

# An Exploration of UNILAG Students' Perceptions of Church Fellowships in Mental Health Support

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## Abstract

*This study explores the impact of church fellowships on mental health support for students at the University of Lagos (UNILAG), utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and interviews. Grounded in Social Support Theory, the research emphasizes the role of social networks in providing emotional, informational, and practical support. The findings reveal that 87% of respondents find religious activities effective in managing stress and anxiety, while 89.5% believe religious support positively influences mental health. Additionally, 96.5% of respondents value the sense of community offered by church fellowships. Interviews with church leaders indicate that while direct suicide cases are rare, depression, academic pressure, and family issues contribute to suicidal thoughts among students. Although churches provide emotional and financial support, the lack of formal mental health training limits their effectiveness. The study confirms the relevance of Social Support Theory by demonstrating how church fellowships reduce mental stress through fostering strong social connections. However, it also highlights the need for structured mental health training for church leaders and recommends partnerships with mental health professionals to improve intervention strategies. Suggestions for enhancing support systems include expanding community-building activities and support groups. A noted limitation of the research is its relatively small sample size focused on UNILAG students, potentially affecting the generalizability of results. Future research should involve larger, more diverse populations to better understand the role of church fellowships in supporting student mental health across various contexts. The church program significantly improves students' mental health, with both church role and program jointly influencing religious support ( $R^2 = 0.423$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ).*

**Keywords:** church fellowship, mental health support, mental well-being, peer support networks, religious support

## 1. Introduction to the Study

Suicide has been a serious problem throughout history and remains a major concern today. Despite the efforts of governments, schools, and organizations to address the issue, suicide rates among Nigerian teenagers, especially university students, are rising at an alarming rate. Research by Olibamoyo *et al.* (2019) shows that men and women in Nigeria tend to use different methods for suicide, with hanging being more common among men and poisoning more frequent among women.

University students face a variety of pressures that can affect their mental health. These include academic stress, peer pressure, and the constant need to perform well in their studies. As Bilsen (2018) highlights, these factors can lead to feelings of hopelessness, depression, and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts. Despite the support provided by educational institutions, mental health professionals, and community organizations, the issue persists, and suicide rates among Nigerian university students remain high (Muhammad, Abdukareem & Chowdhury, 2017).

Religious institutions, particularly churches, can play a key role in helping to tackle this problem. Churches often provide much-needed support through fellowship groups, which offer spiritual guidance, a sense of community, and counseling services. These fellowship groups are especially important on university campuses, where they create a safe and supportive environment for students.

Students can connect with others, share their struggles, and find comfort in their faith during difficult times (Fasogbon, Akinbo & Oke, 2019a).

Church fellowships are essential in promoting mental well-being among students. These groups give students a place for worship, community involvement, and personal growth. By providing both emotional and spiritual support, church fellowships can play a significant role in preventing suicide. This study seeks to explore how students at the University of Lagos view the role of church fellowships in supporting mental health and preventing suicide. Understanding these perceptions will help improve church-based support systems and contribute to better student well-being overall.

The study explores the significant yet under-researched role of church fellowships in supporting mental health among students at the University of Lagos (UNILAG). Mental health issues are increasingly prevalent among university students, yet the contribution of religious institutions, particularly church fellowships, to mental well-being is not well understood. While many students actively engage in church activities, there is limited knowledge about the effectiveness of these programs in addressing mental health needs. Moreover, the relationship between religious support and mental health outcomes remains inadequately explored, particularly in environments where mental health challenges are often stigmatized and misunderstood. This gap in understanding is concerning, given the potential for church fellowships to offer both spiritual and emotional support to students facing mental health challenges. The study aims to fill these gaps by investigating UNILAG students' perceptions of the role of church fellowships in mental health support, evaluating the effectiveness of church programs in promoting mental well-being, and analyzing the broader impact of religious support on students' mental health. By addressing these issues, the research seeks to provide insights that could enhance the role of religious institutions in fostering a supportive environment for students' mental health at UNILAG and similar contexts.

This study will focus on understanding the perspectives of UNILAG students regarding the role of church fellowships in supporting mental health. It seeks to assess how effective church programs are in promoting mental well-being among these students and to analyze the broader impact of religious support on their mental health. By exploring these aspects, the study aims to uncover the contributions of spiritual and community-based interventions in addressing the mental health challenges faced by students, particularly in preventing issues such as depression and suicide. This paper will answer the following Research Questions:

1. What are UNILAG students' views on the role of church fellowships in mental health?
2. How effective are church programs in promoting mental well-being among UNILAG students?
3. What impact does religious support have on students' mental health at UNILAG?

