

Mental Health Concepts and Academic Apathy Among Undergraduate Students. The Case of Upper Eastern Region in Kenya

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Abstract

The study sought to examine the relationship between mental health concepts and academic apathy among undergraduate students in public universities in the Upper Eastern region of Kenya. It was informed by the need to contribute in bridging the existing gap with regard to information on relationship between mental health concepts and academic apathy among university students. The study adopted descriptive cross sectional survey and correlational research designs. Stratified sampling was used to select 380 undergraduate students while 8 student counsellors and 4 deans of students were selected purposively from study locale. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data from sampled respondents. Data was collected from 379 undergraduate students, 8 student counsellors and 4 deans of students giving the study a return rate of 99.74%. Qualitative data obtained was analyzed thematically while quantitative data was cleaned, coded and analyzed descriptively and inferentially with the aid of the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30.0 computer software. Frequency and percentages were used to describe the existing relationship between the variables while hypothesis was tested using regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive statistics established high prevalence of mental health challenges including academic stress, depression and anxiety as well as academic apathy among undergraduate student in public universities. Inferentially, the study established a a positive and significant relationship between stress and academic apathy, depression and academic apathy, anxiety and academic apathy as well as mental health challenges and academic apathy. It is therefore recommended that University management enhance provision of resources and trained as well as experienced personnel to effectively provide mental health support within the institutions. They should also consider expanding access to quality referral resources and programs for advanced psychological and psychiatric support more severe mental health cases.

Keywords: mental health concepts, academic stress, depression, anxiety, academic apathy

1. Introduction

Mental health concepts are central to understanding patterns of engagement and disengagement among undergraduate students in higher education. Psychological states such as stress, depression, and anxiety influence students' emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, and behavioural participation within academic environments. Empirical evidence increasingly suggests that these mental health challenges shape the emergence and persistence of academic apathy among university students. Kenyan studies show that despite the growing burden of mental health challenges, help-seeking behaviour remains low due to stigma, limited mental health literacy, and under-resourced student support systems within public universities (Otieno *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, (Mugotitsa *et al.*, 2025), reveals that existing Kenyan scholarship provides limited empirical explanation of how mental health challenges translate into sustained academic disengagement, and how contextual and behavioural pathways within public universities shape this process.

Moreover, mental health is progressively viewed as a primary determinant of learning, functioning, and involvement in the life of institutions, and the world frameworks acknowledge mental health as a positive state that allows individuals to handle their stressors and interact meaningfully with their environments (WHO, 2021). Modern literature demonstrates that individual vulnerability is not the only factor determining mental health outcomes, but institutional structures, learning environments, and power relations contribute to recognition and access to support (Kalocsai Agrawal, Bie, Bender, Bellissimo, Berkhout, & Soklaridis, 2024). In the academic community, academic stress, learning disruption, and decreased relational support have further complicated the psychological stress among students, making mental health one of the central issues in educational research and practice (Idris, Zulkipli, Abdul-mumin, Ahma, Mitha, Rahman & Naing, 2021). Based on this evidence, the current study conceptualises mental health based on three well-tested predictors, including stress, depression, and anxiety,

which are typically measured by standardised tests, like the DASS-21 (Billington, Gibson, Fogg, Lahmar & Cameronl., 2022).

Stress is defined as a psychological, physiological state that occurs when an individual feel that the academic, social, or environmental demands are so high that they are beyond his or her coping ability (Bosse, Clark & Arnold, 2021). The stressors commonly found in the university environment include pressure of work, demands on assessment, time, financial stress, and uncertainty about academic expectations (Idris et al., 2021). Empirical research, based on the stress subscale of the DASS-21, has consistently indicated high levels of stress in undergraduates when instructional change and increased performance pressure are present (Billington et al., 2022). Educational research also suggests that stress becomes worse in learning settings with low relational support and no trauma-informed care, and thus its applicability as a primary mental health indicator in relation to academic functioning as stated by Bosse et al., (2021). Empirical evidence shows that students with high stress levels, depressed moods, or anxiousness tend to develop more apathetic learning orientations as emotional depletion and mental pressure disrupt long-term academic engagement (Agnafors et al., 2021). These trends have since been further exacerbated by post-pandemic upheavals to learning arrangements and the relationship between students and institutions, leading to more long-lasting disengagement in undergraduates.

Depression is described as constant low mood, loss of interest or pleasure, cognitive exhaustion, sense of hopelessness, and psychological energy depletion, which worsen the ability to function every day and participate in learning (Billington et al., 2022). Depression is one of the most frequent causes of disability worldwide and it is especially common among college students, where empirical evidence has consistently shown that depressive symptoms are directly associated with low academic persistence, poor concentration, and withdrawal behaviors of academic pursuits as stated by Happell, Warner, Waks, O'Donovan, Manning, Doody and Biering, (2022). Standardised screening tools, including the DASS-21 and PHQ-9, provide evidence of a strong correlation between depression and impaired executive functioning, as well as between depression and waning academic engagement (Kalocsai et al., 2024). According to Billington et al., (2022), Chronic academic stress, social stress, and lack of accessibility levels to psychosocial support services tend to strengthen depressive symptomatology, increased behavioural disengagement, and affective dissociation with learning processes among undergraduates in universities

Anxiety is characterized by excessive worrying, increased physiological stimulation, the fear of failure, and lack of concentration, which, in combination, hinder the process of thinking and engaging in study as reported by Idris et al. (2021), making anxiety disorder one of the most widespread mental health problems in the world. The assessment of this condition in a university population is usually performed with the help of validated measures, such as the anxiety subscale of DASS-21 and the GAD-7 (Billington et al., 2022). Empirical data correlates academic anxiety with evaluation pressure, not knowing academic performance, and the sense of not having control over the performance requirements which result in avoidance behaviours and decreased engagement (Idris et al., 2021). Research on education also highlights the importance of socio economic backgrounds that are providing and positive, interpersonal relationships in learning contexts in reducing anxiety and maintaining psychological safety in universities and colleges (Happell et al., 2022, Doyon & Tsimonis, 2022). Likewise, Nawi et al., (2021). Notes that drug abuse has been resoundingly reported as a maladaptive coping mechanism to the academic load and emotional stress, and it serves as a behavioural process where stress, depression, and anxiety are projected out and maintained among university students.

