
KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

**RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AS MODERATORS OF STRESS AND ANXIETY AMONG
TERTIARY STUDENTS IN NIGERIA**

Omomia O. Austin¹, Omomia Taiwo. A² & Dr. Enamudu Gabriel P³

¹ Associate Professor, McPherson University, Department of Religion and Peace Studies, Km. 96, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Seriki Sotayo. Ogun State. Nigeria, Tel.: +234-8033031035,

Email: austin.omomia@yahoo.com

² Chief Lecturer, Yaba College of Technology, Department of Educational Foundations, School of Technical Education, (In affiliation with University of Nigeria, Nsukka), Yaba. Lagos. Nigeria.

Tel.: +234-7066601571,

Email: taiwomomia@gmail.com

³ Department of Applied Psychology, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kampala International University, Uganda, Tel.: +2349024563700, +256754319911,

E-mail: peter.enamudu@kiu.ac.ug

Citation: Austin et al (2025). Religious practices as moderators of stress and anxiety among tertiary students in Nigeria. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 299-313.

ABSTRACT

Stress and anxiety are common challenges for students in Nigerian tertiary institutions, affecting both their academic performance and overall well-being. In a country where religion plays a key role in daily life, many students turn to faith-based practices like prayer, attending worship services, and seeking community support to cope with these challenges. This study looks at how religious activities can help reduce stress and anxiety, offering emotional support and resilience during difficult times. The study applied the descriptive survey research design. The study used surveys and interviews as the research instruments. Data and personal experiences were gathered from students from different religious backgrounds. The findings show that 60% of students experience high levels of stress and 55% struggle with anxiety. However, students who regularly engage in religious practices report lower levels of stress and anxiety compared to those who do not. 78% of students involved in religious practices participate in activities like prayer and church or mosque attendance, and 80% of Christian students attend church services, while 75% of Muslim students pray daily. In contrast, only 30% of the students are not engaged in any form of religious activity. Religious practices such as communal worship and meditation help students feel more peaceful and supported. The study recommends religious support in student wellness programs as this could reduce stress and anxiety among students in tertiary institutions. In addition, the study emphasizes the role of religion in supporting student mental health and encourages tertiary institutions in Nigeria to consider its inclusion in relevant mental health programs.

Keywords: Anxiety, Nigeria, Religious practices, Student well-being, Stress

INTRODUCTION

Religion has long played a vital role in shaping human societies, influencing cultural values, social structures, and individual behaviors. In Nigeria, religion is deeply woven into daily life, with Christianity and Islam being the dominant faiths, alongside indigenous traditional beliefs. Religious practices such as prayer, fasting, meditation, and communal worship are not only acts of devotion but also serve as sources of guidance, hope, and emotional stability (Adebayo, 2023). For many Nigerians, religious engagement is more than a routine activity, it is a way of life that shapes decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and responses to life's challenges (Eze, 2022). The transition to tertiary education is often accompanied by new responsibilities, academic pressure, and social adjustments. University students face numerous challenges, including financial difficulties, career uncertainties, and personal struggles. In such an environment, religious beliefs and practices can serve as a source of comfort and strength, helping students navigate the complexities of academic life (Adekunle & Yusuf, 2021). Many students turn to prayer for reassurance before exams, seek divine guidance for major life decisions, and find solace in religious gatherings that provide a sense of belonging and community support (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023). Despite the prevalence of religious engagement in Nigeria, there is limited scholarly attention

given to its potential impact on students' emotional well-being. Most studies on coping mechanisms in Nigerian tertiary institutions focus on peer support, counseling services, and academic mentoring, while the role of religion as a psychological buffer remains underexplored (Olaniyi, 2022). Given the strong religious orientation of Nigerian society, it is important to investigate whether and how religious practices influence students' ability to cope with academic and personal stressors.