This gives rise to the following hypotheses:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** *There is no significant relationship between effectiveness of UNILAG Church programs in promoting mental wellbeing and impact of religious support on students' mental health.*

**H<sub>02</sub>:** *There is no joint influence of Church role and Church program on impact of religious support on students' mental health.*

This study benefits several groups, starting with the students at UNILAG. They will gain a deeper understanding of how church fellowships can support their mental health and provide them with emotional and spiritual guidance. This can help them access more effective mental health resources within their religious communities. Church leaders and fellowship organizers at UNILAG also benefit from this study as it offers insights into how they can better support students' mental well-being. The findings may help them design programs and workshops that address the specific mental health needs of students, making their efforts more impactful. University counseling services stand to benefit by

learning how to collaborate more effectively with religious organizations, creating a more integrated support system for students. Finally, policymakers and mental health professionals can use the study's insights to develop strategies that reduce mental health stigma and promote well-being within the university community, ensuring a supportive environment that addresses both psychological and spiritual needs.

The scope of this study is centered on exploring the perceptions of students at UNILAG regarding the role of church fellowships in supporting mental health. The study specifically focuses on understanding how these fellowships contribute to the mental well-being of students, assessing the effectiveness of various church programs in promoting mental health, and analyzing the broader impact of religious support on students' mental health outcomes. The research involves qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including surveys and interviews with a diverse sample of UNILAG students who participate in church fellowships. Furthermore, the study examines the collaborative efforts between church fellowships and university counseling services, as well as the role of peer support networks within these fellowships. While the primary focus is on Christian fellowships, the study may also consider insights from students engaged in other religious or non-religious mental health support systems on campus. By concentrating on the experiences and perceptions of students within this specific academic environment, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations that could enhance the mental health support provided by church fellowships at UNILAG and potentially other similar institutions.

### **1.1. Limitations of the Study**

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is limited to students at UNILAG, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other universities or regions with different cultural or religious dynamics. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on Christian church fellowships, potentially overlooking the experiences of students from other religious backgrounds or those who do not engage in religious activities. The reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews may also introduce biases, as students might underreport or overreport their experiences with church fellowships and mental health support. Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional design limits its ability to assess the long-term impact of church fellowships on mental health. Lastly, logistical constraints, such as time and resource limitations, may affect the depth of data collection and analysis.

### **1.2. Operational Definitions of Terms**

1. *Church Fellowship*: organized religious gatherings at UNILAG where students engage in worship, prayer, and community activities, fostering spiritual and social support.
2. *Mental Health Support*: services and programs provided by church fellowships, including counseling, prayer groups, and workshops, aimed at promoting emotional well-being.
3. *Peer Support Networks*: groups of students within church fellowships trained to offer emotional guidance, share experiences, and refer peers to mental health resources.
4. *Religious Support*: emotional and spiritual assistance provided by church fellowships through prayer, counseling, and community activities, helping students cope with stress and anxiety.
5. *Mental Well-being*: the overall emotional and psychological health of students, improved through participation in church fellowship activities and access to religious support.

## 2. Review of Relevant Literatures

### 2.1. Theoretical Frameworks

*Social Support Theory (SST):* SST originates from sociology and psychology, with significant contributions from Sidney Cobb (1976). Cobb emphasized that social support plays a crucial role in protecting individuals from the harmful effects of stress. This theory is highly relevant to the study as it examines the impact of social networks, such as church fellowships, on mental health. Church fellowships offer emotional, informational, and sometimes material support, which can reduce stress and improve mental well-being. Applying SST allows for an exploration of how students perceive the supportive roles of these fellowships and how this support influences their mental health. The theory justifies the study's focus on understanding the communal and spiritual dimensions that church groups provide, which are integral to the mental health support systems within the university context.

*Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB):* TPB was developed by Icek Ajzen (1991). It builds on the Theory of Reasoned Action, adding the concept of perceived behavioural control to predict deliberate actions. TPB is appropriate for this study as it helps understand the students' intentions and behaviours related to seeking mental health support from church fellowships. The theory suggests that students' perceptions of the supportiveness of these fellowships, their attitudes towards mental health, and their perceived control over accessing such support will influence their behavior. By applying TPB, the study can explore the factors that motivate or deter students from engaging with church fellowships for mental health support, providing insights into how these perceptions shape their actions.

### 2.2. Review of UNILAG Students' Views on How Church Fellowships Help with Mental Health

At UNILAG, many students think that being part of a church fellowship helps them manage their mental health. These fellowships provide students with a sense of belonging, where they can connect with others, feel supported, and talk about their problems. For some students, attending fellowship meetings gives them a safe place to share their worries and challenges, especially when they are feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed with schoolwork.

According to a study by Adeyemi (2023), students who participate in church fellowships often feel less anxious and stressed. This is because these gatherings allow students to talk openly about their problems and receive comfort and advice from their peers and fellowship leaders. Being part of a supportive community helps them feel like they are not alone in dealing with challenges, which can significantly improve their mental health.

