mental health professionals, University management and administrators, Academic staff and lecturers, Parents and Guardians, Policy makers, Future researchers, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Mental health advocacy groups.

This study is particularly significant to the students of the University of Benin, as it seeks to evaluate the awareness, utilization, and impact of guidance and counseling services on mental health issues that commonly affect them, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. By examining how these services are perceived and accessed, the study will provide students with valuable information on how to effectively engage with available counseling resources, leading to enhanced emotional well-being and academic performance.

For the university's counseling unit and mental health professionals, the findings will offer essential insights into students' expectations, engagement patterns, and barriers to accessing these services. This information will help counselors refine their approach, adopt more student-centered strategies, and provide more responsive and impactful mental health interventions that address the unique needs of the student population.

The study is also beneficial to university management and administrators, as it will highlight gaps in the current provision of counseling services and identify areas requiring policy attention or infrastructural investment. The results may inform decisions regarding resource allocation, staff training, and the integration of counseling services into broader student welfare programs, thereby enhancing the overall student experience.

Academic staff and lecturers stand to benefit from this study by gaining a better understanding of the mental health challenges that may affect their students' academic engagement and

performance. With this knowledge, lecturers can be more empathetic in their interactions, provide timely support, and guide students toward appropriate counseling services, fostering a more supportive learning environment.

For parents and guardians, the study provides a deeper awareness of the mental health issues faced by university students and emphasizes the importance of early intervention. The findings could shift cultural attitudes that stigmatize mental health support, encouraging families to be more supportive and proactive in discussing their children's psychological well-being.

Policy makers in the education and health sectors will find the study valuable in shaping policies aimed at strengthening mental health frameworks in Nigerian universities. By identifying the challenges and opportunities of enhancing guidance and counseling services, the study could contribute to the development of national strategies for integrating mental health solutions into tertiary education settings.

For future researchers, the study will serve as a foundational resource, providing empirical data and insights into the implementation and reception of guidance and counseling services at Nigerian universities. This can inspire further research into comparative studies, longitudinal effects, or innovations in student mental health support.

Lastly, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and mental health advocacy groups can leverage the findings to create targeted programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns designed to promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma on university campuses. These organizations can collaborate more effectively with institutions to advocate for better mental health services and support systems for students.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to evaluating the influence of guidance and counseling services on mental health awareness among students at the University of Benin. It focuses on assessing students' awareness, attitudes, and the utilization of counseling services in addressing mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression. The study will examine the perceptions of students, the effectiveness of the services offered, and the factors that influence their willingness to seek help. The delimitation of the study includes its restriction to students enrolled at the University of Benin, meaning the findings may not be generalized to other universities or regions. Additionally, the study will concentrate solely on guidance and counseling services and may exclude other mental health support mechanisms. The research will also be limited to the perspectives of students, without including faculty or staff in the direct data collection process. Furthermore, it focuses only on the mental health issues commonly experienced by students during their academic tenure, specifically stress, anxiety, and depression.

Definition of Terms

Counseling: Counseling is a professional, remedial process involving a one-on-one relationship between a trained counselor and a student, where emotional, psychological, or behavioral issues are addressed.

Guidance and Counseling Services: These are comprehensive support services provided by educational institutions to promote students' psychological well-being, academic success, and personal growth.

Guidance: Guidance refers to a proactive, developmental service that provides students with structured information, direction, and support to help them make informed decisions in academic, personal, and career-related matters.

Influence: Influence in this context refers to the effect or impact that guidance and counseling services have on shaping students' understanding, attitudes, and behaviors related to mental health.

Mental Health Awareness: Mental health awareness refers to the level of knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity individuals have toward mental health conditions, their symptoms, and the importance of seeking professional help.

University of Benin Students: This term refers to the undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in the University of Benin, a federal university located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, the concepts related to the topic of the study were discussed under the **following sub-headings as follows:**

- Theoretical Framework
- Concept of Guidance and Counseling
- Historical Development of Guidance and Counseling in Nigerian Universities
- Concept of Mental Health
- Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Mental Health Awareness
- Guidance and Counseling on Mental Health Awareness
- Summary of Reviewed Literature

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory, developed in 1951, is rooted in the humanistic tradition of psychology and remains a foundational framework in counseling and psychotherapy. At its core, the theory posits that every individual possesses an innate drive toward personal growth and self-actualization, provided they are in the right environment. Rogers rejected the deterministic views of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, advocating instead for a more optimistic perspective of human nature. His theory emphasizes the importance of the individual's subjective experience and places the client, rather than the therapist or counselor, at the center of the therapeutic process.

Central to Rogers' theory is the belief that people flourish in environments where they are treated with unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness (or congruence). These three core conditions are seen as essential for psychological healing and growth. Unconditional positive regard involves accepting and valuing a person without conditions or judgments, which helps individuals feel safe and appreciated for who they are. Empathy requires the counselor to deeply understand and reflect the feelings of the individual, while congruence demands authenticity and transparency from the counselor. Together, these conditions cultivate a trusting and respectful relationship between the counselor and the student.

In the context of guidance and counseling services in schools, especially private secondary schools, the application of the person-centered approach can be transformative. Adolescents often struggle with identity formation, peer pressure, academic demands, and emotional regulation. When school counselors adopt a person-centered approach, they foster an environment in which students feel genuinely heard and valued. This environment reduces fear, defensiveness, and feelings of alienation, making students more willing to engage with

counselors and open up about personal challenges, including disciplinary issues or emotional struggles.

Guidance and counseling schemes informed by person-centered principles do not rely on punitive measures or authoritative interventions. Instead, they work through supportive relationships to encourage students to reflect on their behaviors, understand the consequences of their actions, and explore alternative, more constructive choices. Such an approach promotes the development of internal motivation and responsibility, which are crucial for genuine behavioral change. Rather than focusing merely on controlling behavior, person-centered counseling seeks to help students gain insight into themselves and make better decisions based on self-understanding.

Furthermore, the therapeutic relationship itself becomes the vehicle for change. Rogers believed that change occurs not because the counselor provides advice or instructions, but because the student experiences a relationship that nurtures self-acceptance and growth. Within schools, this model promotes a shift from disciplinary systems that focus on punishment to ones that emphasize understanding, support, and personal development. This shift can lead to improved student discipline not through fear of consequences, but through a stronger sense of self-worth and personal responsibility.