Additionally, religious participation often fosters moral discipline, resilience, and a sense of purpose, which may positively affect students' mental outlook. The teachings of most religions emphasize patience, hope, and faith in overcoming adversity, which can be particularly beneficial in times of uncertainty (Balogun, 2023). However, while religion can be a source of strength, it is also necessary to examine whether excessive dependence on religious practices might discourage students from seeking professional psychological support when needed. This study aims to explore the moderating role of religious practices in managing stress and anxiety among tertiary students in Nigeria, contributing to ongoing discussions on faith-based interventions in higher education. Mental health challenges among tertiary students have become a growing concern

globally, with stress and anxiety being among the most prevalent psychological issues (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). In Nigeria, where academic pressures, financial constraints, and social expectations contribute to students' mental distress, coping mechanisms play a crucial role in maintaining psychological well-being (Adekeye et al., 2022). One widely recognized coping strategy is religious engagement, which provides emotional and psychological support through faith-based activities such as prayer, worship, and communal interactions (Oladipo & Ogunleye, 2021). Nigeria is a highly religious society, with Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions deeply influencing individuals' daily lives. Many students rely on religious practices not only for spiritual growth but also as a means of managing stress and anxiety. Research suggests that faith-based coping mechanisms offer a sense of hope, purpose, and social belonging, which can mitigate the negative effects of academic and personal stressors (Ibitoye & Kolawole, 2022). Despite the increasing focus on student mental health, limited studies have specifically examined how religious practices function as moderators of stress and anxiety within Nigerian tertiary institutions. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the relationship between religious engagement and students' psychological well-being.

Definition of Key Terms

Religious Practices: Activities associated with faith, including prayer, worship, fasting,

scriptural meditation, and participation in religious gatherings (Koenig, 2020).

Stress: A psychological and physiological response to academic, financial, or social pressures that disrupt an individual's equilibrium (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Anxiety: A persistent state of worry, fear, or nervousness that affects daily functioning, often triggered by academic demands, personal challenges, or uncertainty about the future (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of stress and anxiety among Nigerian tertiary students poses a significant challenge to academic success and overall well-being (Adewuyi & Salami, 2021). While various coping strategies exist, religion remains an underexplored yet potentially powerful mechanism for mental health support. Studies have shown that religious practices can offer psychological comfort, resilience, and social support, yet there is limited empirical research examining their specific impact on stress and anxiety among Nigerian students (Balogun, 2023). This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how religious engagement moderates these mental health challenges, providing insights into the role of faith-based interventions in student well-being.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- 1) Examine the relationship between religious practices and stress among tertiary students in Nigeria.
- 2) Investigate how religious engagement influences students' anxiety levels.
- 3) Explore the specific religious coping mechanisms used by students to manage academic and personal stressors.
- 4) Assess the implications of religious practices for student mental health support programs.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the relationship between religious practices and stress among tertiary students?
- 2) How do religious practices influence anxiety levels among students?
- 3) What specific religious coping strategies are commonly used by Nigerian tertiary students?
- 4) How can religious practices be integrated into institutional mental health programs?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on mental health by exploring the role of religion as a coping mechanism among Nigerian students. Findings from this research will inform educational institutions, policymakers, and mental health professionals on the potential benefits of integrating religious support systems into student wellness programs. Additionally, the study provides insights for religious

organizations on how they can offer targeted support to students experiencing psychological distress.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on tertiary students across various universities in Nigeria, examining their engagement with religious practices and its effects on stress and anxiety levels. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights. However, the study is limited by potential biases in self-reported data and variations in religious beliefs and practices among students. Future research could expand on this by exploring longitudinal effects and comparing findings across different cultural and religious contexts.

Conceptualizing Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are common emotional responses to challenging situations, particularly among tertiary students who face academic pressures, financial constraints, social expectations, and career uncertainties. Stress is often defined as the body's response to perceived threats or demands, triggering physiological and psychological reactions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Anxiety, on the other hand, is characterized by excessive worry, fear, and nervousness, which can interfere with daily functioning (American Psychological Association [APA], 2022). For tertiary students, stress can stem from rigorous academic workloads, deadlines,

examinations, and the pressure to perform well. The transition from secondary education to university life often brings new responsibilities, including independent decision-making and financial management, which can further contribute to anxiety (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023). If unmanaged, prolonged stress and anxiety can lead to academic burnout, poor mental health, and even physical health issues such as insomnia, headaches, and weakened immunity (Balogun, 2023).

Several factors contribute to stress and anxiety among university students in Nigeria. These include:

- 1) *Academic Pressure* – High expectations from parents, lecturers, and society can cause students to experience stress and anxiety, especially when struggling to meet academic demands (Olaniyi, 2022).
- 2) *Financial Challenges* – Many students face economic difficulties, including tuition fees, accommodation costs, and daily expenses, which add to their stress levels (Eze, 2022).
- 3) *Social and Peer Influences* – Navigating relationships, friendships, and peer expectations can lead to emotional distress, particularly for students struggling with self-identity and belonging (Adebayo, 2023).
- 4) *Career Uncertainty* – The fear of unemployment after graduation contributes to stress, as students worry about their future prospects in an unpredictable job market (Adekunle & Yusuf, 2021).

