

Institutional Support on Mental Health Issues: A Case of Rift Valley National Polytechnic

Paul K. Komen¹ & Jackline A. Ong'injo²

¹Rift Valley National Polytechnic, Kenya (komenpaulo@gmail.com)

²Kabarak University, Kenya (jackieonginjo@gmail.com)

*Corresponding author: komenpaulo@gmail.com

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Abstract

The growing severity of mental health challenges among students is a critical issue for learning institutions. However, there is limited knowledge about the steps institutions are taking to support students' mental well-being. This study investigates the extent of institutional support for students' mental health, with a focus on management and trainers' involvement at Rift Valley National Polytechnic, Kenya. The objective was to assess how management and trainers support mental health services in the institution. A descriptive survey design was adopted, followed by data collection from 83 students through simple random sampling. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in tables and percentages. The study found that management and trainers play a significant role in supporting student mental health. Key challenges identified included poor timetabling, financial constraints, and inadequate guidance and counseling services. Additionally, cases of school dropouts and suicide were reported, largely linked to financial hardships. Government capitation issues and strained relationships were also highlighted as contributing factors to psychological distress. The findings provide valuable insights for administrators, trainers, and policymakers on improving student mental health support systems. The study concludes that prioritizing mental health programs is essential for strengthening primary healthcare within learning institutions.

Keywords: Institutional Support, Management Support, Trainers' Support, Students' Mental Health

Introduction

Mental health issues like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and insomnia are prevalent among college students, negatively impacting academic performance and well-being. Institutional support is critical in providing counseling services, wellness programs, and reducing stigma around mental health. Without proper support, students may struggle with academic challenges, substance abuse, and emotional distress. Colleges must foster a supportive environment that promotes mental health awareness and encourages help-seeking behavior. Resources like counseling, stress management programs, and accommodations for mental health conditions can significantly improve students' academic success and overall well-being (Oswalt et al., 2020).

Mental health challenges significantly affect institutions, especially within educational and workplace settings. The World Health Organization (2022) estimates that up to half of the global population will experience debilitating mental health issues, which can hinder both academic performance and workplace productivity. As educational institutions confront rising mental health concerns among students, workplaces must also address employee well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, prompting institutions to reevaluate their support systems. With shifting societal attitudes toward mental health, there is an increasing expectation for institutions to prioritize mental health by fostering supportive environments and providing accessible services that promote emotional well-being.

According to Kalkan et al. (2020), school administrators are professionals who oversee a school's day-to-day operations. They play a crucial role in creating a supportive and effective learning environment for students. They are a bridge between students, faculty, and support services. Herbert et al. (2023) aver that Mental health is essential for overall well-being, enabling individuals to cope with life's challenges, achieve their potential, and contribute to their communities. Mental wellness is a broader concept that actively promotes optimal mental health through healthy behaviors and mind-body balance. While young adults value mental health and wellness, many struggle to access necessary care due to various barriers, including limited availability, stigma, high costs, insufficient funding, and transportation challenges within the mental healthcare system in the United States (Oliver, 2023).

Institutions can address the mental health challenges linked to increased personal computing technology use by implementing digital literacy programs that educate students on healthy engagement with technology. Such programs can reduce the negative effects of passive social media consumption. Additionally, institutions can integrate mental health resources into digital platforms, providing access to counseling services, wellness apps, and virtual support groups. This approach allows students to utilize technology constructively, fostering a balance between its benefits and potential harms to enhance overall student well-being (Lattie et al., 2019).

According to Paton et al. (2022), schools play a significant role in children's lives and are, therefore, key settings for preventing and addressing mental health issues. Primary prevention aims to stop mental health problems from developing, while early intervention focuses on helping children who show early signs or experience initial episodes of mental illness. Given the substantial amount of time children spend in schools, educational systems have become a central focus for policymakers aiming to prevent and address mental health issues (Malinoski, 2024). Primary prevention involves implementing strategies to stop mental health

problems from occurring, while early intervention focuses on helping children who exhibit early warning signs or experience initial mental health challenges.

Teachers play a critical role in identifying and addressing students' mental health issues, as they spend a significant amount of time with students and are often the first to observe behavioral changes. However, many teachers, especially in primary and secondary schools, lack proper training to effectively handle mental health challenges. This highlights the need for institutional support through comprehensive training programs focused on mental health awareness, early detection, and first aid. Additionally, schools should implement systems that allow teachers to refer students to professionals when necessary. With the right support, teachers can better manage mental health concerns while balancing their academic responsibilities (Mbwayo et al., 2020).