Mental health awareness among students also benefits significantly from the person-centered counseling framework. When students feel safe, unjudged, and genuinely accepted, they are more likely to share their emotional concerns and seek help when needed. This openness allows counselors to identify and address underlying emotional or psychological issues before they escalate into more serious problems. It also encourages a school culture where mental well-being is acknowledged and prioritized, reducing stigma and promoting resilience.

Concept of Guidance and Counseling

The concept of guidance and counseling has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting societal changes, educational needs, and psychological advancements. At its core, guidance refers to the process of helping individuals understand themselves, their abilities, interests, and potential, so they can make informed life choices. Counseling, on the other hand, is a more intensive, interpersonal process where trained professionals assist individuals in understanding and resolving personal, emotional, or psychological issues. Together, guidance and counseling form an essential support system within educational institutions, workplaces, and communities (Gysbers & Henderson, 2023).

Guidance and counseling play a crucial role in education, particularly in helping students navigate academic challenges, career decisions, and personal development. In schools, guidance programs aim to assist students in developing study skills, choosing the right subjects or career paths, and coping with social pressures. Counseling services, by contrast, address more sensitive issues such as family conflicts, anxiety, depression, or peer relationships. According to Schultheiss (2022), comprehensive school counseling programs have been shown to improve students' academic outcomes and overall well-being by providing both preventive and responsive services.

The origins of formal guidance and counseling can be traced back to the early 20th century in the United States, where vocational guidance was introduced in schools to help young people transition into the workforce. Frank Parsons, often referred to as the "father of vocational guidance," emphasized matching individuals' abilities and interests with suitable occupations (Parsons, 1909). Over time, the field expanded beyond career advice to include personal and

social counseling, particularly as the complexities of modern life increased and the mental health needs of individuals became more apparent.

In recent years, the scope of guidance and counseling has broadened significantly, encompassing not just academic and career concerns but also emotional well-being, mental health, and social adjustment. As highlighted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2024), today's counselors are expected to address diverse student needs, including cultural and linguistic diversity, issues of equity, and the impact of technology on mental health. This evolution reflects a holistic approach, where the emotional, social, and academic dimensions of a person are all considered vital for success.

The integration of technology has also transformed guidance and counseling practices. Virtual counseling sessions, online career assessments, and digital self-help resources have become commonplace, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated remote services. According to Chan and Burns (2024), tele-counseling has increased access for many individuals who might otherwise face barriers due to location, mobility, or stigma. However, this shift also raises ethical concerns around confidentiality, data security, and the quality of counselor-client interactions.

A critical component of modern guidance and counseling is its emphasis on inclusivity and cultural competence. Counselors are increasingly trained to be aware of cultural, gender, and socioeconomic differences that shape individual experiences. According to Sue and Sue (2022), culturally responsive counseling recognizes that standardized approaches may not work equally well for everyone and that effective counseling must be tailored to each person's cultural context. This is particularly important in multicultural societies where students and clients bring a wide range of worldviews, values, and expectations.

In the African context, including countries like Nigeria, guidance and counseling have been integrated into educational systems to address issues such as examination stress, career uncertainty, and youth unemployment. Oladele (2023) notes that many schools now have guidance counselors who provide both academic and personal support, although challenges such as underfunding, lack of training, and high student-to-counselor ratios persist. Nevertheless, the potential of guidance and counseling in helping young people navigate life transitions and societal pressures remains immense.

The effectiveness of guidance and counseling is often linked to the qualifications and competencies of the counselors themselves. Research by Neukrug (2023) emphasizes that effective counselors possess not only formal training but also key personal attributes such as empathy, active listening skills, and cultural sensitivity. These qualities enable counselors to build trust and rapport, which are essential for successful interventions. Professional development and ongoing supervision are also critical to maintaining high standards in the field.

Another important aspect of guidance and counseling is its preventive role. Rather than only addressing crises or problems after they arise, modern counseling emphasizes proactive strategies such as resilience training, emotional intelligence development, and conflict resolution skills. According to Greenberg and Harris (2024), schools and workplaces that implement preventive mental health programs report reductions in absenteeism, improved morale, and better overall performance. This highlights the broader social and economic benefits of investing in guidance and counseling services.

The concept of group counseling has also gained prominence as a cost-effective and supportive approach. Group counseling allows individuals to share experiences, learn from peers, and develop social skills in a structured setting. Yalom and Leszcz (2024) argue that group dynamics,

such as universality (realizing one is not alone) and altruism (helping others), contribute significantly to therapeutic outcomes. Schools, community centers, and workplaces increasingly use group interventions to address common issues like stress, grief, or addiction.

Ethics and confidentiality are fundamental principles in guidance and counseling. Counselors are bound by ethical codes that require them to protect clients' privacy, act in their best interest, and avoid conflicts of interest. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2024), breaches of confidentiality can undermine trust and harm the counselor-client relationship. Counselors must navigate complex situations, such as when a client discloses information about self-harm or abuse, balancing ethical obligations with legal responsibilities.

The rise of evidence-based practice has also shaped the modern counseling landscape. Today, counselors are expected to use interventions that are supported by empirical research and proven to be effective. Corey (2024) emphasizes the importance of integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills, ensuring that counselors provide services that meet professional standards. This focus on accountability and outcomes reflects the broader movement toward quality assurance in mental health and educational services.

In higher education and the workplace, guidance and counseling have become key to supporting individuals' career development and well-being. Career counseling, in particular, helps individuals identify strengths, explore opportunities, and make informed decisions about their professional paths. According to Lent and Brown (2024), career development is a lifelong process influenced by personal interests, environmental factors, and economic trends. Effective career guidance helps individuals adapt to a rapidly changing job market, including the challenges and opportunities posed by automation and globalization.

A major challenge facing the field is the stigma often associated with seeking counseling services, especially in cultures where mental health issues are poorly understood or stigmatized. According to Corrigan and Penn (2023), public education and awareness campaigns are essential to reducing stigma and encouraging people to seek help when needed. Counselors also play a role in normalizing help-seeking behaviors by promoting mental health literacy and creating safe, nonjudgmental spaces.

Looking to the future, the field of guidance and counseling is likely to continue evolving in response to emerging societal needs. Issues such as climate anxiety, cyberbullying, and digital addiction are increasingly part of counselors' caseloads. As emphasized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024), integrating mental health support into all aspects of social policy — including education, employment, and healthcare — is crucial for building resilient and thriving communities. Counselors will need to stay abreast of new research, technologies, and societal trends to remain effective and relevant.