1.1 Stress and Academic Apathy Among Undergraduate Students

Empirical research across the world shows a consistent pattern of academic stress impairing engagement of students and long-term academic performance. Dyrbye et al. (2020) carried out a multi-institutional cross-sectional study that included 4,402 medical students in various universities in the U.S. Based on validated burnout, mental health scales and multivariate logistic regression analysis, the research revealed that high stress and emotional exhaustion were significant predictors of serious thoughts of dropping out (Adjusted OR > 2.0, $p < 0.001$). Students with high levels of stress were more inclined to portray withdrawal behaviours and low commitment to their studies. Though academic apathy was not directly operationalised, the high correlation of stress with disengagement behaviours was an indirect empirical evidence of stress-induced apathetic orientations. Corroborating evidence can be attributed to Levenson (2024) in a study of the connection between anxiety, avoidance coping, and academic apathy of community college students, Maji et al. (2024) who used a sequential exploratory mixed design among engineering undergraduates in India, Yousif et al. (2022) in a cross-sectional survey of a group of undergraduate pharmacy students during the COVID-19 pandemic and Alkharj et al. (2024) in a survey of Saudi Arabian undergraduate nursing students using structural equation modelling (SEM). Altogether, these international sequential and mixed-methodological studies suggest that long-term academic stress is a strong predictor of disengagement, withdrawal behaviours, decreased effort, and poor emotional investment in learning.

Empirical studies in Africa show that academic stress is structurally constrained in higher education systems, with small resources, large student to lecturer ratios, and socio-economic pressures. Ogbeta (2022) in a quantitative study of 179 final year undergraduates in Delta State University, Nigeria employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Results indicated that academic resilience and emotional intelligence had a significant influence in academic performance (0.231, $p < .001$; 0.260, $p < .001$ respectively). Though it was not directly measured, weakening pathways of stress-related resilience imply that students with poor adaptive coping skills were susceptible to disengagement following exposure to stress. Similarly, Uleanya (2022) in a systematic review of rural universities in South Africa and Nigeria, found that the factors that created continuous stressors were poor infrastructure, academic malpractice, lecturer-student relational strain, and socio-economic disadvantage. The review summarised the available empirical evidence demonstrating that conditions of structural stress were behind the disengagement and dropout tendencies in rural African higher education institutions. Corroborating evidence can be attributed to Bantjes et al. (2021) who reported a high prevalence of depressive and stress symptoms agreeableness, which was associated with the behaviour of academic withdrawal and disengagement in a South African university mental health research systematic review. In the review, socio-economic inequality and under-resourced counselling systems were identified as contextual facilitants of disengagement brought about by stress. These researches all testify that stress in African settings is both psychological and structural, which enhances the possibility of disengagement and apathetic learning orientations.

In East Africa, Kaggwa et al. (2022) employed a cross-sectional study design to study more than 1,000 university students in Uganda with the help of standardized depression and stress screening measures. Regression analysis revealed that there was a significant prediction of less concentration and academic persistence with high levels of psychological distress ($p < .01$). Students with increased levels of distress were prone to report withdrawal behaviours and poor academic functioning. Similar survey techniques applied by Sikubwabo et al. (2024) to Rwandan undergraduates showed that low academic engagement greatly predicted academic pressure and lack of psychosocial support ($p < .05$). Students who were under persistent stress were less active in the learning activities. Such results show that academic involvement in East Africa is greatly affected by psychological strain caused by stress.

Studies done in Kenya have also illustrated higher stress levels among university students and related academic effects in Kenya. Chemutai and Catherine (2021) developed a quantitative study that focuses on non-academic stress among Kenyan undergraduates through the use of structured questionnaires and inferential statistics. Family obligations and financial pressures were emerged critical predictors of high stress levels ($p < .05$). Even though engagement was not measured directly, the study reported emotional instability and lack of academic attention in highly stressed students. Similar findings were reported by Onderi et al. (2024) in a survey study of stress among undergraduate students in Kenyan universities as well as Conrad, Wang'eri, and Muriithi (2023), in a correlational study among third-year undergraduates in Kenyan public universities. found a significant negative correlation between mental health challenges and academic engagement ($r < -.30$, $p < .01$). Elevated stress was associated with reduced participation and weakened academic involvement, suggesting a behavioural shift toward disengagement. Kenyan evidence demonstrates that academic stress is widespread and significantly associated with weakened academic functioning. However, existing studies largely focus on stress prevalence and general engagement rather than explicitly conceptualizing academic apathy as a multidimensional outcome.

Across global, African, East African, and Kenyan contexts, empirical studies employing regression analysis, structural equation modelling, mixed-method designs, and large-scale surveys consistently show that sustained academic stress significantly predicts reduced engagement, withdrawal behaviours, impaired concentration, and weakened emotional commitment to learning. Although few studies explicitly operationalize academic apathy, the behavioural, emotional, and cognitive consequences of chronic stress closely mirror its defining dimensions. This empirical pattern strengthens the theoretical proposition that sustained stress exposure among undergraduate students creates conditions under which academic apathy emerges as a maladaptive coping response.

1.2 Depression and Academic Apathy Among Undergraduate Students

Depression is one of the most common mental health challenge among undergraduate students in different parts of the world and has always been linked to poor academic performance, withdrawal and falling involvement. Symptoms of depression, such as ongoing low mood, anhedonia, mental exhaustion, hopelessness, and lack of motivation directly disrupt long-term effort, emotional commitment, and cognitive involvement in educational settings (World Health Organization, 2023). In the context of higher learning, depression is currently being understood not only as a clinical entity but also as a foreboding of disengagement patterns, which are equivalent to multidimensional academic apathy.