The effects of stress and anxiety can be severe, leading to decreased academic performance, withdrawal from social activities, increased substance use, and even depression if not properly managed (Balogun, 2023).

Religious Practices as Coping Mechanisms

Religion is a significant aspect of life for many Nigerians and serves as a coping mechanism for dealing with life's challenges. Religious practices such as prayer, meditation, fasting, scripture reading, and fellowship provide comfort, reassurance, and emotional stability for students facing stress and anxiety (Pargament, 1997).

- 1) *Prayer* – Many students turn to prayer as a means of seeking divine intervention, comfort, and guidance. It offers them a sense of control over their circumstances and helps them develop a positive outlook (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023).
- 2) *Meditation* – Some students engage in religious meditation, which helps in calming the mind, reducing stress, and promoting inner peace (Eze, 2022).
- 3) *Fasting* – In many religious traditions, fasting is believed to strengthen spiritual discipline and focus, enabling students to manage emotional stress more effectively (Adebayo, 2023).
- 4) *Scripture Reading* – Reading religious texts provides encouragement, wisdom, and coping strategies that can help students navigate academic and personal challenges (Olaniyi, 2022).

- 5) *Fellowship and Community Support* – Attending religious gatherings and engaging in group worship creates a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation (Balogun, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): This theory explains how individuals respond to stress by assessing their ability to cope. It distinguishes between problem-focused coping, which involves taking direct action to address stressors, and emotion-focused coping, which involves managing emotional responses. Religious practices often align with emotion-focused coping, as they provide reassurance, hope, and psychological relief (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Religious Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997): Pargament's theory emphasizes the role of religious beliefs and practices in dealing with life's difficulties. It identifies positive religious coping, such as seeking spiritual support and trusting in a higher power, and negative religious coping, which includes feelings of spiritual abandonment. Among Nigerian students, positive religious coping mechanisms like prayer and fellowship can enhance resilience, while excessive reliance on divine intervention without practical action may limit problem-solving abilities (Pargament, 1997).

Psychosocial Support Models: Psychosocial models highlight the importance of emotional and social support systems in mental well-being. Religion provides a strong psychosocial support network,

helping students manage stress through communal worship, mentorship, and faith-based counseling (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023). These models suggest that students who actively participate in religious communities experience lower stress levels and greater emotional stability. Religious practices play a crucial role in moderating stress and anxiety among tertiary students in Nigeria. By offering emotional reassurance, spiritual strength, and social support, religion provides a valuable coping mechanism for students navigating academic and personal pressures. However, it is essential to balance religious coping with practical strategies such as professional counseling and academic mentoring to ensure holistic well-being.

Literature Review

The prevalence of stress and anxiety among university students has been extensively studied globally, with many studies focusing on the factors contributing to these emotional challenges. In higher education, students often face multiple stressors such as academic pressure, financial instability, and social adjustment (Parker et al., 2022). A significant body of research has highlighted that the pressures of meeting academic expectations, managing time effectively, and coping with deadlines are primary stressors (Smith et al., 2023). Students also experience anxiety related to their future careers, personal relationships, and overall life direction (Olaniyi, 2022). In the Nigerian context, several studies have identified specific stressors faced by tertiary students.

Academic stress due to heavy workloads, examinations, and competition for grades is a leading cause of anxiety among Nigerian university students (Adekunle & Yusuf, 2021). Additionally, financial challenges, including the inability to pay tuition fees or secure accommodation, are significant sources of stress (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023). Social pressures related to fitting into campus life, navigating peer relationships, and meeting family expectations also contribute to stress and anxiety (Adebayo, 2023).

The relationship between religious involvement and psychological well-being has been well-documented in the literature, with many studies demonstrating that religious practices can serve as effective coping mechanisms for managing stress and anxiety. Religion, particularly through practices like prayer, meditation, and scripture reading, provides individuals with a sense of purpose, belonging, and emotional support (Balogun, 2023). These practices offer students a spiritual outlet for their anxieties and stress, helping them cope with life's difficulties (Pargament, 1997). In the Nigerian context, faith-based support systems such as church congregations, mosque communities, and other religious groups are crucial in providing emotional and psychological support to students (Adebayo, 2023). Religious practices offer students a space for reflection, solace, and connection with others who share similar faith and struggles. Faith-based communities often help students manage

stress by offering counseling, prayer sessions, and social support networks, all of which are vital for mental health and emotional resilience (Olaniyi, 2022).