In the United Kingdom, educational professionals are expected to both recognize early signs of mental health issues in students and provide initial support (Charlton, 2020). In contrast, According to Hoare et al. (2020), Australia's government-funded Be You program focuses solely on equipping educators to identify potential mental health problems without requiring them to deliver direct intervention services. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Be You program in achieving its goals is still under investigation (Blue, 2018).

Educators today face increasing demands to address various health and social issues, in addition to core academic subjects. Mental health is particularly challenging as it significantly impacts students' academic performance (Suldo et al., 2014). Educators encounter numerous obstacles when trying to support students' mental health needs. These challenges include time constraints, inadequate training, overburdened mental health services, and concerns about confidentiality (Paton et al., 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The increasing severity of mental health issues among students in learning institutions, particularly in TVET institutions, poses a significant challenge, yet there is limited understanding of the specific difficulties faced by school administrators in providing adequate support. Institutions are expected to promote mental well-being, but barriers like inadequate counseling, financial constraints, and time pressures continue to hinder effective support. Evidence of this problem includes rising cases of student dropouts, suicides, and psychological distress, which affect academic performance and overall well-being. If unaddressed, these challenges could lead to worsening mental health outcomes. This study seeks to examine the role of management and trainers in addressing these issues, aiming to improve mental health support and ultimately benefit students, school administrators, and policymakers by offering solutions to reduce psychological distress and enhance student success

Objectives

- To determine the management support on mental health among students in TVET institutions in Kenya.
- To assess the trainers' support on mental health among students in TVET institutions in Kenya.

Research Questions

- What is the level of management support for mental health initiatives among students in TVET institutions in Kenya?
- How do trainers support mental health among students in TVET institutions in Kenya?

Literature Review

Mental health challenges significantly affect institutions, especially within educational and workplace settings. The World Health Organization (2022) estimates that up to half of the global population will experience debilitating mental health issues, which can hinder both academic performance and workplace productivity. As educational institutions confront rising mental health concerns among students, workplaces must also address employee well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, prompting institutions to reevaluate their support systems. With shifting societal attitudes toward mental health, there is an increasing expectation for institutions to prioritize mental health by fostering supportive environments and providing accessible services that promote emotional well-being.

However, many educational institutions lack comprehensive strategies for effectively supporting student mental health. Counseling services often remain underutilized due to persistent stigma, and few institutions have explored the potential of technology in addressing mental health concerns. As students face escalating academic pressures, the need for proactive mental health interventions becomes critical. Innovative support systems and leadership approaches must be adopted to prioritize student well-being and enhance academic performance (Bartram et al., 2024)

The mental health of academic staff parallels that of students, as both groups encounter similar academic pressures and stressors. To effectively support mental health, institutions should implement management-led interventions that include mental health assessments and effective communication (Ohadomere & Ogamba, 2021). Moreover, employee mental health has gained prominence, particularly in the post-pandemic context, where heightened symptoms of anxiety and depression are prevalent. Poor mental health incurs significant economic costs, estimated at \$1.7 trillion annually, while stigma remains a barrier to seeking help (Wu et al., 2021).

The stigma surrounding mental health challenges often leads to concealment, negatively impacting well-being and performance. Research highlights factors that promote openness about mental health issues, such as supportive check-ins and management advocacy. These factors emphasize the critical role of institutional support in creating a safe work environment (King et al., 2021). Despite various human resource management interventions, stigma persists, prompting the introduction of lived experience roles as innovative practices to foster cultural shifts that benefit all employees (Wang et al., 2023).

Effective management of guidance and counseling in educational settings is vital for enhancing students' mental health. Qualitative studies demonstrate that guidance and counseling teachers proactively address students' needs through tailored support strategies, including individual and group counseling techniques (Zakaria et al., 2024). Teacher support significantly influences students' mental health, encompassing clarity of expectations, warmth, and autonomy support, which can mitigate risks of anxiety and depression (Wang, 2023).

Despite the importance of mental health initiatives, teachers' perspectives remain underexplored. Many educators feel unprepared to implement these programs effectively due to limited training and resources. A systematic review indicated that addressing these gaps is essential for enhancing mental health support within educational settings (Goodwin et al., 2021). Integrating mental health services into schools is critical; multitiered systems of support can significantly enhance outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities (Marsh & Mathur, 2020).