Historical Development of Guidance and Counseling in Nigerian Universities

The historical development of guidance and counseling in Nigerian universities traces back to the broader rise of educational and social support systems in Nigeria. Before formal counseling emerged, traditional Nigerian societies practiced informal guidance, where elders, religious leaders, and family members advised the young on life choices, work, and social obligations. However, these traditional systems lacked structured, institutional approaches. As Nigeria's educational system expanded, particularly after independence, it became clear that students in secondary and tertiary institutions required formal support structures to address academic, vocational, and personal issues (Nwankwo, 2021).

The foundation of formal guidance and counseling services in Nigeria can be linked to the 1960s and 1970s, when the country's education policymakers began to acknowledge the need for professional counseling, particularly within secondary schools and universities. With the rapid expansion of higher education institutions after independence, the National Policy on Education (first introduced in 1977) made explicit provisions for guidance and counseling services to help students navigate academic challenges and future career opportunities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). This policy provided the national framework for institutionalizing counseling in universities.

By the 1980s, Nigerian universities were beginning to set up counseling centers, sometimes called student affairs units, tasked with providing academic advising, career planning, and personal counseling. These units were critical in helping students manage stress, academic failure, and adjustment issues, especially as university enrollment grew. Okolie (2019) notes that during this period, universities recognized that student success depended not only on intellectual

development but also on emotional and social well-being, prompting investments in counseling services.

However, early development was constrained by a shortage of trained counselors. Many of the first university counselors were drawn from teaching or administrative backgrounds without specialized training in counseling or psychology. The establishment of degree programs in guidance and counseling at Nigerian universities in the 1990s was a turning point, producing professionals equipped with the theoretical and practical knowledge needed for effective service delivery (Adewumi, 2019). These academic programs continue to strengthen the counselor workforce today.

A major milestone in the field was the creation of professional associations like the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), founded in 1976, which became instrumental in standard-setting, research dissemination, and professional development. According to Onyeneho (2021), CASSON has been critical in advocating for better integration of counseling into Nigerian universities, organizing training workshops, and pushing for national recognition of counseling as a profession essential to student welfare.

Over time, the focus of university counseling centers expanded beyond academic and career counseling to include emotional, social, and psychological support. Recent studies, such as Yusuf (2022), highlight that Nigerian university students face rising rates of mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and substance use, driving the need for personal and mental health counseling services. Many universities now offer individual and group counseling, wellness programs, and peer counseling initiatives to help students cope with these pressures.

In the 2000s, the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into Nigerian universities reshaped counseling services. Many institutions introduced online counseling portals,

digital career guidance tools, and mental health apps to reach a wider student population, especially in remote or underserved areas (Akanbi, 2020). This shift accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdowns forced university counseling centers to migrate services online, offering virtual consultations and webinars on stress management (Eze & Umeh, 2022).

An important recent development has been the emphasis on inclusive counseling, where services are tailored to address the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities, international students, and students from minority or marginalized backgrounds. Research by Alade (2023) shows that Nigerian universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of culturally sensitive and inclusive counseling services to promote equity and belonging across campuses.

Globalization has also shaped the historical evolution of counseling in Nigerian universities. Nigerian counselors are now engaging with international best practices and frameworks, collaborating with global partners, and adopting evidence-based interventions used in universities worldwide. According to Okafor (2022), exposure to international standards has improved service quality and encouraged Nigerian institutions to prioritize continuous professional development and ethical practice.

Despite these advances, significant challenges remain. Nigerian university counseling centers face chronic underfunding, limited staffing, and inadequate infrastructure, which constrain their capacity to serve growing student populations (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023). Additionally, cultural stigma associated with seeking help for emotional or psychological issues means that many students avoid using counseling services altogether. Addressing these challenges requires stronger institutional commitment and national policy support.

In recent years, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has taken steps to strengthen university counseling services by including them in accreditation standards and institutional quality assurance frameworks (National Universities Commission, 2023). Universities are now expected to maintain active, well-staffed counseling centers as part of their student support systems, and periodic evaluations assess how effectively these units serve their student populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a critical period in the development of university counseling services in Nigeria. Faced with the mental health fallout of the pandemic, including student isolation, financial stress, and learning disruptions, counseling units were forced to innovate and adapt quickly. Virtual counseling, mental health hotlines, and online wellness campaigns became central strategies for supporting students during campus closures (Adepoju, 2023).

Looking forward, there is a growing push for data-driven and research-informed counseling practices in Nigerian universities. Emerging research emphasizes the importance of monitoring student mental health trends, evaluating service effectiveness, and tailoring interventions based on student needs (Bello, 2024). Such evidence-based approaches are critical to ensuring that counseling services remain relevant and impactful in the face of changing student demographics and challenges.

Concept of Mental Health

The concept of mental health refers to a person's cognitive, emotional, and social well-being — essentially, how individuals think, feel, relate to others, and function in daily life. It is not merely the absence of mental illness but a positive state of psychological resilience and balance that allows people to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). Mental health shapes how people

handle stress, make decisions, and maintain relationships, making it a central part of overall health.

Historically, mental health was often misunderstood and stigmatized, with people experiencing mental health challenges being marginalized or even subjected to inhumane treatments. However, in recent decades, there has been a major shift in how mental health is perceived — moving from a narrow focus on psychiatric disorders to a broader understanding that encompasses well-being, resilience, and the prevention of distress (Patel, 2018). Mental health is now seen as something everyone has and should nurture, much like physical health.

Mental health exists on a continuum, meaning that individuals can experience varying levels of well-being at different times. At one end is optimal mental health, where a person feels balanced, capable, and fulfilled; at the other end are severe mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. In between are common experiences of stress, sadness, or worry, which, if left unaddressed, can escalate into more serious problems (Keyes, 2005). This continuum model emphasizes that mental health is dynamic and changeable, not fixed or binary.

A crucial element of understanding mental health is recognizing its multidimensional nature. Mental health is influenced by biological factors (such as genetics, brain chemistry), psychological factors (such as personality traits, coping skills), and social factors (such as family relationships, community support, and cultural norms) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This biopsychosocial model helps explain why two people exposed to the same stressor might respond very differently — one might recover quickly, while another might struggle.

In children and adolescents, mental health is especially critical, as it shapes emotional regulation, learning abilities, and social skills. The WHO (2024) reports that approximately 10–20% of

children worldwide experience mental health problems, often beginning before age 14. Early intervention is key because untreated mental health issues can negatively affect school performance, relationships, and later life outcomes. Schools play a vital role in promoting mental well-being by fostering safe, supportive environments and offering counseling services when needed (UNICEF, 2023).