Globally, Fishman and Ashbaugh (2022) performed a quantitative investigation at a bilingual Canadian higher learning institution in which young adults were diagnosed with the aid of standardized neuropsychological testing, Beck Depression Inventory, and validated apathy measures. The study used regression and covariance to analyze

the study association between depressive symptoms, apathy, and executive functioning. Although a significant number of the participants were in the apathetic group, apathy, as well as depression, did not have a significant impact on predicting deficits in executive functioning after controlling the statistics. Negatively valenced autobiographical recall and distorted emotional processing patterns were, however, related significantly to depression. The results indicated that depression does not necessarily have an immediate negative impact on intellectual performance; but rather orientates affective attitude to learning materials. This affective disorientation, with a decrease in positive affect and an increase in negative bias, resembling the affective disengagement which is the main feature of academic apathy. Cui et al. (2024) in a multi-wave longitudinal design analysed cross-lagged panel modelling of a sample of over 800 first and second year university students to understand the relationships between depressive symptoms and academic engagement, and vice versa. Results showed that depressive symptoms were strong predictors of the academic engagement declines between measurements waves (3 = -0.30, $p = .01$), but the opposite relationship was less strong and less stable. This chronological order offers very solid empirical evidence to the idea of depression as a predisposing factor to permanent disengagement in academic life. Depressive symptoms create the circumstances in which academic apathy would be solidified in the long run by gradually undermining emotional bonding and behavioural involvement. Other researchers with similar observation include Dyrbye et al. (2020) in a logistic regression modelling to identify the relationships between depression and academic outcomes and Rijal (2025) in a phenomenological design and samples of undergraduates in post-pandemic learning settings. These studies explained academic assignments as being meaningless and emotionally impersonal instead of momentarily overwhelming. The emotional and cognitive essence of academic apathy is manifested in such lasting detachment.

In African institutions of higher learning, Wagner et al. (2022) carried out a cross-sectional study that involved South African first-year university students based on the PHQ-9 screening data associated with the institutional progression records. Logistic regression analysis used showed that students who exhibited moderate to severe symptoms of depression were two to three times more likely to fail progression requirements ($OR > 2.0$, $p < .05$). The impaired academic progression was associated with low persistence and consistent lack of engagement, which are behavioural patterns that are closely related to academic apathy. Similarly, Bantjes et al. (2021) in a systematic literature review of mental health topics in South African students, reported high rates of depressive symptoms and significant correlations with dropout intentions as well as less academic engagement. It was noted in the review that institutional stigma and scanty counselling support extended untreated depression thereby enhancing the probability that psychological distress will show in form of persistent disengagement. Corroborating findings were reported by Ogbeta, (2022) who used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) on 179 undergraduates in Nigeria who were in their final year, findings revealing that lower level of psychological resources was a very important factor that deteriorated the academic performance (0.231, $p < .001$). Despite the fact that the research failed to separate the role of depression, low psychological strength in situations of emotional distress makes individuals more susceptible to disengagement patterns, which resemble those of apathy.

Academic withdrawal is always linked to depressive symptomatology in students of universities in East Africa. Kaggwa et al. (2022) carried out a cross-sectional research study involving more than 1,000 Ugandan university students on depression screening through validated tools with multivariate regression modelling. Higher depressive scores were significant predictors of poor concentration levels, less academic perseverance and more withdrawal behaviour ($p < .01$). Such are the results of cognitive and behavioural disengagement. Likewise, Sikubwabo et al. (2024) studied Rwandan undergraduates, with negative correlations worth $p < .05$ between depressive symptoms and academic involvement ($p < .05$). Students with elevated levels of psychological distress indicated less participation in the classroom and a lack of cognitive engagement. The depressive symptoms thus act as a destabilizing agent of the other sustaining engagement in East African institutions with growing enrolments and limited supportive infrastructure. The Kenyan evidence is reflective of the regional and global trends.

Despite the fact that this was previously highlighted, the level of prevalence emphasizes on the severity of depressive burden in Kenyan higher education. In a cross-sectional study of 358 participants at the Technical University of Mombasa via standardized depression scales, Otieno et al. (2024) reported high levels of depressive symptoms to be significantly related to academic pressure and financial stress. The inferential analyses revealed that high depressive scores predicted the low level of concentration and less academic engagement. Using the multivariate regression analysis among Kenyan undergraduates, the researchers (Mugotitsa et al., 2025) had to conclude that the depressive symptoms were significantly predictive of diminished sustained effort and concentration, especially in students at the beginning of their studies. This relationship was mediated by family support, which means that the lack of psychosocial buffers increases the risk of disengagement. Conrad, Wang'eri, and Muriithi (2023) revealed high negative relations between depression and academic engagement ($r < -0.30$, $p < .01$). High levels of depressive symptoms were related to poor classroom engagement and poor academic engagement-behaviour indicators of academic apathy. The longitudinal data enhances temporal association between depression and disengagement. A multi-wave longitudinal study on depressive symptoms and academic

engagement in first and second-year university students ($N > 800$) by Cui et al. (2024) demonstrated the interdependence of depressive symptoms and academic engagement at repeated measurement times. The cross-lagged panel modelling showed that depressive symptoms had a very strong predictive validity of later reductions in academic engagement ($\beta > -0.30$, $p < .01$), but there was lower predictive validity in the opposite direction. This time-lagging proves that depression acts as antecedent of chronic withdrawal in academic activity, which supports the thesis that depressive symptoms undermine over time the emotional and behavioural investment.

Across global, African, East African, and Kenyan contexts, empirical studies employing cross-sectional designs, longitudinal modelling, structural equation modelling, and regression analysis consistently demonstrate that depressive symptoms significantly predict reduced academic engagement, withdrawal behaviours, diminished persistence, and weakened emotional commitment to learning. Longitudinal evidence establishes depression as a temporal precursor to disengagement, while cross-sectional findings confirm its strong association with academic withdrawal patterns. Although few studies explicitly operationalise academic apathy as a multidimensional construct, the behavioural, emotional, and cognitive effects of depression align closely with its defining characteristics. Depression progressively weakens emotional attachment, reduces behavioural participation, and limits cognitive investment in academic tasks, thereby creating conditions under which sustained academic apathy emerges.