In understanding the influence of social support on mental health, research indicates that perceived support from parents, classmates, and teachers significantly enhances school well-being among adolescents (Soylu et al., 2022). Yet barriers to accessing mental health support persist, particularly among university students, where self-stigma and other factors hinder help-seeking behaviors (Cage et al., 2020).

The rise of mental health issues among college students, particularly among students of color, emphasizes the need for culturally competent mental health services and systemic changes to reduce inequalities (Lipson et al., 2022). Trainers in mental health literacy interventions have been shown to enhance help-seeking behaviors through relatable approaches that foster trust (Mohammadi et al., 2020).

Educators play a crucial role in helping students manage stress and anxiety, especially in demanding fields such as STEM. Evidence-based strategies, including fostering inclusive environments and empowering students with skills, are essential to enhance performance and well-being (Hsu & Goldsmith, 2021). However, many instructors report feeling unprepared to address mental health challenges, underscoring the need for clear guidelines and best practices (Coleman, 2022).

As schools evolve to address mental health needs, collaborative efforts between educational and mental health sectors are vital. This review highlights the importance of integrating mental health services in schools to enhance academic performance and psychosocial well-being, particularly through multitiered systems of support that improve access for underserved youth (Hoover & Bostic, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers demonstrates the necessity of tailored mental health interventions; many institutions have implemented psychological support systems to promote resilience and well-being during crises (Buselli et al., 2021).

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting detailed information on students' perceptions and institutional support on mental health issues (Siedlecki, 2020). The primary data collection instrument was a close-ended questionnaire designed to capture quantifiable responses from the participants. The target population for the study was composed of 100 student leaders from Rift Valley National Polytechnic, spanning students in year one through year three. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table, a sample size of 83 respondents was determined, ensuring that the sample was representative of the larger population. The sampling strategy focused on selecting students' year one to year 3 to provide diverse perspectives across different stages of their academic journey. After distributing the questionnaires, all 83 respondents returned their completed forms, achieving a 100% response rate. Data were successfully analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented in tables and figures.

Results and Findings

Demographic Information

The demographic data collected from 83 respondents provides insights into their gender, age, year of study, and level of study. This demographic data collected from 83 respondents offers valuable insights into their gender, age, year of study, and level of study.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Respondents

	N		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	83	Male	52	62.7
		Female	31	37.3
Age (Years)	83	18-21	37	44.6
		22-25	43	51.8
		26-29	3	3.6
Year of Study	83	1ST Year	19	22.9
		2ND Year	36	43.4
		3RD Year	28	33.7
Level of Study	83	Artisan Certificate	1	1.2
		Craft Certificate	12	14.5
		Diploma Certificate	70	84.3

Table 1 shows the total respondents, 52 (62.7%) were male, and 31 (37.3%) were female, indicating a higher representation of males. Nearly two-thirds of the participants were male, while females made up just over one-third. In terms of age, the majority of respondents (43, or 51.8%) were between 22 and 25 years old, followed closely by those aged 18 to 21 years (37, or 44.6%). Only a small percentage (3.6%) were in the 26 to 29 age group. This suggests that most of the participants fall within the typical age range for post-secondary education, with a significant presence of students in their early twenties.

Regarding the year of study, 2nd-year students comprised the largest group, with 36 respondents (43.4%), followed by 3rd-year students at 28 (33.7%), and 1st-year students at 19 (22.9%). This distribution indicates that the study covers students at different stages of their academic journey, with a slight predominance of more advanced students. The overwhelming majority of respondents (70, or 84.3%) were pursuing a Diploma Certificate. A smaller proportion (12, or 14.5%) were studying for a Craft Certificate, while only 1 respondent (1.2%) was at the Artisan Certificate level. This highlights a predominant focus on diploma-level qualifications within the student population, with fewer students pursuing Craft or Artisan Certificates.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents have several implications for the topic of institutional support for mental health issues. First, the gender imbalance, with a higher representation of males (62.7%), suggests that institutional support strategies may need to be tailored to address the specific mental health challenges faced by male students, who might be less likely to seek help or face different stressors compared to female students. At the same time, efforts should not overlook the female minority, ensuring that mental health services are equally accessible and responsive to their needs.

The age distribution, with most respondents between 18 and 25 years old, indicates that the majority of students are within the typical post-secondary age range, a period often associated with heightened mental health concerns due to academic pressures, life transitions, and financial burdens. Institutional support should therefore focus on providing services that cater to this age group's developmental and psychological needs, such as counseling, stress management, and peer support programs.

