



## Contextual Stressors and Barriers to Help-Seeking Behaviours as Predictors to Depression Severity among Undergraduate Students of Tertiary Institutions in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study assessed contextual stressors and barriers to help-seeking behaviours as predictors of depression severity among undergraduate students of tertiary institutions in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study comprised 12,578 undergraduate students in FCT, Abuja. The sample size for the study was 408 undergraduate students. The multistage sampling procedure was used to draw the study sample. Contextual Stressors and Barriers to Help-Seeking Behaviours for Depression Questionnaire (CSBHSBDQ) was used for the study. The face validity was established by five experts while the reliability (internal consistency) of the CSBHSBDQ was determined using Cronbach's alpha statistics. The reliability coefficients of 0.71 and 0.74 were obtained for sections A and B of the CSBHSBDQ respectively. The research questions were answered using point-biserial correlation. Multiple regression was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that there is a moderate positive relationship between depression level and social/environment (rbp = 0.32) and financial stress (rbp = 0.33), while fear of therapy (rbp = 0.37), fear of self-discovery (rbp = 0.39) and fear of stigma (rbp = 0.37) showed a moderate positive relationship between depression level and barriers to behaviours. Social/physical environment (beta = .205, p = .000 < .05) and financial stress (beta = .216, p = .000 < .05) were significant contextual stressors of depression severity among undergraduate students, while fear of therapy (beta = 1.026, p = .001 < .05), fear of self-discovery (beta = 1.026, p = .001 < .05) and fear of stigma (beta = 1.081, p = .001 < .05) were significant barriers to help-seeking behaviours of depression severity among undergraduate students. The study recommended that necessary stakeholders should embark on stigma-reduction campaigns to create awareness around campuses and help remove stereotypes associated with depression.

**Keywords:** Depression, Severity, Contextual stressors, Predictor, Barriers, FCT Abuja

### Introduction

Depression is a pervasive mental state that affects undergraduate students globally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), more than 264 million people worldwide suffer from depression, and approximately 850,000 deaths are depression-related each year. More than one in ten young people in the United States are living with depression that disrupts their school, work or home life (Mental Health America, 2023). Studies have found that the lifetime prevalence of adult depressive disorder in China is 6.8 per cent (Lu et al., 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, depression rates range from 3.4 to 4.9 per cent across the continent with Niger Republic (3.4%) having the lowest and Cape Verde (4.9%) having the



highest depression rate (Gbadamosi et al., 2022). The report further showed that over 7 million in Nigeria (3.9%) suffer from depression. The number is likely even higher as not everyone who has depression obtains an official diagnosis. Young adults aged 18 to 25 are at the highest risk of a major depressive episode (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). Those aged 19-29 have the highest prevalence of depression at 21 per cent followed by those ages 45-64 at 18.4 per cent, ages 65 and over at 18.4 per cent, and ages 30 to 44 at 16.8 per cent (Center for Disease Prevention and Control, 2019). This shows that undergraduate students are mostly at risk of depression.

Depression is an emotional disorder that is common among undergraduate students. It causes a persistent sad feeling for a relatively long period and may even lead to suicidal ideation (Ordaz et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2018). Depression in undergraduate students may not only affect their academic performances but also may hinder their future success. Studies have shown that the depression prevalence among undergraduate students was relatively high (Acharya et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019). Undergraduate students in tertiary institutions are vulnerable to depression, as they are facing more challenges, such as continuing study pressure, changes in residence place and lifestyle, economic pressure, or employment pressure. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) outlined symptoms of depression to include persistent sadness, anxious or "empty" feelings, hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness and helplessness, irritability, restlessness, and loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable. The essential feature of depression used as a criterion for diagnosis is two weeks, during which there is either a depressed mood or the loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities (Barta & Kiropoulos, 2023).