1.3 Anxiety and Academic Apathy Among Undergraduate Students

Anxiety can be considered one of the most common psychological disorders of undergraduate students, and it is also well-known that it has a disruptive effect on academic functioning. In University level, anxiety is portrayed in the form of being overly worried, fear of being judged, increased physiological arousal, and avoidance behaviour which all disrupt focus, emotional control, and long term study. In its chronic form, anxiety disrupts the willingness of students to become actively involved in learning activities and predisposes them to academic apathy, especially in the forms of avoidance behaviour and cognitive withdrawal. The early signs of anxiety-related disengagement are found in empirical research carried out in the time frames of academic disruption. Nihayah, Sadnawi, and Naillayurraafidah, (2021) studied academic anxiety in students during the COVID pandemic and how uncertainty, the transition to online learning, and disrupted academic routines were also known to exacerbate the experience of anxiety. The study in a quantitative survey design reported that there was a high level of academic anxiety defined by the fear of failure, worry over the exam, and a low degree of confidence about academic performance.

Despite the fact that the research did not measure academic apathy directly, its results indicate that anxiety undermines the feeling of control and ability in students, which is conceptually similar to emotional disengagement and withdrawal of academic endeavors. The behavioral implications of anxiety are also manifested in the studies which explore the pathways of burnout and disengagement. Kordzanganeh et al. (2021) examined the connection between time management, academic burnout, test anxiety, and self-efficacy in university students. Through mediation analysis, the research was able to show that test anxiety was a significant mediating variable between poor time management and academic burnout and low self-efficacy enhanced the relationship. The exhaustion and disengagement of burnout are closely related to academic apathy, especially with respect to less persistence and emotional aloofness. These results suggest that anxiety is not merely a direct source of emotional pressure but also a process by which organizational and self-regulatory failures are converted to disengage academic performance.

A more subtle evidence of anxiety and engagement is presented by Mou, Zhuang, Gao, Zhou, Lu, Gao and Zhao (2022), who studied social anxiety and engagement among college students with a cohort of over 500 individuals and serial mediation analysis. The research aimed to describe the effects of social anxiety on academic engagement using behavioral and lifestyle mechanisms. Findings indicated the presence of a strong negative direct impact of social anxiety on academic engagement, along with strong indirect impacts via social media addiction and low sleep quality. These mediators accounted for almost half of the entire impact of social anxiety on engagement. As academic apathy is the opposite of engagement, the given findings give significant empirical evidence to the argument that anxiety is one of the causes of disengagement via avoidance behaviors and impaired daily functioning. The report also shows that anxiety does not usually operate in isolation but has an interaction with behavioral patterns that erode academic participation over time.

The conceptual perspectives also add more knowledge on anxiety as a disabling and an activating emotional state. Considering the leadership of youth climate-strikes, Bright and Eames (2022) emphasize that anxiety may drive action but requires the perceived agency and purpose. But in academic situations where there are no supportive structures, the same anxiety will tend to lead to paralysis, avoidance, and disengagement. This difference is essential since it highlights the fact that anxiety does not necessarily elicit apathy; instead, its influence on academics varies based on the situational resources and perceived control. Withdrawal and academic apathy will be even more likely in situations where the anxiety is uncontrolled and maintained.

The Kenyan evidence supports the role of anxiety in academic engagement. Conrad, Wang'eri and Muriithi, (2023) investigated mental health predictors of academic engagement in Kenyan university students and discovered that

anxiety was an indicator of less academic engagement. The study, based on a quantitative design, proved that students who noted to be more anxious showed poorer participation, less emotional engagement, and commitment to academic activities. These results directly give contextual evidence to associate anxiety with lack of engagement in academic orientations in Kenya in the public university system especially in a setting that presents high academic stressors and low psychosocial support.

The body of empirical research illustrates that anxiety is a crucial psychological determinant of academic involvement and lack of such involvement among undergraduate students. In a wide range of contexts, anxiety has been found to forecast avoidance behavior, burnout, diminished self-regulation, and diminished engagement, which are closely related to academic apathy. Although anxiety may under some circumstances lead to adaptive action, persistent and uncontrolled anxiety in the academic environment is more likely to be a cause of emotional withdrawal and less cognitive investment. This literature gave a convincing reason to investigate anxiety as a mental factor predictive of academic apathy in the current study especially among students who are going through increased academic demands in the Kenyan public universities. The study thus sought to examine the relationship between mental health concepts and academic apathy among undergraduate students in public universities in the Upper Eastern region of Kenya.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Cognitive Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for explaining how psychological processes, environmental, behavioral and structural constraints interact to shape academic apathy among university students. Cognitive theory posits that dysfunctional thinking causes psychological distress leading to mental disorders conversely Self-Determination Theory elucidates how frustration of basic psychological needs undermines students' engagement and emotional connection to learning under conditions of psychological distress, combined, the two theories offer a coherent lens for understanding how mental health challenges are translated into sustained academic disengagement through both internal psychological mechanisms and externally induced behavioral pathways.

2.1 Cognitive Theory

This study is anchored on Cognitive Theory as the foundational framework for explaining mental health challenges among undergraduate students. Cognitive Theory, primarily associated with Aaron T. Beck (1967) posits that psychological distress—including stress, depression, and anxiety emerges from maladaptive cognitive processes rather than solely from external events (Beck, 1976; Beck & Haigh, 2014). The theory argues that individuals interpret experiences through underlying cognitive schemas, automatic thoughts, and belief systems, which shape emotional and behavioural responses. When these cognitive structures become distorted or negatively biased, individuals are more likely to experience persistent psychological distress. Within higher education contexts, students' interpretations of academic demands, interpersonal challenges, and socioeconomic strain play a decisive role in determining whether such experiences generate adaptive coping or psychological dysfunction.

Cognitive Theory rests on the assumption that cognition precedes emotion and behaviour. It proposes that distorted thinking patterns such as catastrophizing, overgeneralization, personalization, and negative self-evaluation intensify stress reactions and contribute to depressive and anxious symptomatology (Beck & Haigh, 2014). For example, a student who interprets a poor academic grade as evidence of global incompetence rather than a specific performance setback is more likely to experience hopelessness and reduced motivation. Similarly, students facing financial strain may develop maladaptive core beliefs about inadequacy or failure, amplifying anxiety and depressive symptoms beyond the objective stressor itself. In this way, Cognitive Theory explains how identical external pressures can produce different psychological outcomes depending on cognitive appraisal processes.