In terms of academic level, the fact that the majority of respondents are in their 2nd and 3rd years of study (77.1%) indicates that mental health support strategies should consider the cumulative academic pressures that tend to increase as students' progress in their studies. This suggests a need for ongoing support throughout their academic journey, not just at the beginning or end.

The predominance of students pursuing Diploma Certificates (84.3%) suggests that mental health support services should primarily target this group, as they represent the largest population. However, the institution should not neglect Craft and Artisan Certificate students, ensuring that support is inclusive and addresses the specific needs of students at all qualification levels.

Data on Students' Wellbeing

This section provides information on factors such as academic demands, financial support, part-time work, and health conditions that impact their mental health and academic experience.

Table 2: Data on Students' Wellbeing

Description	N		Frequency	Percentage
Have you deferred your course at any one point?	83	Yes	15	18.1
		No	68	81.9
What is your program of study?	83	Engineering	31	37.3
		Applied Sciences	1	1.2
		Business	29	34.9
		ICT	9	10.8
		Fashion and Design	9	10.8
		Agriculture	4	4.8
		Hospitality		
Are you a resident or non-resident student?	83	Resident	23	27.7
		Non-Resident	60	72.3
Have you ever used the counseling services provided by the institution?	83	Yes	34	41
		No	49	59
Do you receive any financial support for your education?	83	Yes	51	61.4
		No	32	38.6
Are you doing any part-time job to support your studies?	83	Yes	29	34.9

		No	54	65.1
Do you live with any chronic mental or physical health conditions?	83	Yes	10	12
		No	73	88
How would you describe your current mental health status?	83	Excellent	24	28.9
		Good	34	41
		Fair	21	25.3
		Poor	4	4.8

According to Table 2, A noteworthy portion of the respondents (18.1%) indicated that they had deferred their courses at some point, suggesting that while deferral is not common, those who have taken this step may have faced challenges that could impact their mental health or academic progression. The largest group of students (37.3%) were enrolled in engineering, followed closely by business students (34.9%). Other fields, such as ICT and fashion and design (10.8% each), agriculture (4.8%), and applied sciences (1.2%), had fewer participants. The varied academic demands of these programs, particularly engineering and business, may contribute to differing levels of stress and mental health challenges among students. A majority of the students (72.3%) were non-residents, with only (27.7%) living on campus. Non-resident students, who typically face challenges such as commuting and managing external accommodations, might experience additional stress that can negatively affect their mental health. In contrast, resident students might benefit from closer access to campus facilities and services. Less than half (41%) of students reported having used the institution's counseling services, while (59%) had not. This indicates that a substantial portion of the student body recognizes the need for mental health support, though a majority have not accessed these services, either due to lack of awareness or perceived necessity.

Financial support plays a significant role in students' experiences, with (61.4%) receiving financial assistance and (38.6%) not receiving any. Those without financial support may be under considerable financial strain, which can lead to heightened stress and negatively affect their mental health and academic performance. A significant portion of the students (34.9%) are working part-time to support their studies. Balancing work and academic responsibilities can contribute to stress and potentially limit the time available for rest and leisure, which are crucial for maintaining mental well-being.

In terms of health, (12%) of the respondents reported living with chronic mental or physical health conditions. These students may face additional challenges in managing their health alongside academic responsibilities, potentially leading to higher stress levels and a greater need for support services. When asked about their mental health, (28.9%) of students described their mental health as excellent, while (41%) rated it as good. However, (25.3%) reported their mental health as fair, and 4.8% described it as poor. This means that nearly a third of the students are experiencing mental health concerns, indicating a significant area of focus for the institution.

These findings suggest that while many students are coping well, there is a sizable group that is struggling with mental health concerns, underlining the need for accessible and effective support systems, such as counseling services and financial aid programs, to enhance student well-being and academic success.

Student's Response to Trainer's Support

Information on trainers' support was gathered from different items in the questionnaires.