Okoye (2022) adds that church fellowships not only provide spiritual support through prayer and Bible study but also help students cope with everyday struggles. The social activities within these fellowships, like group outings or events, give students the chance to make friends and bond with others, reducing feelings of loneliness. Many students reported that the combination of prayer, spiritual counseling, and social interactions gives them peace of mind and helps them stay emotionally balanced, even during difficult times.

However, some students think church fellowships are not enough when it comes to handling serious mental health issues. Adebayo (2021) found that some students feel the fellowships focus too much on prayer and spiritual solutions but don't offer professional help, like counseling from trained experts. These students believe that while spiritual support is good, it should be combined with professional mental health care to better address the deeper issues they face, such as depression, trauma, or severe anxiety.

In conclusion, most students at UNILAG see church fellowships as a positive influence on their mental health, offering them a place to feel supported and connected. However, some students believe that fellowships should also include professional counseling services to provide more complete mental health support.

### **2.3. Church Programs Effectively Enhance Emotional, Spiritual, and Social Support for UNILAG Students' Mental Well-Being**

Church programs are highly effective in promoting mental well-being among UNILAG students by offering emotional, social, and spiritual support. Pastoral counseling, prayer sessions, and support groups provided by churches play a critical role in assisting students facing depression and suicidal thoughts (Fasogbon, Oguntashe & Olowookere, 2019b). Church fellowships create a sense of belonging, allowing students to connect with others who share their values and beliefs, which helps reduce feelings of isolation and alienation (Koenig, 2015a). This social support network acts as a buffer against mental stress and reduces the risk of suicide ideation (Omomia, 2017).

Religious teachings in these fellowships emphasize the sacredness of life and offer spiritual guidance that fosters resilience by encouraging students to see challenges as temporary and manageable (Adewuya & Oladipo, 2021a). This spiritual support is particularly valuable for students who may feel hopeless or overwhelmed. Some church fellowships collaborate with mental health professionals, referring students to psychologists and psychiatrists, when necessary, thereby providing more comprehensive care (Esan, Ajayi & Olowookere, 2019).

In addition to spiritual support, church fellowships address students' financial and academic pressures by offering material assistance, such as tutoring, career counseling, and financial aid. This helps alleviate stress and reduces the likelihood of mental health crises (Okoro & Eze, 2022). Religious activities like prayer, meditation, and group worship further contribute to emotional stability, helping students manage stress and avoid negative behaviors associated with suicidal thoughts (Koenig, 2015b). Overall, church fellowships at UNILAG significantly contribute to students' mental well-being by integrating spiritual, social, and practical support.

### **2.4. Review of Impact of Religious Support on Students' Mental Health at UNILAG**

Religious support plays a significant role in improving the mental health of students at UNILAG. Many students face stress due to academic pressure, financial difficulties, or feelings of isolation, which can lead to serious mental health issues. Religious groups and church fellowships help by offering emotional and spiritual guidance that reduces these pressures.

Firstly, church fellowships give students a sense of community. When students feel alone or overwhelmed, being part of a fellowship where they share common beliefs helps them feel connected and supported. This connection reduces feelings of isolation and prevents thoughts of depression or suicide (Koenig, 2015b). Religious groups also provide counseling and prayer sessions, which give students comfort and hope, helping them deal with stress or personal challenges (Fasogbon *et al.*, 2019c).

Moreover, these fellowships teach values that emphasize the importance of life. Religious teachings encourage students to stay hopeful even when facing difficult situations, showing them that life's challenges are temporary (Adewuya & Oladipo, 2021b). For students dealing with mental health crises, some fellowships even work with mental health professionals, referring students to psychologists or psychiatrists when needed (Esan *et al.*, 2019b).

In addition, religious fellowships often offer practical support, such as financial help, career advice, or tutoring, which helps ease some of the stress students experience due to financial or academic pressures (Okoro & Eze, 2022a). Activities like prayer and meditation also help students relax, manage their emotions, and develop a positive mindset, reducing the risk of developing mental health problems (Koenig, 2015b). In short, religious support at UNILAG offers students emotional, spiritual, and practical assistance, which helps them cope better with stress, prevents feelings of isolation, and improves their overall mental health.

### **3. Methodology**

The study "Exploring UNILAG Students' Perceptions of Church Fellowships in Mental Health Support" utilizes a descriptive survey design to collect and analyze students' views on the role of church fellowships in supporting mental health. This approach is effective for obtaining data from a large group and identifying patterns in responses. The research targets full-time undergraduate students at the University of Lagos (UNILAG) from various faculties, including Arts, Sciences, and Law.

A sample of 200 students was chosen through stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across different faculties and academic years. In addition to the student survey, the study involved interviews with 10 church leaders, including 3 lead chaplains from major campus churches - Catholic Church, Methodist Church, and Redeemed Christian Church of God - each serving 1-2,000 students. Furthermore, 7 student fellowship presidents were interviewed, selected both randomly and purposively from large fellowships (200-500 members) and smaller fellowships (50-150 members).