Spirituality plays a significant role in mental health by providing a framework through which individuals can understand and cope with life's challenges. Spiritual practices, including prayer, fasting, and meditation, contribute to emotional well-being by fostering inner peace, enhancing self-reflection, and promoting positive coping strategies (Pargament, 1997). In Nigerian tertiary institutions, spirituality often provides students with an alternative coping mechanism, particularly when faced with stressful academic pressures or social challenges. Spirituality, rooted in religious practices, encourages hope, resilience, and a sense of control, reducing the harmful psychological effects of stress and anxiety (Adebayo, 2023). The benefits of spirituality on mental health have been substantiated by studies that highlight its ability to reduce anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders (Adekunle & Yusuf, 2021). Spirituality provides individuals with a sense of connection to something greater than themselves, which can alleviate feelings of isolation and helplessness, common among students experiencing high levels of stress (Smith et al., 2023).

Faith-based support systems such as churches, mosques, and religious groups are integral to managing stress and anxiety among Nigerian students. These institutions

provide not only spiritual nourishment but also social support that can enhance students' ability to cope with their academic and personal challenges (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023). For instance, attending religious services can foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of loneliness, which is especially important for students away from home for the first time. Religious groups also offer counseling services, mentorship programs, and prayer sessions that help students develop coping strategies for managing stress (Balogun, 2023). Furthermore, religious groups provide an environment where students can discuss their challenges openly without fear of judgment, promoting mental well-being and emotional stability (Adebayo, 2023). These institutions also serve as platforms for students to engage in community service, enhancing their sense of purpose and fulfillment, which can reduce anxiety and increase their overall psychological well-being (Olaniyi, 2022).

While the relationship between religion and stress is widely studied in the Nigerian context, cross-cultural studies offer valuable insights into how this dynamic plays out in different societies. In Western countries, for example, religion is often viewed through a more individualistic lens, where personal prayer or meditation is emphasized as a form of coping (Pargament, 1997). However, in collectivist societies like Nigeria, religious practices are often communal, with an emphasis on collective worship, fellowship, and shared spiritual experiences (Adekunle

& Yusuf, 2021). Comparative studies reveal that while religious practices can be beneficial in managing stress and anxiety, the form these practices take differs across cultural contexts. For instance, in some societies, religious practices such as group prayer and religious festivals are central to community life and offer significant emotional support to students (Ogunyemi & Akinwale, 2023). In contrast, in more secular or individualistic societies, personal spirituality and private prayer may serve as more common mechanisms for stress management (Smith et al., 2023). In Nigeria, religious communities provide a strong sense of belonging and social support, which is less prevalent in more individualistic cultures. This suggests that the communal aspect of religious practices may be particularly beneficial in alleviating stress and anxiety among Nigerian students compared to their peers in Western or secular societies (Adebayo, 2023).

The literature highlights the significant role of religious practices in moderating stress and anxiety among Nigerian tertiary students. Religious involvement provides students with psychological and emotional support through faith-based practices such as prayer, meditation, and participation in religious communities. While cross-cultural differences exist, the communal aspect of religious practices in Nigeria makes them particularly effective for managing stress and fostering emotional well-being. Further empirical studies are needed to better understand the nuances of how religious

practices function as coping mechanisms in Nigerian tertiary institutions and to evaluate their long-term impacts on students' mental health.

Methodology

Research Design:

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative aspect focused on gathering numerical data to measure levels of stress and anxiety, as well as how often students engage in religious practices. The qualitative part aimed to explore students' personal experiences and perspectives on how religious practices help them cope with stress.

Population and Sampling: The participants in this study were tertiary students (university students) from various institutions in Nigeria. A total of 300 students were selected through random sampling from three universities—two public and one private. The sample included students from different academic levels, genders, and religious backgrounds (Christian, Muslim, and non-religious) to ensure diverse perspectives. This sample size was chosen to ensure that the results were representative of the larger student population.

Data Collection Methods:

- 1) **Surveys:** A questionnaire was distributed to all 300 students. The survey asked questions about their levels of stress and anxiety (using well-

known scales like the Perceived Stress Scale) and how often they engage in different religious practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, attending religious services).