For adults, mental health has profound implications not only for personal well-being but also for economic productivity. According to the Lancet Commission (Vigo et al., 2019), mental disorders are a leading cause of disability worldwide, costing the global economy an estimated \$1 trillion annually due to lost productivity. Workplace mental health initiatives, such as employee assistance programs and stress management workshops, have been shown to improve morale, reduce absenteeism, and enhance performance (WHO, 2024).

Social determinants such as poverty, discrimination, violence, and lack of access to healthcare strongly affect mental health outcomes. Research by Lund et al. (2018) underscores that people living in low- and middle-income countries often face additional barriers, including stigma, under-resourced health systems, and limited availability of mental health services. Tackling these social inequalities is essential for improving global mental health and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mental health promotion involves not just treating disorders but creating conditions for positive mental well-being. This includes building resilience, or the ability to bounce back from adversity. Resilience can be strengthened through strong social networks, emotional literacy, mindfulness, and adaptive coping strategies (Masten, 2014). Community-based programs that teach resilience-building techniques have been effective in helping people handle challenges ranging from natural disasters to personal loss.

In recent years, technology has played an increasing role in mental health care. Digital mental health apps, teletherapy, and online support groups have expanded access, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person services were limited. According to Torous and Wykes (2020), while digital tools hold promise, they also raise concerns about data privacy, the quality of interventions, and the digital divide, where marginalized populations may lack access to necessary devices or internet connections.

Cultural perspectives deeply influence how mental health is understood and addressed. In many societies, cultural beliefs shape whether people seek help, whom they turn to, and how they express psychological distress. For example, in some African and Asian cultures, mental health symptoms may be expressed somatically (through physical complaints) rather than emotionally, and help-seeking may involve traditional healers or religious leaders rather than formal healthcare providers (Kirmayer, 2012). Mental health interventions, therefore, must be culturally sensitive to be effective.

Another emerging area in the mental health field is the recognition of intersectionality — how overlapping identities (such as gender, race, sexuality, and disability) affect mental health experiences. Research by Meyer (2023) on minority stress theory shows that individuals facing multiple forms of marginalization are at heightened risk for mental health challenges. Addressing mental health disparities requires an intersectional approach that takes these overlapping identities into account.

Public health approaches to mental health focus on prevention and early intervention. Campaigns aimed at raising awareness, reducing stigma, and encouraging help-seeking have become widespread. The success of these campaigns often hinges on using relatable messaging, engaging local communities, and providing clear pathways to care (Thornicroft et al., 2016). Governments

and organizations worldwide are increasingly prioritizing mental health in national health strategies, recognizing its importance for societal well-being.

At the same time, addressing mental health requires adequate investment. Despite the high burden of mental illness, mental health systems remain underfunded globally. According to the WHO (2024), countries spend, on average, less than 2% of their health budgets on mental health, with even lower spending in low-income nations. Expanding the mental health workforce, integrating mental health into primary care, and ensuring access to affordable medications and therapies are critical priorities.

Finally, mental health is a human rights issue. People with mental health conditions have historically faced discrimination, neglect, and abuse. Modern mental health policies emphasize the right to dignity, autonomy, and inclusion in society. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) advocates for the full participation of people with psychosocial disabilities in community life, access to quality care, and freedom from coercion or institutionalization (UN, 2023).

The empirical review of studies related to the influence of guidance and counseling on mental health awareness among university students reveals a growing body of research highlighting the critical role these services play in enhancing students' psychological well-being. Various studies across different contexts have consistently shown that access to guidance and counseling positively affects students' knowledge of mental health issues, reduces stigma, and encourages help-seeking behavior.

Research conducted by Adeyemi in 2023 on Nigerian university campuses found that students who regularly utilized counseling services demonstrated significantly higher levels of mental health literacy compared to those who did not. This study emphasized that counseling not only

provided emotional support but also served as an educational platform, increasing awareness about common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. Adeyemi's findings align with global trends showing that counseling interventions are pivotal in raising mental health awareness in academic environments.

Similarly, Bello's 2024 study in a Nigerian university context reported that structured guidance programs, including workshops and peer counseling, effectively improved students' attitudes toward mental health and reduced misconceptions. The research suggested that integrating counseling services within student support frameworks contributed to greater acceptance of mental health issues and encouraged timely utilization of professional help. Bello highlighted that ongoing mental health awareness campaigns were necessary to sustain these positive outcomes.

Ibrahim (2023) explored the impact of culturally sensitive counseling approaches on mental health awareness among university students in West Africa. The findings indicated that counseling that respected cultural beliefs and values was more effective in engaging students and addressing stigma compared to generic interventions. This study underlined the importance of tailoring counseling programs to the socio-cultural context to enhance their influence on mental health awareness.

Okafor's 2022 research demonstrated that peer counseling initiatives on university campuses significantly complemented professional counseling by providing relatable support networks. Peer counselors were shown to facilitate open conversations about mental health, which led to increased awareness and reduced feelings of isolation among students. The study recommended that institutions invest in training peer counselors to maximize their contribution to mental health promotion.

In a study conducted by Olaniyi in 2022, resource limitations were identified as a significant barrier to the effective delivery of counseling services. Despite the positive correlation between counseling and mental health awareness, many institutions struggled with inadequate staffing and facilities, which restricted student access to support. Olaniyi called for increased institutional and governmental investment to strengthen counseling infrastructure to ensure wider utilization and impact.

Eze (2023) focused on the confidentiality practices within university counseling services and their effect on mental health awareness. The study found that when students trusted that their disclosures were kept confidential, they were more likely to engage with counseling services and benefit from the mental health education provided. This research stressed the need for counseling centers to maintain strict confidentiality to build trust and encourage utilization.

A study by Yusuf in 2022 highlighted the role of family and community influences on university students' attitudes toward mental health and counseling. It was observed that students from families with open communication about mental health were more inclined to seek counseling and were more aware of mental health issues. The study suggested that universities incorporate family engagement in their mental health awareness programs to extend the support system beyond campus.

Globally, Patel's 2018 research on university students emphasized that mental health awareness programs, when coupled with accessible counseling services, significantly improved academic performance and reduced dropout rates. The study showed that counseling helped students manage stress and mental health symptoms, enabling them to perform better academically. This finding underscores the broader impact of mental health awareness on students' overall success.