Data collection included self-designed questionnaires distributed via Google Forms and physical methods, resulting in 200 responses. The questionnaire comprised seven sections with a 4-point Likert-type scale to assess demographics and research questions. Qualitative insights were obtained through recorded interviews. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive statistics and presented in tables. Qualitative data from interviews were examined using thematic analysis. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed against relevant theories and pre-tested with 50 students in a pilot study. The study's tools and methods were also reviewed by the project supervisor for accuracy and completeness.

### **4. Results of the Thematic Analysis of the Interviews**

The role of the church in preventing suicide among university students encompasses a range of supportive, educational, and intervention strategies. Based on interviews with various church leaders, including Josiah Adesola from Christ Apostolic Church Youth Fellowship (CACYOF), Father Frederick Obananya from Saint Thomas More Catholic Chaplaincy, and Sunday Owolabi from the Methodist Church, a comprehensive understanding of church involvement in suicide prevention has emerged.

#### **4.1. Prevalence and Contributing Factors**

Across the board, church leaders acknowledge that while direct cases of suicide within their congregations may be relatively rare, the issue is not negligible. Josiah Adesola noted a personal encounter with a suicide case but emphasized that the church had not experienced similar incidents within its own community. Father Frederick Obananya and Samuel Olowookere, on the other hand, indicated that they have not encountered significant suicide cases in UNILAG, the institution where he serves. The common factors leading to suicidal thoughts among students, as identified by the interviewees, include depression, academic stress, family issues, and a lack of support. Josiah Adesola highlighted the role of isolation and lack of love as significant contributors. Father Obananya pointed to peer pressure, poor academic performance, and drug abuse as contributing factors. Similarly, Sunday Owolabi emphasized that unaddressed depression often escalates to suicidal tendencies. These findings appear similar to that of Nock *et al.* (2008) who observed the abuse of drugs as one of the predictors connected with suicide among students and Amare *et al.* (2018) reported that students who were disappointed in their academic results were more likely to have suicidal ideation than their peers.

##### **4.1.1. Church Programs and Initiatives**

The church employs several strategies to address and prevent suicide among students. It is possible to describe the role of groups within the Foursquare fellowship, which provide a support network where

students can openly discuss their challenges and receive emotional and academic encouragement. This approach aims to combat isolation and foster a sense of community. This finding is in line with Koenig (2015b) that social support from religious communities reduces the risk of suicidal thoughts and acts as a buffer against the negative consequences of stress.

Father Frederick Obananya mentioned that the Catholic Church focuses on charity, education, and providing a listening ear. Through initiatives such as the Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students (NFCs), the church educates students about mental health and provides professional advice. The confessional and counseling services also offer spiritual and emotional relief, indirectly supporting mental health.

Sunday Owolabi outlined various programs in the Methodist Church, including skill development initiatives, bursary schemes for financially struggling students, and general counseling services. These programs are designed to provide financial assistance, engage students in productive activities, and offer emotional support. This is in agreement with Ajibola and Agunbiade (2021).

#### 4.1.2. Collaboration and Training

The level of collaboration between churches and educational institutions varies. While there is no formal collaboration with UNILAG, churches like the Methodist Church offer support to students through financial aid and anonymous sponsorships. Father Obananya mentioned some informal interactions but indicated a lack of formal partnerships. The findings contradict the study that says it is important to acknowledge that negative attitudes towards mental health disorders exist among traditional and religious leaders, as well as other healthcare providers.

Training for church leaders on handling suicide tendencies is another area of focus. While there are no specific training programs, general pastoral training includes elements of mental health awareness. According to Pastor Tolu Obadofin of RCF, training for handling suicide tendencies is informal, derived from experience and observation, with a need for more structured training programs. This is contrary to studies that calls for proper training. This training is crucial in equipping church leaders to recognize and address mental health issues effectively. Igbinomwanhia, James and Omoaregba (2013) were concerned with those with known mental health problems who were engaging in suicidal behaviour, not those who were suicidal but not physically 'insane'. They asserted that proper training would help faith-based care providers understand that mental disorders include not only psychotic disorders, but also depression, acute stress disorder, anxiety, and many others.

#### 4.1.3. Recommendations and Improvements

The findings suggest that while churches are actively involved in supporting students and preventing suicide, there are areas for improvement. Increasing awareness about mental health within the church community, enhancing communication strategies, and expanding targeted support programs could further strengthen the church's role in suicide prevention. Additionally, establishing formal collaborations with educational institutions and developing specialized training programs for church leaders could enhance the effectiveness of suicide prevention efforts. This contradicts the notion of Marxian perspective and Freudian irrational neurosis that the comfort and support provided by religious communities should be seen as merely temporary relief.