Table 3: Data on Students' Response on Trainers' Support

Items	N	SA	A	N	D	SD
Trainers are easy to talk to about mental health issues.	83	24.1	33.7	25.3	12	4.8
Trainers help students manage stress from college work.	83	24.1	32.5	21.7	12	9.6
Trainers know where to direct students for mental health support.	83	27.7	38.6	18.1	13.3	2.4
Trainers care about students' mental well-being.	83	26.5	41	16.9	12	3.6
Trainers help students deal with relationship problems.	83	21.7	32.5	24.1	14.5	7.2
Trainers notice when students are struggling mentally.	83	24.1	27.7	19.3	20.5	8.4
Trainers suggest counseling services when needed.	83	28.9	33.7	18.1	15.7	3.6
Trainers create a stress-free classroom environment.	83	31.3	28.9	21.7	12	6
Trainers encourage students to seek help when needed.	83	31.3	48.2	14.5	6	0
Trainers take part in mental health activities at college.	83	27.7	32.5	19.3	15.7	4.8

Table 3 shows that 16.8% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that trainers were approachable regarding mental health issues. This suggests that a notable portion of students may encounter barriers when attempting to engage in discussions about their mental health with trainers. The implication here is that students who perceive their trainers as unapproachable may refrain from seeking help, potentially leading to unaddressed mental health concerns. Meanwhile, 25.3% of students responded neutrally, indicating uncertainty or lack of experience in such interactions, further suggesting that the approachability of trainers may not be consistently communicated. However, the majority (57.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that trainers are easy to talk to, which reflects positively on the overall perception of trainer-student communication regarding mental health. These findings imply that institutional interventions are required to enhance trainers' approachability and communication skills to ensure all students feel comfortable seeking mental health support.

Among the respondents, 21.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that trainers assist them in managing stress related to college work. This points to a gap in support that could leave students vulnerable to the negative effects of academic stress, which in turn could affect their mental health and academic performance. Another 21.7% of students provided neutral responses, potentially indicating that while some students might not have experienced active support, they may also not have faced stressors requiring such intervention. On the other hand, 56.6% of students agreed or strongly agreed that trainers help manage stress, which demonstrates that for many, trainers are an important source of support in navigating academic pressures. These findings suggest a need for institutions to provide additional resources and training for trainers to help them more effectively assist students in managing stress.

A total of 15.7% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that trainers are knowledgeable about where to direct them for mental health support, indicating that some trainers may lack sufficient awareness of available mental health resources. This can delay or prevent students from accessing the necessary support in a timely manner. The neutral responses (18.1%) suggest that some students may not have had enough interaction with trainers on this matter, or that trainers' guidance is not consistently visible. However, 66.3%

of students agreed or strongly agreed that trainers know where to direct them, indicating that the majority of trainers are adequately informed about mental health services. This points to a general competency in directing students to the appropriate resources(White & LaBelle, 2019), though institutions may need to ensure that all trainers are equally equipped with the knowledge to guide students effectively.

The disagreement rate of 15.6% reflects a minority of students who feel that their trainers do not show adequate concern for their mental well-being, which could result in disengagement or reluctance to seek help. Neutral responses (16.9%) indicate that some students may not have experienced sufficient interactions to form an opinion on this issue. However, a significant majority (67.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that their trainers care about their mental well-being, suggesting that trainers generally foster a supportive environment. The implication of these findings is that institutions should focus on ensuring that all trainers consistently demonstrate empathy and concern for students' mental health(White & LaBelle, 2019), as this can enhance student engagement and well-being.

Approximately 21.7% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that trainers help them deal with relationship problems, which suggests that trainers may not be seen as a resource for non-academic personal issues that can impact mental health. Neutral responses accounted for 24.1%, indicating that many students may not have sought help from trainers in this area, or that trainer involvement in personal matters is unclear. Meanwhile, 54.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed that trainers provide support in dealing with relationship problems, suggesting that a significant proportion of trainers are perceived as offering broader emotional support. These findings indicate that institutions should provide more training and resources to help trainers address personal and non-academic challenges that affect students' mental well-being.

The fact that 28.9% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that trainers notice when they are struggling mentally points to a critical issue in the early identification of mental health concerns. Trainers who are unable to detect signs of distress may miss opportunities for early intervention, potentially allowing mental health issues to worsen. Neutral responses (19.3%) suggest that some students may not have experienced trainers recognizing mental health struggles, reflecting inconsistency in trainers' attentiveness. However, 51.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that trainers notice when they are struggling, which indicates that some trainers are attuned to their students' mental health needs. The findings highlight the need for institutions to invest in mental health training for trainers, equipping them with skills (Anderson et al., 2019)to recognize signs of mental distress in students.