A major strength of Cognitive Theory lies in its extensive empirical validation across clinical and educational research. Meta-analytic studies consistently demonstrate that maladaptive cognitive patterns significantly predict stress, anxiety, and depression among adolescents and young adults (Hofmann et al., 2012). In university populations, cognitive distortions have been shown to mediate the relationship between academic stressors and psychological distress, reinforcing the central role of cognitive appraisal in mental health outcomes. The theory also provides clearly operationalizable constructs—such as automatic thoughts, dysfunctional attitudes, and cognitive schemas that enable systematic measurement within empirical research designs.

In the context of this study, Cognitive Theory provides a robust explanatory foundation for understanding how mental health challenges develop among undergraduate students in public universities. Stress, depression, and anxiety are conceptualized not merely as reactions to academic or socioeconomic pressures, but as outcomes of maladaptive cognitive processing of those pressures. Socioeconomic disadvantage, interpersonal conflict, and academic demands serve as activating events; however, it is students' cognitive interpretations of these events that determine the intensity and persistence of psychological distress. By grounding mental health variables in Cognitive Theory, the study emphasizes internal appraisal mechanisms as the psychological pathway through

which structural and relational stressors influence emotional stability.

Despite its strengths, Cognitive Theory has been critiqued for emphasizing intrapersonal processes while giving comparatively less attention to structural and environmental determinants of stress (Beck & Haigh, 2014). Critics argue that focusing on cognition alone risks underestimating the material realities of poverty, institutional constraints, and systemic inequality that shape student experiences. Nevertheless, when applied within an integrated framework that acknowledges structural conditions, Cognitive Theory remains highly valuable for explaining the psychological mechanisms underlying stress, depression, and anxiety. Within this study, Cognitive Theory anchors the independent mental health constructs—stress, depression, and anxiety—by explaining how distorted or maladaptive cognitive appraisals intensify psychological distress among undergraduate students. These mental health challenges are expected to influence academic functioning through downstream effects on motivation, concentration, and emotional regulation. The theory therefore provides the psychological foundation upon which the subsequent explanatory framework for academic apathy will build.

2.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory, (Ryan & Deci, 2020) was developed through combination of many min theories. The theory posits that academic apathy can be understood as a multidimensional result that can be explained through specific psychological, social and structural factors. In the simplest terms, the Determination Theory assumes that behaviors and outcomes are not generated by chance; instead, they are systematically generated by interacting determinants functioning at various levels -individual, interpersonal, institutional and structural (McLeroy et al., 1988; Solar & Irwin, 2010). In the learning environment, academic engagement or disengagement is thus not a mere result of student capacity or motivation, but it is the result of inter-dependent psychological conditions, interpersonal relations, and socioeconomic statuses.

The so-called academic apathy, which is conceptualized in this study as behavioural withdrawal, emotional detachment, and weakened cognitive engagement is therefore thought of as an outcome of definite determinants as opposed to a deficit inherent to students. From their explanation of an environment that encourages thrive of three needs namely autonomy, competence and relatedness is ideal for psychological well-being. Autonomy concerns a sense ownership in one's actions and being self-directed, competence concerns feelings of mastery, succeeding, achieving and opportunities for growth and finally relatedness concerns a sense of belonging and connection which is facilitated by provision of respect and caring. Thwarting any of these three basic needs is seen as damaging to motivation hence causing psychological distress. According to SDT's analysis of educational settings is primarily focused on to the extent to which they meet or frustrate these needs which to this study is major cause of academic apathy

Self-Determination Theory presupposes that outcomes are conditioned by causal patterns of interrelationship between the antecedent conditions and observable behaviors. Academic apathy determinants in higher education environments might be mental health issues (stress, depression, and anxiety), socioeconomic deprivation, relationship disruption, and maladaptive coping strategies (substance use). These determinants do not act alone, but they have a cumulative effect of raising vulnerability of disengagement. As an example, psychological distress can be aggravated by socioeconomic strain leading to weakness in emotional regulation and motivation, culminating to withdrawal behaviour in academic activities. Determinant Theory thus enables the study of academic apathy to be viewed as a result of complex influences as compared to being a solitary psychological condition.

One of the strong points of Self Determination Theory is its ability to explain things at multiple levels. The framework brings together individual-level (cognitive appraisals, emotional regulation), interpersonal determinants (quality of relationships and social support) and structural determinants (economic inequality, institutional capacity). This integration is much in line with the ecological model of human development that stresses on the interaction between individuals and their surrounding in the determination of outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Academic apathy is not understood as indifference or a lack of discipline in the current research but a behavioural endpoint that occurs when there is continued exposure to negative determinants that gradually degrade the capacity to be engaged.

Empirical evidence of determinant-based models of disengagement is strong in the field of education. The research indicates a consistent finding that mental health variables are a significant predictor of academic withdrawal and a lack of participation (Dyrbye et al., 2020; Cui. 2024). Socioeconomic disadvantage has also been revealed to be a predictor of psychological distress and poor academic persistence (Richardson et al., 2022; Lund et al., 2022). Disengagement is further increased by interpersonal strain that compromises relatedness and emotional stability (Braithwaite et al., 2022). All these findings strongly support the idea that there are no single causes of academic apathy as there are instead interacting determinants.

Although it has its own strengths, Determinant Theory has been criticized to be at times imprecise on the magnitude

and direction of relationships between determinants. Critics say that multi-level determinant models may become descriptively large unless they are operationalized with the help of well-articulated pathways and measurable constructs (Solar & Irwin, 2010). However, with well-defined mediating and moderating relationships, such as those in the current study, the framework has a lot of analytical clarity. This research frames the dependent variable, academic apathy, using Determinant Theory in the understanding that the behavioural and psychological outcome is a result of distinguishable determinants. Mental health issues are the proximal psychological determinants; socioeconomic status and interpersonal relationships are structural and contextual determinants and maladaptive coping behaviours like drug abuse are behavioural moderators. The Determinant Theory adopted by the study places academic indifference in a well-organized causal context, which allows systematic analysis of how various factors interact to create a persistent disengagement in undergraduate learners in state university.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design and cross sectional research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine mental health challenges and academic apathy among undergraduate students. It focused on undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Education, Deans of Students and student Counsellors in public universities located in the Upper Eastern Region of Kenya. A sample of 392 respondents constituting 380 students, 8 student counsellors and 4 Dean of students were sampled from the study population of 19,954 to respond to the research instruments. Sample size was determined using Yamane's formula (Nakamura, et al., 2012). Data was collected using questionnaires for students while Interview schedules were used to collect data from student counsellors and Deans of students. Data obtained was edited, coded and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively based on study objectives. Qualitative data was analyzed in themes based on the study objectives. Inferential and descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 computer software.