Depression in young adults, including university students is one of the most common disorders observed in these groups and is a serious public health concern (Ebert et al., 2019). According to a study by UNICEF carried out in 21 countries, in the first half of 2021, self-reported depression rates among the age group 15–24 years was approximately 19% (UNICEF, 2021). Depression among university students is known to cause several adverse consequences. It not only disrupts academic performance and social development, but also increases university dropouts, alcohol and substance abuse and increases the risk of suicide (Wickramasinghe et al., 2023). University students are often in a critical phase of life, undergoing transitions both positive and negative. Most students are away from home for the first time, start living in hostels or student accommodation with other students, are experiencing romantic relationships, seeking independence with reduced adult supervision and taking care of themselves; these situations can often be overwhelming and could often lead to increased stress and depression.

Depression is usually examined in clinical and non-clinical samples in terms of severity. Severity denotes intensity or intensiveness. Severity is the degree of something undesirable or hard to endure (SA Technologies, 2020). Depression is not a definite phenomenon. Instead, there is a continuous grading in severity, from their absence to severe depression. The degree of severity of depression constitutes its most important aspect, and its dimensional nature is not an issue from a conceptual perspective. The severity is affected by some contextual stressors and barriers to help seeking behaviours. Hence, this study examined the contextual stressors and barriers to help seeking behaviours to of depression among tertiary institutions in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja students.

Contextual stressors refer to external factors that contribute to depression in students' environment. Contextual stressors such as social/environmental stressors, academic achievement, curriculum and academic expectations, time/balance stressors, and financial



stressors are all forms of stress capable of producing depressive problems. Financial pressures coming from the increasing cost of tertiary education all lead to depression among students (Acharya et al., 2018).

Despite the serious effects of depression on undergraduate students, barriers to help-seeking seems to persist. Only around one in two people contact professional support services for their depressive symptoms, despite considering a broad range of services, including psychiatric or psychotherapeutic help, general practitioners, and counselling (McLaren et al., 2023). Even in regions with high healthcare density, there is a substantial proportion of people who do not seek professional help for their depressive symptoms. Help-seeking for mental illness is understood as a process of experiencing symptoms, identifying them as such, forming an intention, and lastly actual help-seeking (McLaren et al., 2021; Tomczyk et al., 2020). The identification of symptoms of mental illness is a crucial starting point to forming intention (Horsfield et al., 2020; Kagstrom et al., 2019). Fear of treatment (McLaren et al., 2023), fear of self-discovery and fear of stigma (Schomerus et al., 2019) have been identified as major barriers, hindering both self-identification and help-seeking initiation. However, these barriers are under-reported in Nigerian contexts. Therefore, students of tertiary institutions in FCT can be at risk of experiencing depression relative to other young people due to a combination of predictors that Linden and Jurdi-Hage (2017) identified as relating to contextual stressors, and barriers to help-seeking.

Tertiary institution students are students in higher institutions, such as colleges, polytechnics, or universities, who have not yet received a degree. A plethora of reports and research evidence indicate that undergraduate students are at high risk of depression (Dabana & Gobir, 2018; Lugata et al., 2021). More so, students show heightened depression in tertiary institutions more than at home and other fun places. In this study, undergraduate students refer to female and male students in tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja studying for their bachelor's degree. A tertiary institution on the other hand is defined as an institution that has been set up to offer both post-secondary education and vocational training. Nevertheless, it is worrisome that students of tertiary institutions are experiencing depression, which could undermine the attainment of the laudable goals they have set out to achieve.

This study was conducted among undergraduate students of tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja. The FCT is entirely appropriate for this study. First, it serves as a cosmopolitan centre, with residents representing all parts of the federation of Nigeria and the West African Sub-region, making it an educational hub for young adults from diverse backgrounds. Secondly, by the disposition of the FCT, students are at risk for experiencing depression relative to financial difficulties, the influence of peer pressure, such as the use of drugs/substances that predisposes them to indiscriminate sexual involvements This trend which includes ignorance, academic-induced frustration, and lack of parental care, tends to be more predominant among tertiary institution students (Agwagie, 2016) in the FCT. Imam (2019) disclosed that manifestations of depression among students of tertiary institutions in the FCT are worrisome. This is evident in students' poor academic performance, increased dropout rate, suicidal ideation, contemplating, attempting, and even completing suicide (Imam, 2019). To make matters worse, students are suffering from unmet needs for treatment of depression due to either outright lack of mental health services on their campuses, including counselling and treatment services, or, where there are such services, their fear of therapy, fear of self-discovery and fear of the stigma that society attaches to individuals receiving mental health/psychiatric care (Dabana & Gobir, 2018; Wada et al., 2021). These conditions justified the selection of FCT, Abuja, as the study area.