With 19.3% of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that trainers suggest counseling services, when necessary, there is an indication that some trainers are not proactive in referring students to professional support. This could lead to delayed access to necessary counseling services, potentially exacerbating students' mental health issues. Neutral responses (18.1%) suggest that some students may not have been in a situation where counseling referrals were necessary, or they may not recall such suggestions being made. The majority (62.6%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that their trainers recommend counseling services, demonstrating that most trainers are mindful of the need to connect students with professional mental health support. Institutions should ensure that all trainers are encouraged to take an active role in referring students(Harris et al., 2022) to appropriate mental health services when needed.

The disagreement rate of 18% indicates that some students feel the classroom environment adds to their stress rather than alleviating it, which could negatively impact both their mental health and academic outcomes. Neutral responses (21.7%) suggest that the classroom atmosphere may vary, with some students experiencing mixed feelings about how conducive the environment is to learning. However, the majority (60.2%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that trainers create a stress-free classroom environment, reflecting positively on the majority of trainers' ability to foster a supportive learning atmosphere. Institutions should focus on ensuring that all trainers are equipped (Anderson et al., 2019) to create an environment that minimizes stress and promotes well-being.

Only 6% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that their trainers encourage them to seek help, indicating that this is a relatively rare concern. However, the neutral responses (14.5%) suggest that some students may not have received clear guidance from trainers on seeking help when needed. The overwhelming majority (79.5%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that trainers encourage them to seek help, which is a critical factor in promoting a help-seeking culture within the institution. The findings suggest that while most trainers effectively promote help-seeking behaviors, further efforts should be made to ensure all trainers consistently encourage students to reach out for support when necessary (Anderson et al., 2019).

A total of 20.5% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that their trainers participate in mental health activities at the college, indicating that a portion of the student body perceives trainers as being disengaged from institutional mental health initiatives. Neutral responses (19.3%) suggest that some students are unsure about their trainers' involvement, perhaps due to a lack of communication or visibility of trainers' participation in such activities. Nonetheless, 60.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their trainers are involved in mental health activities, which supports the institution's overall commitment to promoting mental health awareness. These findings imply that institutions should encourage more visible and active participation from trainers (Shelemy et al., 2019) in mental health activities to foster a stronger culture of mental health support on campus.

Students' Responses to Management Support

Table 4: Data on students' response to Management Support

ITEMS	N	SA	A	N	D	SD
Management provides enough counseling services for students.	83	28.9	30.1	26.5	12	2.4
Management listens to students' mental health concerns.	83	26.5	30.1	26.5	10.8	6
Management informs students about mental health programs.	83	30.1	31.3	16.9	15.7	6
Management makes sure class schedules are not too stressful.	83	24.1	30.1	28.9	10.8	6
Management helps students with financial problems that cause stress.	83	18.1	34.9	19.3	15.7	12
Management promotes mental health awareness in college.	83	26.5	36.1	21.7	7.2	8.4
Management creates a safe and supportive environment for students.	83	31.3	39.8	20.5	7.2	1.2
Management works with outside organizations to help students with mental health.	83	19.3	39.8	22.9	9.6	8.4
Management offers financial guidance to students in need.	83	26.5	37.3	15.7	14.5	6
Management makes mental health a priority in college planning.	83	24.1	28.9	22.9	10.8	13.3

According to table 4 (12%) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management provides sufficient counseling services, indicating a perception among some students that the available mental health resources may be inadequate. This dissatisfaction can hinder students from seeking help, leading to unresolved mental health issues. Conversely, 26.5% of respondents were neutral, suggesting they may not have utilized counseling services or may lack a strong opinion on this matter. However, 61.4% of students agreed or strongly agreed that adequate counseling services are provided, reflecting a generally positive view of management's commitment to student mental health. This discrepancy highlights the need for improved communication regarding the availability of counseling services (Feijt et al., 2020) to ensure all students are aware of and can access these resources effectively.

Regarding management's responsiveness to students' mental health concerns, 16.8% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management listens adequately to their issues. This suggests a disconnect between student needs and management's engagement, which could result in students feeling undervalued or ignored. Neutral responses (26.5%) indicate that some students may not have experienced direct communication with management regarding their concerns. However, a majority (56.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that management actively listens to their mental health concerns, indicating that many students feel heard and supported. The implication here is that enhancing channels for communication between students and management could foster a more responsive approach to addressing mental health needs.