- 2) **Interviews:** A smaller group of 30 students participated in one-on-one interviews. These interviews gave students the opportunity to share their personal experiences in more detail, especially about how religious practices help them manage stress and anxiety. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.
- 3) **Case Studies:** 5 students were selected for in-depth case studies. These students were those who reported using religious practices as their main method for coping with stress. These case studies provided a detailed look into their daily practices and how they felt religion helped them manage their stress.

Psychometric Scales: Students also completed psychological scales that measured their coping strategies, such as how they used their faith to deal with stress. These scales helped to understand the impact of religious practices on students' emotional well-being.

Data Analysis Techniques: For the quantitative data collected from the surveys, the responses were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. This means we looked at the basic numbers—such as the average stress levels, how many students engage in religious

practices, and how often they do so. We also used simple comparisons to see if there were any noticeable differences in stress levels between students who practiced religion and those who did not.

For the *qualitative data* from the interviews and case studies, we identified *common themes that* appeared in students' responses. This was done by looking for repeated ideas or experiences, such as how students describe using prayer or attending religious services to cope with stress. These themes helped provide a deeper understanding of how religious practices might support mental well-being.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process. Before participating, all students gave informed consent, meaning they understood the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The study ensured confidentiality, meaning no personal information was shared or used in the results.

Additionally, students were made aware of available *mental health resources* in case they felt distressed during the study. This was particularly important because the study focused on stress and anxiety, and the well-being of participants was a top priority.

By adhering to these ethical principles, the research will ensure the safety and well-being of participants while providing valuable insights into the role of religious

practices in managing stress and anxiety among Nigerian tertiary students.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the role of religious practices in reducing stress and anxiety among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The results align with existing literature, highlighting the significant impact of religious involvement on mental well-being. First, the data reveals that 60% of students experience high levels of stress and 55% face anxiety, which is consistent with findings from previous studies. According to Olsson et al. (2023), stress and anxiety are prevalent among university students globally, often linked to academic pressures and social challenges. This study further indicates that students who engage in religious practices show lower levels of stress and anxiety, which corroborates the work of Tisdell et al. (2022), who found that religious practices, such as prayer and meditation, can significantly mitigate stress by providing emotional support and a sense of community.

The high percentage of students involved in religious activities, 78%, with Christian students at 80% and Muslim students at 75%—supports the idea that religious participation is a common coping mechanism in Nigeria. This finding aligns with research by Ibrahim and Ojo (2022), who highlighted that religion serves as a powerful source of resilience, particularly in societies where faith plays a central role in daily life. Their study showed that students engaged in regular religious practices

reported higher levels of emotional stability and greater coping abilities during stressful periods. Furthermore, the study's recommendation to integrate religious support into student wellness programs is supported by similar recommendations in recent literature. Smith et al. (2021) argue that incorporating faith-based interventions into mental health programs can help address the psychological needs of students, particularly in countries with a strong religious culture like Nigeria. Such interventions are suggested to provide a holistic approach to mental health, combining emotional, spiritual, and community support to foster resilience. In contrast, the study also found that 30% of students do not engage in any form of religious activity, which may point to a gap in available support systems for non-religious students. This aligns with the findings of Sulaimon et al. (2023), who noted that students who lack access to spiritual or religious coping mechanisms might experience heightened stress, suggesting the need for diverse support systems within student wellness programs. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of religious practices in mitigating stress and anxiety among Nigerian tertiary students. Incorporating religious support into mental health initiatives could be an effective strategy for improving students' overall well-being and academic performance.

There is a consensus between this and previous studies undertaken by other researchers as discussed previously. The

findings of the study are carefully articulated. The survey results revealed that *a significant number of tertiary students in Nigeria experience high levels of stress and anxiety*. Over **60% of the participants** reported feeling stressed frequently due to academic pressures, financial challenges, and social concerns. Anxiety levels were also high, with 55% of *students* indicating that they often felt anxious, particularly during exam periods and in response to personal challenges. This highlights the commonality of mental health struggles among students in Nigerian universities. The study found that *religious practices* play an important role in students' lives, with **78% of participants** reporting that they engage in some form of religious activity regularly. These activities varied across religious groups but included practices such as *prayer, meditation, attending religious services, and reading religious texts*. For example, 80% of *Christian students* attended church services regularly, while **75% of Muslim students** engaged in daily prayers. Non-religious students, however, reported lower engagement in religious practices, with only **30%** participating in any spiritual activities.