4. Findings and Discussions

The study sought to examine the relationship between mental health concepts and academic apathy among undergraduate students in public universities in the Upper Eastern region of Kenya. Concepts assessed include stress, depression and anxiety. The four hypotheses formulated to facilitate the test of the relationship between aspects of mental health challenges and academic apathy included;

- i. There is no statistically significant relationship between stress and academic apathy among university student in upper eastern region, Kenya.
- ii. There is no statistically significant relationship between depression and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya.
- iii. There is no statistically significant relationship between anxiety and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya.
- iv. There is no statistically significant relationship between mental health challenges and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya.

A linear regression model was used to test the relationship between each of the aspects of mental health challenges and academic apathy.

4.1 Stress and Academic Apathy Among University Students

The study sought to assess general stress in relation to academic apathy among university students in upper Eastern region in Kenya.

Table 1. Stress Levels Among University Students

Statement	DAM	APS	APC	APV	Total
I found it hard to wind down	62.8	26.4	5.8	5.0	100.0
I tended to over-react to situations	67.0	10.3	12.7	10.0	100.0
I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	55.7	10.6	21.1	12.7	100.0
I found myself getting agitated	31.7	52.2	16.1	-	100.0
I found it difficult to relax	52.2	35.1	1.8	10.9	100.0
I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	25.9	48.0	15.3	10.8	100.0
I felt that I was rather touchy	28.0	51.2	10.0	10.8	100.0

Data in Table 1 show that a few students find it hard to wind down (10.8%), tend to over-react to situations (22.7%), feel that they are using a lot of nervous energy (33.8%) and find themselves getting agitated (16.1%). Further, less than a third of the students confessed that they find it difficult to relax (12.7%), was intolerant of anything that kept them from getting on with what they were doing (26.1%) and feel that they were rather touchy (20.8%). Finding illustrated that about one in five students (20.4%) felt that they experience stress. The study thus proceeded to establish the relationship between stress levels and academic apathy. Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2. Relationship Between Stress and Academic Apathy (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE	F	Sig.
1	.935	.875	.875	.34193	2637.627	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stress

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Apathy

Information in Table 2 presents finding on the correlation between the observed and predicted values of academic apathy (dependent variable). Findings imply that 87.5% of the total variance in academic apathy ($R^2=0.875$) could be attributed to stress. This observation was found to be statistically significant, $F(1,377) = 2637.627$, $p<0.001$. Table 3 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 3. Relationship Between Stress and Academic Apathy (Regression Coefficient)

Model	Unstand. Coefficient		Stand. Coefficient		Sig.
	B	SE	Beta	t	
Constant	.009	.044		.199	.842
Stress	.950	.018	.935	51.358	.000

From Table 3, the following regression model was established

$$\text{Academic Apathy} = .009 + 0.950X \quad P=0.000$$

Where X = Stress

$$\beta_0 = 0.009, \beta_1 = 0.950$$

The regression constant shows that when the independent variable (stress) is constant at zero, academic apathy would be positive (0.009) but insignificant implying that academic apathy would be insignificantly low. Findings illustrates that academic apathy would increase by 0.950 with every unit increase in stress, this observation being significant ($t=51.358$, $p<0.001$). Findings thus show that there exists a positive and significant relationship between stress and academic apathy. Therefore, the formulated sub-hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between stress and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya was rejected. In India, Maji et al. (2024) used a sequential exploratory mixed design among engineering undergraduates. The qualitative step included in-depth interviews on the sources of stress, and then the analysis of the survey in terms of the structural equation modelling. The negative relationship between academic stress and academic engagement was statistically significant ($p < .01$). Students who indicated a heavy workload pressure and anxiety about making performance reflected less involvement and depleting effort, which reflected fundamental behavioural and emotional aspects of academic apathy. Likewise, Yousif et al. (2022) used a cross-sectional survey research design on a group of undergraduate pharmacy students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 90 percent of students rated moderate to high levels of stress scales and descriptive and inferential statistics. Impaired concentration, emotional exhaustion, and worry about the exam were also found to be significantly related to stress ($p < .05$). These emotional and cognitive disturbances are in agreement with the mechanisms that underlie academic apathy, especially cognitive disengagement.

4.2 Depression and Academic Apathy Among University Students

The study sought to assess general depression in relation to academic apathy among university students in upper Eastern region in Kenya. Table 4 presents the descriptive findings.

Table 4. Depression among University Students

Statement	DAM	APS	APC	APV	Total
I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	59.9	29.0	5.8	5.3	100.0
I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	50.9	11.9	16.4	20.8	100.0
I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	44.9	16.3	38.8	-	100.0
I felt down-hearted and blue	55.9	28.0	-	16.1	100.0
I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	44.1	35.1	-	20.8	100.0
I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	55.1	-	17.9	27.0	100.0
I felt that life was meaningless	73.4	15.8	-	10.8	100.0

Information obtained show that less than a third of the sampled students couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all (11.1%) and felt down-hearted and blue (16.1%) while more than a third found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things (37.2%) and felt that they had nothing to look forward to (38.8%). Similarly, about one in five was unable to become enthusiastic about anything (20.8%), less than a half felt they weren't worth much as a person (44.9%) and about one in five felt that life was meaningless (10.8%). Results obtained illustrated that about a quarter of the students sampled (25.7%) experience depression. The study thus proceeded to establish the relationship between depression levels and academic apathy. Table 5 presents the findings.