#### 4.1.4. Conclusion

Churches play a significant role in preventing suicide among university students by providing emotional support, educational resources, and community engagement. The strategies employed by various church leaders highlight the importance of a holistic approach that combines spiritual guidance with practical support. By continuing to refine their programs and collaborate with educational institutions, churches can further enhance their impact on preventing suicide and supporting the mental health of students.

## **4.2. Recommendations from the Interviews**

1. The interviewees unanimously agreed that Churches should collaborate formally with universities like UNILAG to create joint programs for mental health support and suicide prevention. This collaboration could include offering counseling services, peer support networks, and educational workshops on mental health for students.
2. The interviewees unanimously agreed that structured training programs focused on identifying and addressing mental health issues, including suicidal tendencies, should be provided to church leaders. They are of the opinion that this would equip them with the necessary skills to recognize early warning signs of mental health struggles and offer appropriate support to students.
3. The interviewees unanimously agreed that Churches should expand their existing emotional, spiritual, and financial support programs to address not only spiritual concerns but also practical issues like academic stress and mental health. They also avowed that initiatives could include mental health education, skill development workshops, and financial aid for at-risk students.

## **4.3. Summary of Findings from the Interviews**

The church plays an active role in suicide prevention among university students by offering a combination of spiritual, emotional, and financial support. However, while the church leaders acknowledge the prevalence of suicidal thoughts caused by factors such as depression, academic pressure, and peer influence, they note that direct suicide cases are rare in their congregations. Churches employ various strategies, including group counseling, financial aid, and mental health education. However, there is a need for more formal collaborations between churches and universities, as well as structured training for church leaders in mental health issues.

The role of the church in preventing suicide among university students involves a mix of support, education, and intervention strategies. Church leaders like Josiah Adesola from Christ Apostolic Church and Father Frederick Obanya from Saint Thomas More Catholic Chaplaincy emphasize that while suicide is not common in their congregations, depression, academic stress, and family issues often contribute to suicidal thoughts. Churches like the Methodist Church offer programs that provide emotional and financial support to struggling students. Peer pressure and drug abuse were also mentioned as factors leading to suicidal ideation.

Church programs such as group support, counseling services, and educational initiatives help students feel more connected and less isolated. Churches like Daystar collaborate with university medical centres to offer outreach programs. Although there is no formal collaboration with schools like UNILAG, church leaders stress the need for more structured training to address mental health issues. With better training and partnerships, the church's role in suicide prevention could be more effective.

## **4.4. The Interviews Provides Contributions to Knowledge**

This study highlights the significant role that churches can play in suicide prevention by addressing both spiritual and mental health needs.

It provides insights into the importance of formal partnerships between religious institutions and educational bodies for a more coordinated approach to mental health support.

The study underscores the need for specialized training for church leaders to better equip them for mental health intervention and suicide prevention.

## 5. Analysis of Qualitative Data (Questionnaire)

### 5.1. Demographical Characteristics of Participants

Table 1: Field Performance of the Research Instrument

Targeted Responses	Responses Obtained	Invalid	Valid
N =200 (100%)	n <sub>1</sub> = 200 (100%)	n <sub>2</sub> = 0 (0%)	n <sub>3</sub> = 200 (100%)

The table above shows the performance of the research instrument in the field. Links to the questionnaire were targeted at undergraduate students at UNILAG. However, we were able to gather responses from the targeted 200 respondents which formed the basis of analysis and interpretation for this research work.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender Option(s)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	57	28.4
Female	143	71.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16 – 20	40	19.9
21 – 24	116	58.2
25-30	38	18.9
31&above	6	3.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
Level	Frequency	Percentage
200 Level	49	24.5
300 Level	44	22.0
400 Level	81	40.5
500 Level	26	13.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
Department	Frequency	Percentage
Arts/Law	65	32.5
Sciences/Environmental	54	27.0
Social Sciences	54	27.0
Engineering	27	13.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

The survey results show that most respondents were female (71.6%). Most respondents were aged 21 to 24 years old (58.2%), which is typical for university students. The next largest age groups were 16-20 years (19.9%), 25-30 years (18.9%), and 31 years and older (3%). In terms of academic level, the majority were in their 400 Level (40.5%), followed by 200 Level (24.5%), 300 Level (22%), and 500 Level (13%). This suggests that more senior students were more likely to participate. Finally, most respondents came from the Arts/Law departments (32.5%), with the Sciences/Environmental and Social Sciences departments each contributing 27.0%, and Engineering accounting for 13.5%.

## 5.2. Research Question 1: UNILAG Students' Views on the Role of Church Fellowship on Mental Health

Table 3: Church Fellowship Plays a Crucial Role in Supporting Students' Mental Health at UNILAG

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	60	30.0
Agree	124	62.0
Disagree	14	7.0
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings from Table 3 reveal that a vast majority of respondents (92%) agreed or strongly agreed that church fellowship plays a crucial role in supporting students' mental health at UNILAG. This indicates that church fellowship is widely seen as a vital part of mental health support for students.