A few Nigerian studies have relied on population-level data that are not specific to students of tertiary institutions, needing more scope to consider contextual stressors and barriers to help-seeking that predict depression among students. This study, therefore, filled this gap by investigating the contextual stressors and barriers to help-seeking behaviours as predictors of depression among undergraduate students of tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja. The findings will greatly benefit students, higher education administrators, Ministries of Education and Health, lecturers, public health and health education experts, psychologists, mental health researchers, and parents/guardians.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide this study:

1. What is the relationship between depression severity level and contextual stressors of tertiary institution students in FCT, Abuja?
2. What is the relationship between depression severity level and barriers to help-seeking behaviours of tertiary institution students in FCT, Abuja?

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study

1. Contextual stressors are not significant predictors of level of depression severity among tertiary institution students in FCT, Abuja.
2. Barriers to help-seeking behaviours are not significant predictors of level of depression severity among tertiary institution students in FCT, Abuja.

### Methods and Materials

The study adopted the correlational research design. Correlational design is a non-experimental design in which the researcher measures two variables and assesses the statistical relationships between them with little or no effort to control extraneous variables (Price et al., 2020). This study was conducted in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The FCT has many educational institutions representing different levels of education. In the FCT, the accredited tertiary institutions include Veritas University, Nile University of Nigeria, Baze University, African University of Science and Technology, Aspire College of Technology, University of Abuja, and FCT College of Education, Zuba.

The population for this study consisted of students of tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja. The population comprised 12,578 students during the 2019/2020 academic session. The breakdown shows student enrollment for the University of Abuja to be 3,255 males and 3,161 females, giving a total of 6,416 students. The 2019/2020 academic session student enrollment for Baze University was 2,190 males and 1,795 females, giving a total student enrollment of 3,985. The student enrollment for the College of Education, Zuba was 1,484 full-time and 693 part-time, giving a total of 2,177 students (Academic Planning Units and Office of the Registrar, 2020). The sample size of this study consisted of 408 students of tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size formula. Multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select the study sample. The first stage involved the use of a simple random sampling of balloting without replacement was used to sample two universities and one college of education. There are five universities and two colleges of education within the FCT, Abuja which gave a ratio of 5:2. The Second stage involved the categorization of the universities under public and private universities. A simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement



was used to draw one public university and one private university. This gave rise to three tertiary institutions (the University of Abuja, Baze University, and College of Education, Zuba). Stage three involved the use of simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement to select two faculties from two universities and two schools from the College of Education (COE), Zuba. This gave rise to four faculties and two schools (six groups in all). The fourth stage involved the use of systematic sampling technique to draw four departments from each of the selected faculties and four units from the selected schools. The fifth stage involved the use of simple random sampling of balloting without replacement to select 17 students from each of the sampled departments and units. Thus, a total of 408 students were selected from three tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja for the study.

The researcher-adapted 'Contextual Stressors and Barriers to Help-Seeking Behaviours for Depression Questionnaire' (CSBHSBDQ) was used for data collection. The CSBHSBDQ contained sections A and B. Section A contained five items that generated responses on contextual stressors. The section was assigned a 4-point Likert-type response option of 'Not at all (0 points),' 'Several days (1 Point),' 'More than half the days (2 Points),' and 'Nearly every day (3 points).' Section B comprised three items that elicited information on barriers to help-seeking for depression. This section was assigned a 4-point Likert-type response option similar to Section B. The participants were asked to indicate their experiences by placing a tick (✓) in the box against each of the items. Section C of the CSBHSBDQ contained the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). The PHQ-9 is a nine-item questionnaire that scores each of the nine DSM-IV criteria as '0' (not at all) to '3' (nearly every day). It assesses the severity of depression. However, it can be used to make a diagnosis of depression in the at-risk population (e.g., students). Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they had experienced each of the items on PHQ-9 on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 3 (nearly every day) over the past two weeks. The responses of participants to the items on the scale were added, with composite scores ranging from 0 to 27 for the PHQ-9. Higher scores indicated greater severity of symptoms suggesting the presence of depression.