Table 5. Relationship Between Depression and Academic Apathy (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE	F	Sig.
1	.924	.854	.854	.36899	2211.680	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Depression

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Apathy

Results in Table 5 presents finding on the correlation between the observed and predicted values of academic apathy (dependent variable). Findings imply that 85.4% of the total variance in academic apathy ($R^2=0.854$) could be attributed to depression. This observation was found to be statistically significant, $F(1,377) = 2211.680$, $p<0.001$. Table 6 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 6. Relationship Between Depression and Academic Apathy (Regression Coefficient)

Model	Unstand. Coefficient		Stand. Coefficient		
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	.085	.047		1.822	.069
Stress	.941	.020	.924	47.029	.000

From Table 6, the following regression model was established

$$\text{Academic Apathy} = 0.085 + 0.941X \quad P=0.000$$

Where $X = \text{Depression}$

$$\beta_0 = 0.085, \beta_1 = 0.941$$

The regression constant shows that when the independent variable (depression) is constant at zero, academic apathy would be positive (0.085) but insignificant implying that academic apathy would be insignificantly low. Findings illustrates that academic apathy would increase by 0.941 with every unit increase in depression, this observation being significant ($t=47.029$, $p<0.001$). Findings thus show that there exists a positive and significant relationship between depression and academic apathy. Therefore, the formulated sub-hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between depression and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya was rejected. In a multi-wave longitudinal design, Cuiet al, (2024) analysed cross-lagged panel modelling in a sample of over 800 first-second year university students to study the relationships between

depressive symptoms and academic engagement, and vice versa. Results showed that depressive symptoms were strong predictors of the academic engagement declines between measurements waves (3 = -0.30, $p = .01$), but the opposite relationship was less strong and less stable. This chronological order offers very solid empirical evidence to the idea of depression as a predisposing factor to permanent disengagement in academic life. Dyrbye et al. (2020) applied logistic regression modelling to identify the relationships between depression and academic outcomes. Students who tested positive on depression had over twice the likelihood to report serious dropout intentions (Adjusted OR = > 2.0, $p = .001$). Even though academic apathy could not be directly measured, withdrawal intentions, and lesser academic meaning were indicative of behavioural and cognitive disengagement in line with apathetic orientations.

4.3 Anxiety and Academic Apathy Among University Students

The study sought to assess general anxiety in relation to academic apathy among university students in upper Eastern region in Kenya. Table 7 presents descriptive findings.

Table 7. Anxiety among University Students

Statement	DAM	APS	APC	APV	Total
I was aware of dryness of my mouth	56.5	-	33.2	10.3	100.0
I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	55.9	28.3	15.8	-	100.0
I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)	48.3	29.0	1.9	20.8	100.0
I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	55.9	26.1	5.3	12.7	100.0
I felt I was close to panic	43.0	28.2	28.8	-	100.0
I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	49.1	40.1	-	10.8	100.0
I felt scared without any reason	48.3	29.0	12.7	10.0	100.0

Information obtained show that less than a half of students were aware of dryness of their mouth (43.5%), experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion) (15.8%), experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands) (22.7%) and were worried about situations in which they might panic and make a fool of themselves (18.0%). Further, less than a third of the students felt they were close to panic (28.8%), were aware of the action of their heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat) (10.8%) and felt scared without any reason (22.7%). Finding thus showed that less than a third of the student experience anxiety (27.1%). The study thus proceeded to establish the relationship between depression levels and academic apathy. Table 8 presents the findings.

Table 8. Relationship Between Anxiety and Academic Apathy (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE	F	Sig.
1	.922	.851	.850	.37362	2147.982	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Anxiety

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Apathy

Results in Table 8 presents finding on the correlation between the observed and predicted values of academic apathy (dependent variable). Findings imply that 85.1% of the total variance in academic apathy ($R^2=0.851$) could be attributed to anxiety. This observation was found to be statistically significant, $F(1,377)=2147.982$, $p<0.001$. Table 9 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 9. Relationship Between Anxiety and Academic Apathy (Regression Coefficient)

Model	Unstand. Coefficient	Stand. Coefficient
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	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	.041	.048		.846	.398
Stress	.948	.020	.922	46.346	.000

From Table 9, the following regression model was established

$$\text{Academic Apathy} = .041 + 0.948X \quad P=0.000$$

Where X =Anxiety

$$\beta_0 = 0.041, \beta_1=0.948$$

The regression constant shows that when the independent variable (anxiety) is constant at zero, academic apathy would be positive (0.041) but insignificant implying that academic apathy would be insignificantly low. Findings illustrates that academic apathy would increase by 0.948 with every unit increase in anxiety, this observation being significant ($t=46.346, p<0.001$). Findings thus show that there exists a positive and significant relationship between anxiety and academic apathy. Therefore, the formulated sub-hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between anxiety and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya was rejected. Kordzanganeh et al. (2021) examined the connection between time management, academic burnout, test anxiety, and self-efficacy in university students. Through mediation analysis, the research was able to show that test anxiety was a significant mediating variable between poor time management and academic burnout and low self-efficacy enhanced the relationship. The exhaustion and disengagement of burnout are closely related to academic apathy, especially with respect to less persistence and emotional aloofness. Mou, Zhuang, Gao, Zhoug, Lu, Gao and Zhao (2022), studied social anxiety and engagement among college students with a cohort of over 500 individuals and serial mediation analysis. The research aimed to describe the effects of social anxiety on academic engagement using behavioral and lifestyle mechanisms. Findings indicated the presence of a strong negative direct impact of social anxiety on academic engagement, along with strong indirect impacts via social media addiction and low sleep quality. These mediators accounted for almost half of the entire impact of social anxiety on engagement. As academic apathy is the opposite of engagement, the given findings give significant empirical evidence to the argument that anxiety is one of the causes of disengagement via avoidance behaviors and impaired daily functioning. The report also shows that anxiety does not usually operate in isolation but has an interaction with behavioral patterns that erode academic participation over time.