In terms of informing students about mental health programs, (21.7%) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management adequately communicates the available resources. This communication gap could leave students unaware of the support options available to them, potentially exacerbating mental health challenges. The neutral responses (16.9%) suggest uncertainty or lack of awareness among some students. On the positive side, (61.4%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that management effectively communicates information about mental health programs, suggesting that outreach efforts successfully reach a majority. To improve overall awareness, management should focus on enhancing communication strategies (Latha et al., 2020) to ensure all students are informed about mental health resources.

When assessing the management of class schedules, (16.8%) of students expressed disagreement that management ensures schedules are not overly stressful. This indicates a concern about academic pressures that may not be adequately addressed, which could affect students' mental health and academic performance. The neutral responses (28.9%) suggest that some students may have mixed feelings about the scheduling or have not experienced significant stress related to their class timetables. In contrast, (54.2%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that management actively takes steps to ensure manageable class schedules, reflecting a commitment to reducing student stress. To strengthen this area, management should continue seeking feedback from students (Hughes & Byrom, 2019) about scheduling practices and making adjustments as needed.

In relation to financial support, (27.7%) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management adequately assists with financial problems that contribute to stress. This points to a significant need for enhanced support in addressing financial challenges that impact students' mental well-being. Neutral responses (19.3%) indicate uncertainty or lack of experience with financial support services. However, (63.8%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that management offers financial guidance to those in need, indicating a commitment to alleviating financial burdens. The implication here is that management should

further enhance the visibility and accessibility of financial support resources (Taylor & Cantwell, 2019) to ensure all students can benefit from available assistance.

With regard to promoting mental health awareness, 15.6% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management is active in this area, suggesting some students feel that these efforts are insufficient. Neutral responses (21.7%) indicate that some students may not have sufficient knowledge or engagement with mental health awareness initiatives. Conversely, (62.6%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that management actively promotes mental health awareness, indicating a positive institutional effort to foster a culture of understanding around mental health issues. To improve overall awareness, management should consider diversifying their initiatives to reach all students effectively (Pollock & Briscoe, 2020).

In terms of creating a safe and supportive environment, only (8.4%) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management fosters such an atmosphere. This suggests that the majority of students feel secure and supported within the institution. Neutral responses (20.5%) may reflect ambivalence or insufficient engagement with the campus environment. A significant majority (71.1%) felt that management successfully creates a safe and supportive environment, indicating strong institutional backing for student well-being. This finding suggests that management should continue to prioritize strategies that enhance safety and support within the institution (Kopelovich et al., 2021).

The assessment of management's collaboration with outside organizations yielded mixed responses, with (18%) of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that management works with external partners to provide mental health support. This suggests a potential area for improvement in visibility and collaboration with external mental health resources. Neutral responses (22.9%) indicate that some students may be unaware of such partnerships. However, (59.1%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that management collaborates with external organizations, highlighting a proactive approach to enhancing mental health resources. To capitalize on this strength, management should increase visibility and communication (Latha et al., 2020) regarding these partnerships to ensure students are aware of available support.

Finally, regarding the prioritization of mental health in institutional planning, (24.1%) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that management makes mental health a priority, revealing concerns about how effectively mental health considerations are integrated into college strategies. Neutral responses (22.9%) suggest that some students may not be fully informed about the planning processes. On the positive side, (53%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that management prioritizes mental health in planning, indicating a commitment to addressing these issues within institutional policies. To bridge the gap, management should continue to engage students in discussions about mental health priorities and ensure transparency in planning processes (Wesley, 2019).

Discussions

Trainers' Support

The findings on trainer support for mental health at Rift Valley National Polytechnic highlight a mix of positive and negative experiences among students, providing valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the institutional support system. A significant portion of students reported dissatisfaction with trainers' roles in addressing mental health issues, particularly in areas such as communication, stress management, and recognizing students' mental health struggles. These findings suggest that, while many

students benefit from trainer support, there is a notable gap in communication and awareness. Trainers who are unapproachable or fail to recognize signs of mental distress may inadvertently create barriers for students seeking help. The lack of proactive stress management and emotional support exacerbates these challenges, as students may feel isolated or unable to cope with academic pressures. This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of trainer-student communication and the early identification of mental health struggles in reducing student stress and anxiety (Jorm, 2020).

