

Chapter 12

Institutional Barriers to the Healthy Promoting of Universities in Higher Education in Africa: A Scoping Review

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ABSTRACT

Poor mental health among students in higher education is a growing public health and policy concern. There is a lack of literature that synthesizes the available evidence on the barriers faced by educational institutions in becoming health promoting universities (HPUs) and the recommendations for implementing health promotion among university students in Africa. To identify the major institutional barriers and how they affect student well-being in Africa, a scoping review of various electronic databases were searched spanning from January 2000 to May 2024. Two themes emerged: a) Institutional barriers to health promotion university; b) recommendations for the implementation of HPU in Africa. The findings serve as a catalyst in fostering collaboration, both locally and internationally, to enhance the well-being

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of students throughout Africa and help them thrive and succeed in their academic pursuits. The review calls for African universities to join the International Network of HPU, as well as training academics to effectively teach health promotion concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Poor mental health of students in higher education is an increasing concern for public health and policy (Douwes et al. 2023; Liu et al. 2024). The importance of health promotion is gaining increased recognition within university settings, as institutions strive to safeguard the well-being of their students. Faced with the challenge of declining student well-being, universities are increasingly focusing on implementing initiatives that promote physical, mental, and emotional wellness to support their student populations and foster a healthy academic environment. This proactive approach is essential to addressing the growing concerns surrounding student health and ensuring that students have the resources and support they need to thrive during their university years (Liu et al., 2024). Health promotion is a process of enabling people to create more control over their own health and their environment (Turunen 2017). The notion of a health-promoting university goes beyond the mere provision of health education and promotion to students and staff. It encompasses the complete integration of health principles into the university's culture, protocols, and policies (Fernández et al. 2016; Tsouros et al. 1998).

Douwes et al. (2022) found that various factors influence students' well-being which ranged from personal and university related factors to external factors beyond their educational institutions. Despite the widespread of consensus on the importance of Healthy Promoting Universities (HPU) to the university environment and overall student well-being (Douwes et al. 2022; Hossain et al. 2020), there has been no recent review to compile the current evidence on student mental well-being in the African continent. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a scoping review to consolidate available data and to aid understanding the institutional barriers to the HPU approach and identify recommendations in this important area of student well-being in higher education in Africa.

BACKGROUND

There are increasing concerns globally about the well-being of students in tertiary environments, and is increasingly linked to long-term educational outcomes at the systematic level (Eloff et al. 2022). A 2020 Insight Network survey of students from 10 universities suggested that "1 in 5 students has a current mental health diagno-

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