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**PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MENTAL HEALTH**

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**ABSTRACT**

The recent outbreak of the coronavirus has added more challenges to the inadequate infrastructure Nigerian educational system. The high mortality rate, fast spread and the emergency protocols implemented in combat coronavirus in different countries including Nigeria, led to an increase in the rates of mental health problems in individuals especially university students.The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of the pandemic on mental health and academic performance of university students in Nigeria.

Beck's cognitive theory of depression and psychoanalytic theory of anxiety guided the study. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 232 Nigerian university students. They were recruited to participate in the survey through purposive sampling after completing an online screening questionnaire to determine their eligibility. The instruments used were the hospital anxiety and depression scale and perceived stress scales. The data were analyzed using paired samples t-test, chi-square independent test, and zero order correlation, at p≤0.05.

About 60% of the participants were females. There was significant difference in anxiety (t(231) = -8.38), depression (t(231) = -7.19) and perceived stress (t(231) = -3.52) , after COVID-19 than before. Anxiety (x = 9.28±4.37), depression (x = 6.90±3.92), and perceived stress (x = 23.43±5.48) significantly increased after COVID-19 than before. There was a significant relationship between university status and post COVID-19 CGPA [*x*2 = 33.42; P<.00]. Post COVID-19 CGPA with the highest prevalence was 4.0 – 4.5 and was highest among participants in private universities (24.1%) compared with their counterparts in public universities (3.4%).

Anxiety, depression, perceived stress, and academic performance of Nigerian university undergraduates were impacted by COVID-19. It is recommended that psychological interventions for coping with sudden pandemics be developed and administered periodically to students.