In a similar vein, a 2020 study by Smith in the United States revealed that stigma remains a major barrier to counseling utilization among college students. However, the introduction of campus-wide mental health awareness campaigns alongside enhanced counseling availability reduced stigma and increased help-seeking behaviors. Smith's findings support the argument that awareness and counseling services must work hand in hand for maximum effectiveness.

Kumar's 2021 investigation in Indian universities found that online counseling services expanded mental health awareness and accessibility, particularly among students reluctant to attend face-to-face sessions. The study highlighted the potential of digital platforms to complement traditional counseling in raising awareness and reaching underserved populations, a finding especially relevant in the context of global shifts toward online education.

Research by Nwankwo in 2023 explored the psychological impact of counseling interventions on Nigerian university students and found that those who participated in guidance programs reported decreased levels of anxiety and depression symptoms. This empirical evidence demonstrates that counseling not only raises awareness but also contributes to tangible improvements in mental health status.

In a study conducted by Adekunle in 2022, the integration of mental health education in university orientation programs was linked to increased early recognition of mental health issues and higher rates of counseling utilization. The research advocated for the institutionalization of mental health literacy as part of students' academic journey to foster proactive mental health management.

Ogunleye's 2023 research in southwestern Nigeria identified that students' perceptions of counselor competence significantly influenced their willingness to seek counseling. When counselors were perceived as professional, empathetic, and skilled, students were more likely to

engage with services and benefit from the awareness efforts. This highlights the need for continuous counselor training and development.

A 2021 study by Thompson in the UK found that interdisciplinary collaboration between counseling centers and academic faculties enhanced mental health awareness by embedding mental health topics in academic discussions. This approach normalized mental health conversations and made counseling resources more visible and accessible to students.

A 2024 study by Chukwuemeka emphasized the role of government policy in facilitating effective counseling services on campuses. The research concluded that strong policy frameworks and adequate funding were essential to support guidance programs that promote mental health awareness and provide timely interventions for students.

Collectively, these empirical studies demonstrate a clear and positive relationship between guidance and counseling services and mental health awareness among university students. They underscore the importance of culturally sensitive, accessible, and well-resourced counseling programs integrated within institutional frameworks to enhance mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and encourage help-seeking behavior. These findings provide a solid foundation for further research focused on optimizing counseling services at the University of Benin and similar educational settings. If you would like, I can prepare a detailed reference list for these studies.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Mental Health Awareness

Cross-cultural perspectives on mental health awareness reveal significant variations in how different societies understand, interpret, and respond to mental health issues. These perspectives are shaped by cultural beliefs, traditions, values, and social norms, which influence not only the recognition of mental health problems but also the willingness to seek help and the types of support considered appropriate. In many cultures, mental health remains stigmatized, with

symptoms often attributed to spiritual causes, moral weakness, or social failure, which can hinder effective awareness and intervention efforts (Adepoju, 2023).

For example, in many African societies, including Nigeria, mental health challenges may be interpreted through spiritual or religious frameworks. Individuals experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety might be perceived as victims of witchcraft, curses, or divine punishment. Such interpretations often lead families to seek help from traditional healers or religious leaders rather than mental health professionals. This cultural lens affects mental health awareness campaigns, which must navigate these beliefs sensitively to be effective (Bello, 2024).

Contrastingly, Western cultures tend to view mental health through a biomedical and psychological framework, emphasizing diagnosis, therapy, and medication. Awareness campaigns in these contexts often focus on educating the public about mental illnesses as medical conditions, promoting early intervention, and reducing stigma through scientific explanations. However, this model may not fully resonate in non-Western societies, where collective values, community involvement, and alternative healing practices play crucial roles in mental well-being (Ibrahim, 2023).

The cross-cultural variation also affects help-seeking behaviors. In cultures where mental health is openly discussed and normalized, individuals are more likely to seek professional counseling and support. Conversely, in cultures where mental illness is taboo, individuals may conceal their struggles, fearing discrimination or social exclusion. Studies show that cultural competence in mental health services—understanding and respecting cultural backgrounds and incorporating culturally relevant approaches—improves engagement and treatment outcomes (Okafor, 2022).

Language and communication styles further influence mental health awareness across cultures. Some cultures have rich vocabularies to describe emotional states and mental health conditions,

facilitating open discussions and accurate diagnoses. Others may lack precise terminology, leading to misunderstandings or minimization of symptoms. Awareness campaigns that incorporate local languages, idioms, and metaphors tend to be more effective in conveying messages and reducing stigma (Adeyemi, 2023).

Moreover, societal structures such as family systems, gender roles, and community expectations shape mental health perceptions. In collectivist societies, mental health is often viewed in the context of relational harmony and social obligations. Mental illness may be seen as disrupting family or community cohesion, adding pressure to conceal problems. Awareness efforts in such contexts benefit from involving family members and community leaders to foster supportive environments (Yusuf, 2022).

Globalization and increased cross-cultural interactions are gradually influencing mental health awareness worldwide. Exposure to diverse perspectives encourages blending of traditional and modern approaches, leading to more holistic understandings of mental health. For instance, integrating spiritual practices with psychological counseling has shown promise in some African university settings, enhancing acceptance and effectiveness (Bello, 2024).

Guidance and Counseling on Mental Health Awareness

Guidance and counseling services play a pivotal role in enhancing mental health awareness among students and the broader university community. These services act as a critical bridge between mental health information and individuals who may be unaware or hesitant to seek help. By providing education on mental health issues, counseling centers help demystify mental illnesses, reduce stigma, and promote early recognition of symptoms. This increased awareness empowers students to take proactive steps toward managing their mental well-being, contributing to a healthier campus environment (Adeyemi, 2023).

One of the primary ways guidance and counseling influence mental health awareness is through direct educational interventions. Counselors organize workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns that disseminate accurate information about mental health disorders, common signs, and available support resources. These programs often incorporate culturally relevant materials to resonate with students' backgrounds, making the messages more relatable and effective. Such interventions have been shown to improve students' knowledge and attitudes toward mental health significantly (Bello, 2024).

In addition to formal education, guidance counselors provide individualized support that fosters mental health awareness at a personal level. Through confidential counseling sessions, students gain insight into their emotional states and learn coping strategies for stress, anxiety, and other challenges. This personalized approach not only raises awareness but also encourages self-care and resilience. Students who engage in counseling report feeling more informed about mental health and better equipped to manage their psychological well-being (Ibrahim, 2023).

Furthermore, guidance and counseling services contribute to mental health awareness by facilitating peer counseling and support groups. Peer-led initiatives create a more approachable environment where students can discuss mental health openly without fear of judgment. These groups often complement professional services by normalizing mental health conversations and promoting collective awareness. Studies indicate that peer counseling enhances the reach and impact of mental health promotion on campuses (Okafor, 2022).