4.4 Mental Health and Academic Apathy Among University Students

Descriptive data obtained illustrated that about one in five students experience academic stress (20.4%), about a quarter experience depression (25.7%), less than a third experience anxiety (27.1%) implying that slightly less than a quarter of undergraduate students (24.4%) experience mental health challenges. The study ultimately sought to determine the relationship between mental health challenges and academic apathy among university students in upper Eastern region in Kenya. The hypothesis formulated for this case stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between mental health challenges and academic apathy among university students in upper eastern region, Kenya. Regression model used to assess the relationship yielded results as presented in Table 10 and 11.

Table 10. Relationship Between Mental Health Challenges and Academic Apathy (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE	F	Sig.
1	.952	.906	.906	.29577	3652.235	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mental Health Challenges

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Apathy

Results in Table 10 presents finding on the correlation between the observed and predicted values of academic apathy (dependent variable). Findings imply that 90.6% of the total variance in academic apathy ($R^2=0.906$) could be attributed to mental health challenges. This observation was found to be statistically significant, $F(1,377) = 3652.235, p<0.001$. Table 11 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 11. Relationship Between Mental Health Challenges and Academic Apathy (Regression Coefficient)

Model	Unstand. Coefficient		Stand. Coefficient		
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.

Constant	.066	.039		-1.691	.092
Stress	.997	.017	.952	60.434	.000

From Table 11, the following regression model was established

$$\text{Academic Apathy} = -.066 + 0.997X \quad P=0.000$$

Where X = Anxiety

$$\beta_0 = 0.066, \beta_1 = 0.997$$

The regression constant shows that when the independent variable (anxiety) is constant at zero, academic apathy would be positive (0.066) but insignificant implying that academic apathy would be insignificantly low. Findings illustrates that academic apathy would increase by 0.997 with every unit increase in mental health challenges, this observation being significant ($t=60.434$, $p<0.001$). Findings thus show that there exists a positive and significant relationship between mental health challenges and academic apathy. Therefore, the formulated hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between mental health challenges and academic apathy among university in upper eastern region, Kenya was rejected. Empirical studies show continually that these mental health issues directly sabotage the ability of students to engage in academics in the long run. Depression affects attentional control and sustained cognitive demand, undermining the ability goal-directed behaviour that is necessary in higher education to sustain continuous academic demands (Wong Aitken Rabanal, Carranza and Rondon 2024). Depression impairs executive functioning, diminishes psychological energy, and goal-directed behaviour, which are key to persistence in higher education (Agnafors, Bladh, Svedin & Sydsjo, 2021). Fear of assessment, shyness especially in chronic cases, and decreasing involvement in learning activities all encourage avoidance behaviour and restrict the active involvement of students in the learning process (Quek Tam, Tran, Zhang, Ho, 2019). As a unit, stress, depression and anxiety determine the way students think, experience and act in university situations with immediate consequences of engagement as well as disengagement.

Qualitative data was also sought from student counsellors as regards their experience mental health challenges and its influence on students' academic motivation and engagements. According to interviewees:

SC1: *Mental health challenges affects concentration and attention, increased absenteeism, procrastination of assignments.*

SC3: *Mental health challenges often lead to absconding studies and lack of motivation to study.*

SC4: *Leads to poor concentration which diminishes their concentration and motivation to attend classes as well as a factor of withdrawal.*

Information gleaned show that interviewees confirmed the influence of mental health challenges on students' academic motivation and engagements. Influences highlighted include loss of concentration and attention, increased absenteeism, procrastination of assignments among others. Signs of the effects include:

SC2: *Reluctance to collaborate in team projects, minimal interactions with lecturers, tutors or academic advisors as well as not seeking help when struggling.*

SC3: *Decline in performance, chronic absenteeism and withdrawal from academic engagements*

SC4: *Not doing their assignment and attending classes, declining performance and loss of interest in studies.*

Findings show that according to the interviewees, signs of the influence of mental health challenges on students' academic motivation and engagements included decline in performance, chronic absenteeism and withdrawal from academic engagements among others. Interviewees indicated that students believed that the relationship between their mental health and academic performance were:

SC3: *It leads to loss of focus, low grades, disconnected and discontented students.*

SC4: *It affects their motivation towards their studies, makes them lose concentration and forget easily*

Information obtained show that student counsellors interviewed believe that students presenting with mental health challenges have low motivation towards their studies, lose concentration forgetfulness, loss of focus, low grades, disconnected and are discontented. Qualitative data obtained therefore confirm that influence of mental health challenges on students' academic motivation and engagements include loss of concentration and attention, increased absenteeism, procrastination of assignments among others. Such students suffer from decline in performance, chronic absenteeism and withdrawal from academic engagements. Empirical studies in Southern Africa indicate that symptoms of depressive and anxiety have a strong correlation with the failure of academic performance, slow academic progress, and dropping out of school, with regard to the academic implications of untreated psychological distress in educational institutions (Wagner, Kolanisi, Makuapane, Masango & Gomez, 2022). In these areas, mental health issues are exacerbated by the lack of integrated counselling services, stigma,

and the lack of integration of psychosocial support into the university frame, which leads to a higher probability of distress expression in the form of disengagement and dysfunctional academic behaviours (Bantjes et al., 2021).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study sought to examine the relationship between mental health concepts and academic apathy among undergraduate students. Concepts assessed included stress, depression, anxiety and ultimately overall mental health challenge. Descriptive finding showed that about one in five students experience academic stress, about a quarter experience depression, less than a third experience anxiety implying that slightly less than a quarter of undergraduate student experience mental health challenges. Inferential analysis showed an 87.5% of the total variance in academic apathy could be attributed to stress, 85.4% due to depression, 85.1% due to anxiety and 90.6% to mental health challenge, the observation being statistically significant in each case. Regression analysis showed that there exists a positive and significant relationship between stress and academic apathy. Similar observation was made with regard to depression, anxiety and mental health challenges, regression coefficient illustrating a positive and significant relationship with each concept. It can therefore be concluded that there exist a positive and significant relationship between stress and academic apathy, depression and academic apathy, anxiety and academic apathy as well as mental health challenges and academic apathy. It is therefore recommended that University management enhance provision of resources and trained as well as experienced personnel to effectively provide mental health support within the institutions. They should also consider expanding access to quality referral resources and programs for advanced psychological and psychiatric support more severe mental health cases.

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