The face validity of the CSBHSBDQ was established by giving the draft copies of the instrument, the study's specific objectives, research questions and the hypotheses to five experts in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability coefficients of the CSBHSBDQ were determined using Cronbach's alpha. In this study, the reliability coefficients of 0.71, and 0.74 were obtained for sections A and B respectively. The PHQ-9 is a standardised instrument and was not subjected to reliability testing. The instruments were adjudged reliable since the co-efficient values were above .70 (Cohen et al., 2018). The completed questionnaires were collected on the spot after they had been filled out by the students. A total of 390 copies (95.59%) of the CSBHSBDQ were duly filled and returned and were used for analysis.

The retrieved copies of the CSBHSBDQ were cross-checked for completeness of responses before data analyses. Copies with incomplete information were discarded. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS version 25) was used for data analyses. The data were analyzed on an item-by-item basis. The point-biserial correlation was employed to determine the relationship between the level of depression and contextual stressors and barriers to help-seeking behaviours of the students. Subsequently, Nwagu and Agbaje's (2017) guidelines for the interpretation of the degree or strength of the relationship between two or more variables were employed. The guidelines recommended that a correlation coefficient of  $\pm .00$  to  $\pm .29$  should be interpreted as none to a weak relationship; correlation coefficients between  $\pm .30$  to  $\pm .59$  and  $\pm .60$  to  $\pm .99$  should be interpreted as





moderate and strong relationships, respectively. In addition, a correlation coefficient of  $\pm 1.00$  should be interpreted as a perfect relationship between two or more variables. Multiple regression analyses were used to test null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A null hypothesis was rejected if the p-value is less than or equal to 0.05. However, when the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

## Results

Table 1

### Point – Biserial Correlation showing the Relationship between Depression Severity level and Students' Contextual Stressors (n=390)

| s/n | Variables                 | 1.   | 2.   | 3.   | 4.   | 5.   | 6.   |
|-----|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1.  | Depression severity level | 1.00 |      |      |      |      |      |
| 2.  | Social/environment        | .324 | 1.00 |      |      |      |      |
| 3.  | Academic achievement      | .172 | .324 | 1.00 |      |      |      |
| 4.  | Curriculum/Expectations   | .250 | .423 | .521 | 1.00 |      |      |
| 5.  | Time/Balance              | .257 | .349 | .349 | .510 | 1.00 |      |
| 6.  | Financial Stress          | .331 | .350 | .301 | .412 | .000 | 1.00 |

Results in Table 1 show that there is moderate positive relationship between depression severity and social/environment ( $r_{bp} = .32$ ) and financial stress ( $r_{bp} = .33$ ). This implies that students' social interactions and the school environment, both structure and functions, is related to their depression severity level. Also, the results showed that depression severity has a weak positive relationship with students perceived academic achievement ( $r_{bp} = .17$ ); curriculum/expectations ( $r_{bp} = .25$ ), and time/balance challenge (.25). This translates to weak relationship between depression severity level and students' academic achievement, curriculum/expectations, and time/balance respectively.

Table 2

### Point Biserial Correlation Showing the Relationship Between Level of Depression Severity and Student's Barriers to Help-Seeking Behaviours (n=390)

| s/n | Variables                 | 1.   | 2.   | 3.   | 4.   |
|-----|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| 1.  | Depression severity level | 1.00 |      |      |      |
| 2.  | Fear of therapy/treatment | .370 | 1.00 |      |      |
| 3.  | Fear of self-discovery    | .395 | .323 | 1.00 |      |
| 4.  | Fear of stigma            | .373 | .466 | .423 | 1.00 |

Results in Table 2 show that there is a moderate positive relationship between depression severity and students' fear of therapy/treatment ( $r_{bp} = .37$ ); fear of self-discovery



(rbp = .39); and fear of stigma (rbp = .37) respectively. The implication here is that students' fear of treatment, fear of self-discovery, and fear of stigma influence their depression level.