For students who engaged in religious practices, the *coping strategies* were found to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety. Many students reported feeling *comforted* and *supported* by their faith, particularly in difficult times. *Prayer* was the most common religious coping strategy, with students explaining that it helped them **to** feel more at peace and regain a sense of

control over their stress. *Meditation* and *scripture reading* also emerged as beneficial practices, providing students with a sense of inner calm and a structured way to process their emotions. Students involved in religious groups and fellowships also mentioned that these communities provided *emotional support* and a sense of belonging, which further helped them cope with stress. When comparing religious and non-religious students, the data showed that *religious students* generally reported *lower levels of stress and anxiety* than their non-religious counterparts. *Religious coping mechanisms* seemed to provide students with *a sense of purpose and support* that helped buffer the negative effects of stress. In contrast, non-religious students, who did not have access to the same community support or coping strategies, tended to report higher levels of anxiety, especially in situations of academic pressure or personal crises. While religious coping strategies were generally helpful, several challenges were identified. Some students noted that their religious coping could lead to *fatalism*, where they believed that *prayer alone* could solve all problems, without taking proactive steps to address their challenges. This mindset sometimes prevented them from seeking *professional mental health support* when needed. Additionally, *religious extremism* was mentioned by a small group of students, who reported that extreme religious views sometimes added *extra pressure* or led to unhealthy guilt when they failed to meet religious expectations. These issues demonstrate that while religious practices

can be a source of strength, they can also have negative consequences if not approached in a balanced and healthy way.

The findings suggest that *religious practices* can be an important part of student mental health support systems, but there is a need for *careful integration*. Universities could consider *collaborating with religious leaders* and faith-based organizations to offer students more opportunities for *religious coping* alongside *professional mental health resources*. Programs could be designed that promote *spiritual well-being* while also encouraging students to seek *counseling services* when necessary. Creating a *holistic approach* to mental health that respects students' faith while providing them with access to mental health professionals could improve their overall well-being and academic performance. These findings emphasize the importance of religious practices as moderators of stress and anxiety among Nigerian tertiary students, highlighting both the benefits and limitations of religious coping strategies. The integration of these practices into comprehensive mental health support systems could offer a more inclusive approach to student well-being.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of religious practices in moderating stress and anxiety among tertiary students in Nigeria. The key findings indicate that a significant proportion of students in Nigerian higher education institutions experience high levels

of stress and anxiety, with academic pressure, financial difficulties, and social challenges being the primary stressors. Students who engaged in religious practices such as prayer, scripture reading, and fellowship reported lower levels of stress and anxiety, suggesting that religious coping mechanisms offer psychological relief and support. However, while religious practices were generally effective in managing stress, challenges such as fatalism, religious extremism, and the lack of professional intervention were also identified. These challenges underscore the importance of a balanced approach that integrates religious practices with professional mental health care. The findings have important implications for both policy and practice in Nigerian higher education institutions. Given the centrality of religion in students' lives, universities should **consider incorporating religious practices** as part of their mental health support systems. This could involve *faith-based counseling services* that respect students' religious beliefs while providing access to professional mental health care. Institutions could also encourage *peer support groups* where students can engage in collective religious practices like prayer or scripture study to create a supportive community. Additionally, universities could *train counselors* to recognize the importance of religion in students' coping mechanisms and equip them with the skills to integrate religious and psychological approaches to support student well-being.

Furthermore, university policies could prioritize the *integration of mental health programs* that offer *holistic support*, combining both secular and religious coping strategies. This approach would ensure that students feel comfortable seeking help, regardless of their religious affiliations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- 1) Institutions should provide counseling services that incorporate religious coping strategies, allowing students to access both psychological and spiritual support.
- 2) Institutions should organize stress-relief programs that combine *secular and religious coping mechanisms*, such as workshops on meditation, prayer, and mindfulness.
- 3) Forming peer support networks that engage students in religious activities, such as prayer groups, Bible study sessions, and group worship, could offer emotional and psychological support, helping students manage stress in a community setting.
- 4) Institutions should also raise awareness about the potential limitations, such as *fatalism and over-reliance on religious intervention*, and encourage students to seek professional mental health care when needed.
- 5) Mental health professionals in universities should receive training on how to incorporate religious perspectives into their practice,

especially when working with students from diverse religious backgrounds.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigerian universities can foster an

environment where students can effectively manage stress and anxiety through a combination of religious and psychological support, promoting overall well-being and academic success.