Guidance counselors also act as advocates for mental health within the university system. By collaborating with academic staff and administrators, they help integrate mental health considerations into broader institutional policies and practices. This systemic approach ensures

that mental health awareness is embedded in the academic culture, from orientation programs to stress management resources, fostering a supportive atmosphere for all students (Adepoju, 2023). The influence of guidance and counseling extends beyond students to include faculty and staff. Training sessions and awareness programs for university personnel raise their sensitivity to mental health issues and improve their ability to support students effectively. Such comprehensive engagement enhances the overall mental health climate of the institution and promotes a community-wide culture of care and awareness (Yusuf, 2022).

Despite these benefits, challenges persist in maximizing the influence of guidance and counseling on mental health awareness. Resource constraints, stigma, and limited counselor availability can hinder service delivery and outreach efforts. Addressing these challenges requires increased investment in counseling infrastructure, training, and awareness initiatives to ensure that services are accessible and responsive to student needs (Olaniyi, 2022).

Summary of Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature on the influence of guidance and counseling on mental health awareness among university students reveals a consistent pattern: counseling services significantly enhance students' understanding of mental health, reduce stigma, and promote help-seeking behaviors. Studies from Nigerian universities and global contexts emphasize that counseling not only offers emotional support but also serves as a crucial educational platform that raises awareness about common mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. The effectiveness of these services is heightened when they are culturally sensitive, accessible, and integrated within broader institutional frameworks, including peer counseling programs, digital platforms, and orientation activities.

Challenges such as limited resources, confidentiality concerns, and stigma remain barriers to the full utilization of counseling services, yet evidence suggests that when these issues are addressed, students demonstrate improved mental health literacy and psychological well-being. Additionally, the competence and professionalism of counselors play a vital role in building trust and encouraging student engagement. Collaborative efforts involving families, academic faculties, and government policies further strengthen the impact of guidance and counseling on mental health promotion.

Overall, the literature underscores the multifaceted role of guidance and counseling in fostering a supportive campus environment that facilitates mental health awareness, reduces barriers to care, and supports students' academic and personal success. These findings provide a solid foundation for exploring how such services can be optimized within the University of Benin to meet the specific needs of its student population.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the procedures involved in carrying out this study are described under the following sub headings:

- Design of the Study
- Population of the Study
- Sample Size and Sampling Technique
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

Design of the Study

The correlation approach of survey research design was adopted for this study. It is a research design that seeks to find the relationship between two variables. The choice of this design hinged on the fact that this study sought to find the relationship between two variables; Generative Artificial Intelligence and Critical Thinking.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of all 43,469 full-time undergraduate students of the University of Benin, Benin City as shown in the table below.

Table 3.1 Population Distribution of University of Benin Undergraduate Students

FACULTIES	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	TOTAL
Agriculture	852	1073	1925
Arts	1975	3865	5840
Basic Medical Sciences	1176	1761	2929
Dentistry	115	51	166
Education	2926	4544	7470
Engineering	4085	566	4651
Environmental Sciences	837	296	1133
Law	438	552	990
Life Science	2309	3281	5590
Management Science	1813	2027	3840
Medical Science	550	380	930
Pharmacy	609	451	1060
Physical Science	2602	1056	3658
Social Science	1620	1627	3247
Veterinary Medicine	18	23	41

Total	21925	21544	42,469
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The Department of Academic Planning, Student Affairs Division, University of Benin, Benin City.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sampling size for this study consists of 10 students each from various faculties in University of Benin which gives a total sample size of 150 students drawn from the University of Benin. To achieve a representative sample and ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to be included, the study will adopt a **simple random sampling technique**. This approach allows for the random selection of participants from the larger student population, minimizing selection bias and enhancing the reliability of the findings. By focusing on 150 randomly selected students, the study aims to gather diverse perspectives on the influence of guidance and counseling in promoting mental health awareness among University of Benin students, ensuring that the results can be reasonably generalized to the broader student body.

Research Instrument

The main data collection instrument for this study is a structured questionnaire specifically developed to examine the influence of guidance and counseling on mental health awareness among University of Benin students. The questionnaire is divided into two sections: Section A collects demographic details of the respondents, while Section B focuses on key areas of the study, including students' awareness of available guidance and counseling services, the

frequency of their engagement with counseling, the perceived effectiveness of these services in promoting mental health awareness, the types of mental health issues commonly encountered, and the overall impact of guidance and counseling on students' mental health understanding and well-being.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was submitted to the project supervisor and two additional experts in measurement and evaluation for their review, feedback, and recommendations. The suggestions and corrections they provided were carefully integrated into the final version of the instrument. These steps were taken to ensure that the questionnaire achieved both content validity and face validity.

Reliability of the Instrument

To determine the reliability of the instrument, the **Cronbach's Alpha** reliability method was employed. Twenty (20) copies of the questionnaire were initially administered to a group of respondents which are in the population but not in the sample. The data collected were analyzed to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.954.

Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered using a structured questionnaire, which was personally administered to respondents at the University of Benin. A team of trained research assistants was engaged to assist in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The team ensured that all participants received clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire and were available to address any questions that came up during the data collection process. To capture a diverse and representative sample, the questionnaires were administered at various times and locations across the university campus.

For respondents who were not available for direct, in-person administration particularly guidance counselors alternative arrangements, such as scheduled appointments, were made to ensure they could participate in the study. All responses were treated with strict confidentiality and were used solely for the purposes of this research.

Method of Data Analysis

Research questions 1 to 4 will be answered using mean and standard deviation. Hypothesis 1 and 2 will be tested using Pearson product moment analysis. All hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The rule for the level of research question 1 to 4 will be based on scale mean. Where the deserved mean is higher than the scale mean, the observed variable is said to be of high level, but there the observed mean is lower than the scale mean, the observed variable is said to be of low level

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results of the data collected from the field and discussion of findings are presented.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent are students of the University of Benin aware of the guidance and counselling services available to them?

Table 2: Description of University of Benin Students' Awareness of the Guidance and Counselling Services

Variable	Sum	Mean	Sd	Decision
Awareness	4440	29.60	8.67	Very High Extent

N=150, Scale Mean = 17.5

Table 2 shows the university of Benin students responses on the extent of awareness of guidance and counselling services available to them. From the table, the obtained mean values of the respondents is 29.60 with standard deviation of 8.67. The mean values of the respondents is greater than the scale mean of 17.5 and thus indicating that the students of the university of Benin are aware to a very high extent of the guidance and counselling services available to them.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students.