Table 3

**Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Contextual Factors as Predictors of Depression Severity Level among Tertiary Institution Students in FCT, Abuja (n = 390)**

| Model                                | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | adj.R <sup>2</sup> | F       | 95% CI for B |       |        |        |       |
|--------------------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------------|---------|--------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
|                                      |       |                |                    |         | $\beta$      | t     | p      | LB     | UB    |
| (Constant)                           | 0.166 | 0.030          | 0.155              | 15.4236 | -            | 4.994 | 0.000  | 1.884  | 4.331 |
| Social/<br>Environment               |       |                |                    |         | 0.205        | 3.810 | 0.000* | 0.496  | 1.555 |
| Perceived<br>Academic<br>Achievement |       |                |                    |         | -0.005       | 0.099 | 0.921  | -0.551 | 0.498 |
| Curriculum/<br>Expectation           |       |                |                    |         | 0.070        | 1.235 | 0.218  | -0.221 | 0.966 |
| Financial Stress                     |       |                |                    |         | 0.216        | 4.024 | 0.000* | 0.553  | 1.610 |

**\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$**

**Note:**  $\beta$  = Standard regression coefficients; F = ratio; R<sup>2</sup> = R square'  $\Delta R^2$  R<sup>2</sup>variance;  $\Delta F$  = F-ratio change/variance; C.I= confidence interval; t – t-test value, LB = Lower Boundary for  $\beta$ ,  $\mu B$  = Upper Boundary for B

Table 3 shows that social/physical environmental challenges with higher beta values (beta = 0.205, p = .000 < .05) and financial stress (beta = .216, p = .000 < .05) were statistically significant predictors of depression severity. Academic achievement, curricular expectations, and time/balance challenges were not statistically significant. Therefore, they did not contribute to the model.

Table 4



**Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Barriers to Help-Seeking Behaviours as Predictors of Depression Severity Level among Tertiary Institution Students in FCT, Abuja (n = 390)**

| Model                         | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | F      | β     | t      | 95% CI for B |       |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------------|-------|-------|
|                               |       |                |                     |        |       |        | p            | LB    | UB    |
| (Constant)                    | 0.241 | 0.058          | 0.235               | 40.864 | -     | 17.182 | 0.000        | 4.806 | 6.049 |
| Fear of Therapy/<br>Treatment |       |                |                     |        | 0.209 | 4.123  | 0.000*       | 0.840 | 2.372 |
| Fear of Self-<br>Discovery    |       |                |                     |        | 0.257 | 5.181  | 0.000*       | 1.037 | 2.305 |
| Fear of Stigma                |       |                |                     |        | 0.167 | 3.150  | 0.002*       | 0.386 | 1.668 |

**\*Significant at p ≤ 0.05**

Table 4 shows that fear of self-discovery (beta = 0.257, p = .000 < .05), fear of stigma (beta = .167, p = .002 < .05), and fear of therapy/treatment (beta = 0.209, p = .000 < .05) are statistically significant predictors of depression severity among tertiary institution students in FCT, Abuja.

**Discussion of Findings**

Findings in Table 1 showed a moderate positive relationship between depression severity and students’ social/environment and financial stress. This means that the social interactions among students and teachers and their interactions with the physical environment of tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja influenced the depression severity level reported in this study. This result was expected due to the unstable and psychologically fragile tertiary institution environments in FCT, Abuja. Linden and Jurdi-Have (2017) in their study among students in Canada reported that social/environmental stress was the second-most influential predictor of the contextual stressors variables for the depression model. It was expected that the highly stressful social and physical environment in FCT, Abuja such as peer pressure to engage in drug abuse, illicit sex, examination malpractice, and financial difficulties would influence depression severity among students.