Table 4: Regular Participation in Church Fellowship Helps Improve My Mental Well-Being

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	74	37.0
Agree	99	49.5
Disagree	25	12.5
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings from Table 4 reveal that a significant majority (86.5%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that regular participation in church fellowship helps improve their mental well-being. This suggests that regular engagement with church fellowship is beneficial for many students' mental health.

Table 5: Church Fellowship at UNILAG Addresses Mental Health Issues Relevant to Students

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	46	23.0
Agree	128	64.0
Disagree	24	12.0
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings from Table 5 reveal that majority of respondents (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that church fellowship at UNILAG addresses mental health issues relevant to students. This suggests that church fellowships are seen as relevant and important in addressing mental health concerns.

Table 6: I feel that Church Fellowship Provides a Supportive Community for Mental Health

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	95	47.5
Agree	98	49.0
Disagree	3	1.5
Strongly Disagree	4	2.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data drawn from Table 6 suggest that a significant majority (96.5%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that church fellowship provides a supportive community for mental health. This indicates a strong perception of church fellowship as a supportive environment for students' mental health.

#### 5.2.1. Discussion of Findings for Research Question 1

The findings above demonstrate that church fellowships at UNILAG are widely perceived as effective in addressing mental health issues and providing a supportive community. Specifically, 87% of respondents agree that church fellowship at UNILAG addresses mental health issues relevant to students. Furthermore, an overwhelming 96.5% agree that church fellowship provides a supportive community for mental health. These high levels of agreement indicate that church fellowships play a crucial role in mental health support. However, the small percentages of disagreement (13% and 3.5%) indicate that there is room for improvement to ensure that all students feel adequately supported. This underscores the importance of continuously evaluating and enhancing the mental health initiatives within church fellowships to better serve the diverse needs of the student population.

The findings reveal that many students at UNILAG view church fellowships as beneficial for managing their mental health. These fellowships provide a supportive community, where students feel connected, share problems, and receive comfort. Studies by Adeyemi (2023) and Okoye (2022) highlight that participation in these fellowships reduces stress and anxiety, offering spiritual support through prayer and social interactions that ease loneliness. However, Adebayo (2021) notes that some students feel the fellowships focus too heavily on prayer and lack professional mental health care, suggesting that combining spiritual support with expert counseling would be more effective.

### **5.3. Research Question 2: Assessing the Effectiveness of UNILAG Church Programs in Promoting Mental Well-Being**

Table 7: UNILAG Church Programs Effectively Promote Mental Well-Being among Students

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	49	24.5
Agree	130	65.0
Disagree	19	9.5
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data drawn from Table 7 shows that a majority of respondents (89.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that church programs effectively promote mental well-being among students. This suggests that the church programs are perceived as successful in fostering mental health.

Table 8: Mental Health Workshops and Seminars Organized by UNILAG Churches Are Beneficial

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	42	21.0
Agree	135	67.5
Disagree	22	11.0
Strongly Disagree	1	0.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings from Table 8 reveal that a significant majority (88.5%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the mental health workshops and seminars organized by the church are beneficial. This highlights the effectiveness of these programs in supporting students' mental health.

Table 9: UNILAG Church Counseling Services Have Positively Impacted My Mental Health

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	43	21.5
Agree	116	58.0
Disagree	34	17.0
Strongly Disagree	7	3.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 9** indicates that the majority of respondents (79.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that the counseling services provided by the church have positively impacted their mental health. This indicates that the counseling services are perceived as valuable and effective.

### 5.3.1. Discussion of Findings for Research Question 2

The results indicate that church programs, workshops, seminars, and counseling services are generally effective and beneficial for students' mental well-being. Specifically, 89.5% of respondents believe that UNILAG church programs effectively promote mental well-being among students. Similarly, 88.5% find the mental health workshops and seminars organized by the church to be beneficial, which can be linked to the study of Koenig (2015b), which found that these activities support stable emotions and constructive thinking, both of which are essential in averting negative behaviours linked to suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, Ottuh and Jemegbe (2020) say religion supports societal cohesiveness and order by unifying individuals around common beliefs and values through worship and other religious events. This study has confirmed the result of the 79.5% of respondents that feels the church's counseling services have positively impacted their mental health. The high level of agreement suggests that these initiatives are well-received and make a positive impact on students' mental health. However, evidence on church programs' impact on mental health is limited according to Beyerlein (2004) backed up by minority of respondents that still feels the services are not effective, indicating potential areas for improvement in program delivery or content. This suggests the need for regular feedback and adaptation of programs to ensure they meet the evolving needs of students.