REFERENCES

- 1) Adebayo, R. T. (2023). Faith and resilience: The role of religious practices in coping with life's challenges. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 20(1), 55-72.
- 2) Adekeye, O. A., Salami, A. O., & Adeyemi, S. T. (2022). Coping with stress: The role of religious beliefs and practices among Nigerian students. *Journal of African Mental Health*, 18(2), 45-60.
- 3) Adekunle, P. M., & Yusuf, S. K. (2021). Religion as a coping mechanism among Nigerian university students: An empirical study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 15(2), 78-92.
- 4) Adeniyi, D. (2023). The mental health of Nigerian tertiary students: Prevalence and predictors of stress and anxiety. *Journal of Mental Health in Education*, 15(4), 98-112.
- 5) Adewuyi, M. O., & Salami, D. R. (2021). Understanding student anxiety: The impact of academic stress and coping mechanisms in Nigerian universities. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 15(1), 78-94.
- 6) Ajayi, T., & Oduwole, O. (2022). Religion and coping strategies in Nigerian universities: The role of prayer and meditation. *Journal of Psychological Studies*, 18(3), 45-60.
- 7) American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: APA.
- 8) American Psychological Association. (2022). *Stress and anxiety: Understanding their impact and management strategies*. APA Press.
- 9) Balogun, T. K. (2023). Faith and mental health: Investigating the influence of religious engagement on psychological well-being among university students. *Nigerian Journal of Psychology*, 22(1), 33-49.
- 10) Eze, C. N. (2022). Cultural and religious influences on youth behavior in Nigeria: A sociological perspective. *West African Journal of Sociology*, 18(3), 102-118.
- 11) Eze, I. (2022). Stress and mental health among Nigerian students: The influence of socio-economic factors. *African Journal of Psychology*, 7(2), 23-35.
- 12) Ibitoye, F. A., & Kolawole, O. J. (2022). Religious coping and stress management: A case study of university students in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(3), 56-72.
- 13) Ibrahim, A., & Ojo, O. (2022). Religion as a coping mechanism for stress among Nigerian university students. *Journal of Psychological Studies*, 45(3), 210-220.
- 14) Koenig, H. G. (2020). *Religion and mental health: Research and clinical applications*. Academic Press.
- 15) Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer.
- 16) Ogunyemi, A. O., & Akinwale, T. J. (2023). Religion and youth development: Understanding the impact of religious

- practices on Nigerian students. *Journal of African Educational Research*, 12(2), 45-61.
- 17) Oladipo, S. E., & Ogunleye, T. O. (2021). Religious coping strategies and mental health outcomes among Nigerian students. *West African Journal of Psychology*, 16(2), 89-102.
 - 18) Olaniyi, K. O. (2022). Coping with academic pressure: A study of Nigerian university students' strategies. *African Journal of Education and Development*, 10(4), 89-105.
 - 19) Olsson, C., Dahlberg, L., & Nilsson, S. (2023). Mental health challenges among university students: A global perspective. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35(2), 179-196.
 - 20) Oluwaseun, S., & Ojo, O. (2021). Spirituality and well-being: The impact of religious practices on mental health in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology*, 11(2), 76-90.
 - 21) Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, and practice*. Guilford Press.
 - 22) Parker, R. J., Coopersmith, M., & Parker, D. J. (2022). Understanding stress and anxiety in university students: A review of factors and strategies. *International Journal of Education Psychology*, 21(3), 123-140.
 - 23) Smith, J. A., Johnson, E. R., & Williams, C. S. (2023). Religion and mental health: A cross-cultural comparison of stress-coping mechanisms in higher education. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35(4), 454-470.
 - 24) Smith, M. T., Miller, E., & Roberts, L. (2021). The role of faith-based interventions in student mental health: A review of best practices. *Journal of College Counseling*, 24(4), 315-329.
 - 25) Sulaimon, A., Lawal, I., & Umeh, P. (2023). The impact of religion on coping strategies among Nigerian tertiary students: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Religious Studies and Mental Health*, 10(1), 45-59.
 - 26) Tisdell, C., Lopez, J., & Wilson, R. (2022). Religion and stress reduction: A psychological perspective. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 69(3), 289-298.
 - 27) World Health Organization. (2023). *Mental health and well-being in higher education: A global perspective*. WHO Publications.