The deficiency in recommending counseling services is also concerning. With (19.3%) of students reporting that their trainers do not suggest counseling when needed, this signals that trainers are not consistently promoting professional mental health support. This gap undermines the institution's ability to connect students with critical mental health resources, delaying or preventing students from accessing necessary care. It reflects a missed opportunity for early intervention, which could potentially mitigate the progression of mental health issues (Colizzi et al., 2020). Despite these deficiencies, the majority of students reported positive experiences with their trainers, indicating that the institution does have a strong foundation of mental health support. For instance, (67.5%) of students felt their trainers cared about their mental well-being, which is crucial in fostering a supportive academic environment. Trainers' involvement in mental health activities, as reported by (60.2%) of students, also indicates a commitment to promoting mental health awareness within the institution. This is consistent with literature suggesting that trainer involvement in mental health programs can enhance the overall mental well-being of students (Eisenberg et al., 2017).

The study's findings suggest that while students benefit from trainer support, there is still room for improvement, particularly in ensuring that all trainers are approachable, proactive in stress management, and knowledgeable about mental health resources. The gap in support for recognizing mental health struggles and suggesting counseling services could be addressed through targeted training programs for trainers (Frank et al., 2020). This would equip them with the skills to identify early signs of mental health issues and refer students to appropriate services more consistently. Moreover, the institution's commitment to creating a stress-free environment and encouraging help-seeking behavior is commendable, but further efforts could be made to ensure that this culture is universal across all trainers. According to Latha et al. (2020), increasing participation in mental health activities and promoting awareness campaigns could also help bridge the gaps identified in the study. Addressing the areas where trainers fall short will be critical to improving the overall mental health framework and ensuring that all students receive the support they need to thrive academically and emotionally.

Management Support

The findings regarding students' perceptions of management support for mental health issues reveal a complex landscape of strengths and weaknesses. A notable (12%) of students expressed disagreement about the sufficiency of counseling services, indicating a perception that available mental health resources may be inadequate. This dissatisfaction can discourage students from seeking help, potentially leading to unresolved mental health challenges. Conversely, a majority (61.4%) agreed that adequate counseling services are provided, suggesting that management has made significant efforts in this area. However, the presence of neutral responses (26.5%) indicates a need for clearer communication regarding the availability of these services, ensuring that all students are aware of and can effectively access the support they need (Cage et al., 2020).

Students' perceptions of management's responsiveness to mental health concerns highlight another important area for improvement. While (56.6%) of respondents felt that management actively listens to their issues, 16.8% disagreed, suggesting a disconnect between student needs and management engagement. This disconnect could foster feelings of being undervalued or ignored among students. The neutral responses (26.5%) indicate that some students may not have experienced direct communication with management regarding their mental health concerns. To address this gap, enhancing communication channels between students and management (Beames et al., 2022) could foster a more responsive approach to mental health needs, allowing for more effective support and engagement.

The findings also illustrate critical issues related to financial support, awareness promotion, and the prioritization of mental health within institutional planning. A significant (27.7%) of students disagreed regarding the adequacy of financial assistance, pointing to a pressing need for enhanced support in addressing financial burdens that impact mental well-being. Additionally, while (62.6%) of students felt that management promotes mental health awareness effectively, (15.6%) disagreed, suggesting that awareness initiatives may not reach all students. Furthermore, (24.1%) expressed disagreement about management prioritizing mental health in institutional planning, raising concerns about the integration of these considerations in college strategies (McGorry et al., 2022). These findings underscore the importance of strengthening communication, enhancing support services, and fostering a culture of inclusivity (Jensen & Cross, 2021) to ensure that all students feel supported and empowered in addressing their mental health needs.

Recommendation

In review of these research findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The management should invest in expanding and promoting the counseling services available on campus, ensuring that all students are aware of the services and feel comfortable accessing them. Increasing the availability of counselors to meet rising demand is crucial.
- Trainers should foster an open and supportive environment that encourages students to talk about their mental health concerns without fear of judgment. Establishing regular check-ins with students could help trainers build rapport and trust, ensuring early detection of issues.
- The Ministry of Education should mandate the inclusion of mental health education in teacher training curricula. This would prepare future educators to recognize mental health challenges early and provide appropriate guidance.
- The Ministry of Education should also introduce policies that require routine mental health screenings for students, especially during critical periods of academic pressure. This can help in identifying students at risk and ensuring timely interventions.
- Future studies should conduct comparative studies across different technical and vocational institutions to identify variations in mental health support practices and their effectiveness. Such studies could focus on geographical differences or the impact of institutional resources on the success of mental health initiatives.

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