Findings from a review of relevant literatures reveal that Church programs at UNILAG are vital in supporting students' mental health by providing emotional, social, and spiritual aid. These initiatives, including pastoral counseling, prayer sessions, and support groups, are particularly effective in helping students dealing with depression and suicidal thoughts (Fasogbon *et al.*, 2019d). They create a sense of belonging, which reduces feelings of loneliness and stress (Koenig, 2015a). Additionally, church teachings encourage resilience by helping students view challenges as temporary (Adewuya & Oladipo, 2021c). Some church fellowships collaborate with mental health professionals for more comprehensive care and offer practical support such as tutoring and financial aid to alleviate academic and financial pressures (Esan *et al.*, 2019b; Okoro & Eze, 2022b). Overall, these church programs provide a holistic support system that greatly enhances students' mental well-being

### 5.4. Research Question 3: Assessing the Impact of Religious Support on Students' Mental Health at UNILAG

Table 10: Religious Support from UNILAG Churches Has a Positive Impact on My Mental Health

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	63	31.5
Agree	116	58.0
Disagree	14	0.07
Strongly Disagree	7	3.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 10 suggests that a substantial majority (89.5%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that religious support from the church has a positive impact on their mental health. This demonstrates the perceived value of religious support in enhancing students' mental well-being.

Table 11: The Spiritual Guidance Provided by UNILAG Church Leaders Contributes to My Mental Health

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	73	36.5
Agree	106	53.0
Disagree	17	8.5
Strongly Disagree	4	2.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 11 indicates that the majority of respondents (89.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that spiritual guidance from church leaders contributes positively to their mental health. This suggests that spiritual support is highly valued by the students.

Table 12: Religious Activities and Fellowship at UNILAG Play a Significant Role in Managing My Stress and Anxiety

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	56	28.0
Agree	118	59.0
Disagree	19	9.5
Strongly Disagree	7	3.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings from Table 12 reveal that a majority of respondents (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that religious activities and fellowship play a significant role in managing their stress and anxiety. This indicates that these activities are effective in helping students cope with stress and anxiety.

The findings suggest that religious support, including spiritual guidance and participation in religious activities, has a significant positive impact on students' mental health. Specifically, 89.5% of respondents agree that religious support from the UNILAG churches has a positive impact on their mental health. Additionally, 89.5% believe that the spiritual guidance provided by church leaders contributes to their mental health. As Omomia (2017) astutely pointed out, "... the unique privilege of reaching a wide and diverse audience with messages of hope and joy" is a powerful asset of religious institutions and organisations in Nigeria. These results are in line with Fasogbon *et al.* (2019a) that religion has a tremendous positive impact on people's lives in Nigeria. Furthermore, 87% feel that religious activities and fellowship play a significant role in managing their stress and anxiety, which is supported by Koenig (2012) that religious practices reduce stress and promotes mental health. These high levels of agreement highlight the importance of religious activities in students' mental well-being. However, there is a small proportion of respondents who do not share this view, indicating that some students might not fully benefit from or engage with these religious supports. This underscores the need for the church to find ways to make its religious support more inclusive and accessible to all students.

A summary of the findings from the literature reveals that religious support significantly enhances the mental health of University of Lagos (UNILAG) students. Church fellowships play a key role by providing a sense of community, which helps reduce feelings of isolation and prevents depression and suicidal thoughts (Koenig, 2015b). These fellowships offer emotional and spiritual guidance through counseling and prayer sessions, giving students comfort and hope during stressful times (Fasogbon *et al.* 2019a).

al., 2019b). Additionally, religious teachings promote resilience by encouraging students to view life's challenges as temporary and manageable (Adewuya & Oladipo, 2021a). Some fellowships collaborate with mental health professionals to ensure students receive comprehensive care when needed (Esan *et al.*, 2019). They also offer practical support such as financial aid, career advice, and tutoring, which helps alleviate academic and financial pressures (Okoro & Eze, 2022c). Activities like prayer and meditation further support emotional stability and a positive mindset, reducing the risk of mental health issues. Overall, religious support at UNILAG provides crucial emotional, spiritual, and practical assistance that helps students manage stress and improve their mental well-being.

## 6. Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant relationship between effectiveness of Unilag Church programs in promoting mental wellbeing and impact of religious support on students' mental health.

Table 13: Relationship between Church Programs and Impact on Mental Well Being

Variables	X	SD	N	r	P
Effectiveness of Unilag Church programs in promoting mental well being	9.9774	1.51553	199	0.597**	0.000
Impact of religious support on students' mental health.	10.5000	1.88999	197		

Table 13 shows the correlation between the effectiveness of UNILAG church programs in promoting mental well-being and the impact of religious support on students' mental health. A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) test was run to determine the relationship between church programs and impact of religious support on students' mental health. There is a significant, positive correlation ( $r=0.597$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This implies that as churches and fellowships organize different programs for students, they boost their mental health. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which means that the original hypothesis is accepted.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There is no joint influence of Church role and Church program on Impact of religious support on students' mental health.