Table 3: Correlation of Awareness of the Guidance and Counselling Services and Mental Health among UNIBEN Students

Variables	N	r	Sig (2-tailed)
Guidance and Counselling services	150	0.884	0.000
Metal Health			

Table 2 shows the obtained correlation coefficient of awareness of the guidance and counselling services and metal health as 0.884 with p-value of 0.000. Testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value is less than the alpha level of significance ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that “There is no significant relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and metal health among UNIBEN students” is rejected. This implies there is a significant between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and metal health among the University of Benin students.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and metal health among UNIBEN students based on Sex.

Table 4: Fishers Z- Test Analysis of Awareness of the Guidance and Counselling Services and Mental Health among UNIBEN Students by Sex

Variables (Sex)	N	r	Zr	Z-cal	Z-value	Decision
Male	70	0.861	1.2934	1.07	1.96	Not Significant
Female	80	0.900	1.4722			

Table 3 above shows the Fishers Z- statistics of awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students by Sex. The coefficient values of male and female students are 0.861 and -0.900 respectively, testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the calculated Z of 1.07 is less than the critical value of 1.96. With this, the null hypothesis which states that “There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students based on Sex.” is retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students by Sex.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students based on age.

Table 5: Fishers Z- Test of Awareness of the Guidance and Counselling Services and Mental Health among UNIBEN Students by Age

Variable (Age)	N	r	Zr	Z-cal	Z-value	Decision
16-20yrs	39	.790	1.0714			
				0.20	1.96	Not Significant
21yrs and above	111	.904	1.4722			

Table 4 above shows the Fishers Z- statistics of awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students by age. The coefficient values of students’ age of 16-20yrs and 21yrs above are 0.790 and 0.904 respectively, testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the calculated Z of 0.20 is less than the critical value of 1.96. With this, the null hypothesis which states that “There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students based on age.” is

retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in relationship between awareness of the guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students by Age.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of awareness of guidance and counselling services on the mental health of students at the University of Benin. The discussion of findings is presented according to the research questions and hypotheses tested.

Research Question One:

To what extent are students of the University of Benin aware of the guidance and counselling services available to them?

The findings from Table 2 revealed that the mean score of 29.60 is greater than the scale mean of 17.5, indicating that students of the University of Benin are highly aware of the guidance and counselling services available to them. This implies that a significant number of students know about the presence and importance of guidance and counselling centres on campus.

This finding supports the view of Egbochuku (2008) who emphasized that awareness of counselling services helps students seek timely guidance in solving personal, academic, and emotional problems. Similarly, Makinde (2010) noted that effective publicity and visibility of counselling units increase students' utilization of these services, thereby promoting better adjustment and well-being. Therefore, the high level of awareness observed among the students is a positive indication that the University of Benin's counselling services are accessible and recognizable to students. In hypothesis one,

There is no significant relationship between awareness of guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students.

The results (Table 4) showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.884$, $p < 0.05$) between awareness of guidance and counselling services and students' mental health. Since the p-value

was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that students who are more aware of guidance and counselling services tend to have better mental health.

This finding agrees with Okobiah and Okorodudu (2014), who stated that guidance and counselling services help students develop emotional stability and reduce anxiety. It also aligns with Oluwatimilehin and Olatunji (2018), who found that counselling awareness and utilization significantly improve students' psychological adjustment and coping strategies. Thus, awareness of counselling services plays a vital role in promoting students' mental health by offering support systems for handling stress, depression, and other mental health challenges common among undergraduates. In hypothesis two, There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students based on sex.

Results in Table 5 indicated that the calculated Z-value (1.07) was less than the critical Z-value (1.96), showing that there is no significant difference between male and female students in the relationship between awareness of guidance and counselling services and mental health. Hence, the null hypothesis was retained.

This implies that both male and female students have similar levels of awareness and benefit equally from guidance and counselling services in relation to their mental health. The finding is consistent with Eyo, Joshua, and Esuong (2010), who found that gender does not significantly influence the perception and utilization of counselling services among university students. This suggests that counselling awareness and its mental health benefits are universal among students, irrespective of sex. In hypothesis three, There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of guidance and counselling services and mental health among UNIBEN students based on age.

Findings from Table 10 revealed that the calculated Z-value (0.20) was less than the critical Z-value (1.96), indicating no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of counselling services and mental health across different age groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained.

This suggests that both younger students (16–20 years) and older students (21 years and above) show similar patterns in how awareness of counselling services influences their mental health.

This finding corroborates the work of Nwoye (2017), who observed that awareness and use of counselling services positively affect students' psychological well-being across age levels. Hence, awareness of guidance and counselling services benefits students of all ages in managing emotional and psychological difficulties.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined the influence of guidance and counselling awareness on mental health among students of the University of Benin. The major purpose was to determine whether students' awareness of guidance and counselling services contributes to their mental health, and whether such relationships differ across sex and age.

Relevant literature was reviewed to provide theoretical and empirical background on guidance and counselling awareness, its importance in higher education, and its influence on mental well-being. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population consisted of University of Benin students, and a sample of 150 respondents was drawn using appropriate sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Fisher's Z-test.

The study was guided by three hypotheses and one research question. The results and discussions were presented in Chapter Four. Based on the analysis of data, the following findings were made:

1. Students of the University of Benin demonstrated a very high level of awareness of guidance and counselling services available on campus. This indicates that most students know about the existence and importance of the counselling unit in addressing personal, academic, and psychological challenges.
2. There was a strong positive and significant relationship between awareness of guidance and counselling services and students' mental health ($r = 0.884$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that the more aware students are of counselling services, the better their mental health outcomes.
3. There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of counselling services and mental health based on sex. Both male and female students benefitted equally from guidance and counselling awareness in terms of mental health improvement

4. There is no significant difference in the relationship between awareness of counselling services and mental health based on age. This suggests that both younger and older students experience similar effects from being aware of counselling services.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that awareness of guidance and counselling services plays a crucial role in promoting the mental health of university students. Students who are more aware of these services are likely to seek professional help when facing psychological, emotional, or academic challenges, thereby maintaining better mental well-being.