Table 2 showed a positive moderate relationship between depression severity and students’ fear of therapy/treatment, fear of self-discovery, and fear of stigma respectively. This did not come as a surprise. This is worrisome because many cases of depression remain undiagnosed, yet reports showed that only about half the people with depression seek professional health care services (McLaren et al., 2023). Goetz et al (2023) averred that help-seeking behaviours were influenced by a preference for informal supports, significant structural barriers, stigma, cultural factors, and awareness of services. The implication is that tertiary institution administrators in FCT, Abuja should identify and address these barriers to help-seeking among students. A new framework incorporating help-seeking and service-use determinants specific to undergraduate students in tertiary institutions is needed. Clinicians and health workers have obligations to meet the needs of undergraduate students and reduce





barriers to care. On a larger scale, policy makers have a responsibility to address the systemic barriers that inordinately affect access to proper mental health support for undergraduate students.

The most influential of the three predictors for students of FCT, Abuja was fear of self-discovery indicating that the greater the fear of self-discovery, the higher the depression severity score. Students feared being discovered that something was indeed wrong with their mental health and having to change their current methods of coping such as self-medication. Since negation is a symptom of depression, it is not surprising that the students feared discovering more about their mental health status which constituted a significant barrier to treatment, as it is also a significant predictor of depression severity level. This implies that tertiary institution administrators should target students who may be reluctant to seek traditional mental health care but who may be willing to receive an anonymous assessment and counselling through the Internet. Online screening and information about campus resources can be provided for these students in all tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja.

Table 2 also showed a positive moderate relationship between the fear of therapy/treatment the fear of self-discovery, and the fear of stigma respectively. Furthermore, there was a positive moderate relationship between fear of self-discovery and fear of stigma. All three predictors were significant predictors of students' depression severity in FCT, Abuja which was expected. In their study among students in Canada, Linden and Jurdi-Hage (2017) found that fear of therapy was a significant predictor of students' depression severity. Table 4 further showed that fear of self-discovery and fear of therapy/treatment were statistically significant. Furthermore, the fear of stigma by students in this model showed a lower beta value or a weak positive statistical significance implying that anti-stigma campaigns might be making a positive impact among tertiary institution students in FCT, Abuja. Depression severity symptoms did not impact help-seeking attitudes among students, which suggests that mental health literacy promotion will improve the recognized value of mental health care when needed.

Table 3 further showed that students' social and environmental challenges and financial stress were positively and significantly correlated with students' level of depression severity. This indicated that students' interpersonal and financial challenges tended to produce higher depression severity scores. This was expected due to students' challenges of meeting new friends, adjusting to the campus environment in a challenging cosmopolitan centre like FCT, Abuja, and financial pressure/difficulties due to increasing inflation and the high cost of schooling. The life quality and mental state of people globally have changed a lot with economic development (Gao et al., 2020). Also, there is enrollment expansion in tertiary institutions globally (Ye et al., 2018). These changes not only reflect a dramatic change in the social environment, but also may have an impact on the psychological characteristics of undergraduate students. The management of tertiary institutions in FCT, Abuja can tackle the financial difficulties of their students by increasing and/or providing funding dedicated to services that promote and support their mental health and well-being. Tertiary institutions can save money by providing mental health and emotional health support for their students.

## Conclusion

The findings have shown that there was a weak negative relationship between depression severity and students' living arrangements. There was a moderate positive relationship between depression severity and students' social/environment and financial stress respectively. There was a moderate positive relationship between depression severity and students' fear of therapy/treatment, fear of self-discovery, and fear of stigma



respectively. There was also a moderate positive relationship between fear of therapy/treatment fear of self-discovery, and fear of stigma respectively.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Psychologists, public health educators, and mental health educators in FCT, Abuja, should promote social networks by facilitating social connection such as routine contact with students, faculty and staff to help identify students in distress.
2. Public health educators, health educators, mental health educators, and tertiary institution administrators in FCT, Abuja should embark on stigma-reduction campaigns to create awareness around campuses and help remove stereotypes associated with depression.
3. Public health educators, health educators, mental health educators, and psychologists should build trust and empathize with their students including allowing them to choose working groups depending on the course content to lessen their distress.

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