Table 14a: Correlation Analysis of Influence of Church Role and Church Program on Impact of Religious Support on Students' Mental Health

Variables	X	SD	N	R	P
Role of church fellowship in preventing suicide	13.1622	3.01300	199	0.601**	1
Effectiveness of church program	9.9774	1.51553	197	0.478	
Impact on mental health	10.5000	1.88999			

Table 14b: Regression Analysis of Influence of Church Role and Church Program on Impact of Religious Support on Students' Mental Health

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of Est.	Df1	Df2	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	Sig.
(Constant)					2	193	0.423	70.827	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Church Programs	0.651 <sup>a</sup>	0.423	0.417	1.43990					
Church role									

a. Dependent Variable: Impact Mental

b. Predictors: (Constant), Church Role, Church Program

The linear regression analysis was used to test the joint influence of Church role and Church program on Impact of religious support on students' mental health. Tables 14a and 14b show there is joint influence of the two variables on the impact of religious support on students' mental health ( $R^2 = 0.423$ , Adj.  $R^2 = 0.417$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). This shows that the regressor variables jointly cause 42.3% change in the Impact on mental health. This implies that the role of the Church fellowship in preventing suicide among UNILAG students and the effectiveness of UNILAG Church programs in promoting mental wellbeing jointly influence the impact of religious support on students' mental health in the University of Lagos.

## **6.1. Summary of Quantitative Research**

This study investigates how students at UNILAG view church fellowships as a resource for mental health support. Many students face significant stress from academic pressures, financial difficulties, and feelings of isolation, which can lead to mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety. Church fellowships are seen as a valuable source of support, offering emotional, spiritual, and practical assistance to help students cope with these issues.

The study found that students appreciate the sense of community and belonging provided by church fellowships. Being part of a fellowship where members share similar values helps students feel less isolated and more supported. This connection is crucial in reducing feelings of loneliness and preventing mental health crises. Participants reported that church fellowships offer emotional comfort through counseling and prayer sessions, which help them manage stress and personal difficulties.

Furthermore, the study highlights that religious teachings within these fellowships emphasize resilience and hope, encouraging students to view challenges as temporary and manageable. Some fellowships also collaborate with mental health professionals, providing students with referrals to psychologists and psychiatrists for more specialized care when needed.

In addition to spiritual support, church fellowships offer practical aid such as financial assistance, career guidance, and academic tutoring, which helps alleviate some of the stress associated with financial and academic pressures. Activities like prayer and meditation also contribute to emotional stability, helping students maintain a positive outlook.

## **6.2. Recommendations for the Study**

For the study Exploring UNILAG Students' Perceptions of Church Fellowships in Mental Health Support, the recommendations are as follow:

1. The study recommends the regular organization of church-led mental health workshops that integrate both spiritual and psychological support for students.
2. We advocate for the establishment of peer support networks that offer spiritual guidance and facilitate mental health referrals.
3. We suggest fostering collaboration between churches and university counselling centers to create effective referral systems and joint mental health initiatives.
4. The research encourages partnerships between churches, school fellowships, and mental health professionals to offer faith-based workshops that address depression, anxiety, and suicide prevention.
5. We advocate for collaboration with mental health experts to train church leaders in recognizing and addressing student mental health crises.
6. It promotes collaboration between churches, campus fellowships, and university counseling teams to co-develop tailored mental health support for students.

7. Finally, the study calls for integrating mental health education into church activities to reduce stigma and foster a supportive environment for students.

## 7. Conclusion

The study highlights the significant role that church fellowships play in supporting mental health among UNILAG students. Facing academic pressures, financial struggles, and feelings of isolation, many students experience stress that can lead to mental health challenges like depression and anxiety. Church fellowships offer essential support by creating a sense of community and belonging, which helps students feel less alone and more connected. This sense of connection is crucial for reducing feelings of loneliness and preventing mental health crises.

Church fellowships provide emotional support through counseling and prayer sessions, offering students comfort and guidance. The religious teachings within these groups promote resilience and hope, encouraging students to view their challenges as temporary and manageable. Additionally, some fellowships collaborate with mental health professionals, referring students to psychologists and psychiatrists when necessary for more specialized care.

Beyond emotional and spiritual support, church fellowships also address practical needs. They offer financial aid, career advice, and academic tutoring, which help reduce the stress associated with financial and academic pressures. Activities like prayer and meditation further aid in maintaining emotional stability and a positive outlook. Overall, church fellowships at UNILAG offer a comprehensive support system that integrates emotional, spiritual, and practical assistance, significantly enhancing students' mental well-being and providing valuable support in managing their stress and mental health.

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