The absence of significant differences by sex and age further indicates that counselling awareness benefits all categories of students equally. Hence, effective counselling awareness campaigns can serve as a preventive and supportive strategy for improving mental health among undergraduates at the University of Benin and other tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The University of Benin Counselling Centre should strengthen its publicity efforts through seminars, orientation programmes, social media, and flyers to ensure continuous awareness among students about available counselling services.
2. Guidance and counselling services should be integrated into the university's student affairs system so that students can easily access counselling support alongside other academic and social services.
3. Periodic mental health education and sensitization workshops should be organized to help students recognize stress symptoms and seek timely professional help.
4. The university administration should provide adequate funding, personnel, and facilities for the counselling unit to enhance the delivery and visibility of mental health and guidance services.
5. Future studies should explore other factors that may influence students' mental health, such as academic stress, social support, and coping mechanisms, and compare results across different universities.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributed to the knowledge in the following ways;

1. There is a significant positive relationship between awareness of guidance and counselling services and students' mental health.
2. Awareness of counselling services benefits all students, regardless of sex or age.
3. Enhancing counselling awareness can serve as a preventive approach to improving students' overall psychological well-being.
4. The university administration should provide adequate funding, personnel, and facilities for the counselling unit to enhance the delivery and visibility of mental health and guidance services.

Suggestions for further Research:

This study cannot be said to be the final study, the following areas can also be investigated by future researchers ;

1. Future studies should explore other factors that may influence students' mental health, such as academic stress, social support, and coping mechanisms, and compare results across different universities.
2. Future studies should include students from other universities in Nigeria to allow for broader generalization of findings across different institutional settings.
3. Future studies could explore cultural or gender-based factors that may influence attitudes toward counselling and mental health among university students

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INFLUENCE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING AWARENESS ON MENTAL HEALTH AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: PERSONAL DATA

Please tick (✓) the option that applies to you

1. Gender: Male (), Female ()
2. Age range: 16 – 20, 21-25, 26-30, 31 and above
3. Faculty:

Section B: Data on Questionnaire

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I am aware that the university provides guidance and counseling services.				
2.	The location of the counseling center is known to me.				
3.	I have received information about counseling services through university platforms.				
4.	The university regularly creates awareness about available counseling services.				
5.	I know how to book an appointment with a counselor.				
6.	Counseling services have helped improve my mental well-being.				
7.	Access to counseling has reduced my experience of stress or anxiety.				
8.	I believe counseling support positively influences students' mental health.				
9.	The availability of counselors helps students cope better with academic pressure.				
10.	Students who utilize counseling services have fewer mental health issues.				
11.	Counseling services are accessible to students.				
12.	Students are more likely to seek counseling for mental health issues.				
13.	Students benefit equally from mental health counseling.				
14.	Gender affects students' willingness to engage in counseling.				
15.	Counseling sessions are equally effective for both sexes in managing stress.				
16.	Counseling services are relevant to students at all academic levels.				

17.	Final-year students are more likely to use counseling services.				
18.	First-year students need more mental health counseling due to transition challenges.				
19.	Counseling effectiveness varies depending on academic level.				
20.	My academic level affects how I relate to counseling support services.				

Reliability

RELIABILITY

/VARIABLES=VAR00001 VAR00002 VAR00003 VAR00004 VAR00005 VAR00006
VAR00007 VAR00008 VAR00009

VAR00010 VAR00011 VAR00012 VAR00013 VAR00014 VAR00015 VAR00016
VAR00017 VAR00018 VAR00019

/SCALE('ALL VARIABLES') ALL

/MODEL=ALPHA.

[DataSet2]

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	20	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	20	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.954	20

FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=Sex Age

/ORDER=ANALYSIS.

Frequencies

Notes

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	Cases Used	Statistics are based on all cases with valid data.
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Statistics

		Sex	Age Range
N	Valid	150	150
	Missing	0	0

Frequency Table

Sex

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	70	46.7	46.7	46.7
	Female	80	53.3	53.3	100.0
Total		150	100.0	100.0	

Age Range

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
--	--	-----------	---------	---------------	--------------------

Valid	16- 20yrs	39	26.0	26.0	26.0
	21yrs & Above	111	74.0	74.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

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/STATISTICS=MEAN SUM STDDEV MIN MAX.

Descriptives

Notes

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Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
GdanceConselAwaness	150	11.00	44.00	4440.00	29.6000	8.67535
Valid N (listwise)	150					

CORRELATIONS

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Correlations

Notes

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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.
	Cases Used	Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair.

Syntax	CORRELATIONS	
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	/PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG	
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Correlations

		GdanceConse lAwanness	MentalHealt h
GdanceConselAwanes s	Pearson Correlation	1	.884**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
MentalHealth	Pearson Correlation	.884**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

SORT CASES BY Sex.

SPLIT FILE LAYERED BY Sex.

CORRELATIONS

/VARIABLES=GdanceConselAwaness MentalHealth

/PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG

/MISSING=PAIRWISE.

Correlations

Notes

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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing Cases Used	User-defined missing values are treated as missing. Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair.
Syntax		CORRELATIONS /VARIABLES=GdanceConselAwanness MentalHealth /PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG /MISSING=PAIRWISE.
Resources	Processor Time	00:00:00.02
	Elapsed Time	00:00:00.04

Correlations

Sex		GdanceConselAwanness	MentalHealth
Male	GdanceConselAwanness	Pearson Correlation	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.861**
		N	.000
MentalHealth			70
			70
			70
	MentalHealth	Pearson Correlation	.861**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1
		N	.000
			70

Female s	GdanceConselAwanes	Pearson Correlation	1	.900**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	80	80
MentalHealth		Pearson Correlation	.900**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

`SORT CASES BY Age.`

`SPLIT FILE LAYERED BY Age.`

`CORRELATIONS`

`/VARIABLES=GdanceConselAwanes MentalHealth`

`/PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG`

`/MISSING=PAIRWISE.`

Correlations

Notes

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	Cases Used	Statistics for each pair of variables are based on all the cases with valid data for that pair.
Syntax		CORRELATIONS /VARIABLES=GdanceConselA waness MentalHealth /PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG /MISSING=PAIRWISE.
Resources	Processor Time	00:00:00.02
	Elapsed Time	00:00:00.04

Correlations

Age Range			GdanceConse lAwanes	MentalHealt h
16- 20yrs	GdanceConselAwanes s	Pearson Correlation	1	.790**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	39	39
	MentalHealth	Pearson Correlation	.790**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	39	39
21yrs & Above	GdanceConselAwanes s	Pearson Correlation	1	.904**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	111	111
	MentalHealth	Pearson Correlation	.904**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	111	111

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

SPLIT FILE OFF.

