

**SPIRITUAL CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH AMONG  
STUDENTS AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, KAMPALA: A CASE STUDY OF  
PHANEROO RELIGIOUS GROUP**

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**DECLARATION**

I, Matharine Whitney Nakasi, sincerely declare that this work has been done through my own efforts and that it is entirely mine. I ascertain that this work has never been submitted anywhere for any academic award or financial gain. Therefore, it, is my original work and I do take full responsibility for all its content and I confirm acknowledgement of other people's work which has been made through citations, quotations, and references. I also declare that no part of this dissertation should be published anywhere without my consent.

Signature.....

Date.....

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**APPROVAL**

This dissertation is submitted for examination with my approval as the student's supervisor.

Signature.....  ..... Date..... 5th January 2023 .....

DR. JUSTUS TWESIGYE

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved mother Ms. Anne Ruth Naava Naluwooza and my brothers Griffin Kaicie, Rayner Augustine and Perrine Benald for their support and love to me.

Their prayers and constant support has given me reason to stay focussed on my studies and my beautiful mother for always going out of her way to ensure that I am happy and doing fine hence the motivation to continue pushing even when things weren't going on so well.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMI	Any Mental Illness.
HRQoL	Health related quality of life
MH	Mental Health
MI	Mental illness.
PRG	Phaneroo Religious Group
PRGM	Phaneroo Religious Group Members
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
QoL	Quality of Life
R/S	Religion and Spirituality
SMI	Serious Mental Illness.
SUD	Substance Use Disorder.
WHO	World Health Organisation.



## ABSTRACT

Against a background that the mental health of college and University students has attracted growing attention in the past three or four decades as reported by UNESCO (2021), coupled with the fact that severe psychoses occur in most institutions at an average rate of about two for every thousand students enrolled per year. And the common term that 1 in every 10 students' needs a psychiatrist. (Digital Library, 2022) this backed by the fact that mental health problems of students differ in various countries depending on how many go to college, supported with the common fact that most mental health indicators are highly dependent on spiritual health (Dan, 2021) together with the fact that spirituality influences many decisions people make (WebMd, 2022), IT is therefore upon this that I choose to undertake this study.

The purpose of this research was to explore the spiritual conceptualization on mental health that that students at Makerere University held. The study was guided by three objectives namely (1) To explore the spiritual meaning of mental health among students in Makerere University, (2) to document the understanding of spiritual mental health disturbances among students of Makerere University, (3) to discover how spirituality has affected mental health among students in Makerere University.

The research was purely qualitative in nature with data collected randomly from major key participants and focus group discussions. The sample size was rather relatively small as 12 students did take part voluntarily.

The study findings did highlight the complexity of mental health and spirituality as concepts and also did expose the research to yet more interesting developments, debates and theses that may be used as a yardstick to critique the research in the nearby future. The study did expose the spiritual meanings students have on mental health, spiritual understanding of mental health disturbances and also exposed the role of the religion, church and spirituality in influencing student's mental health at the University.

Lastly, the research was concluded with a number of arguments and recommendations so as to ensure mental health literacy is actually increased in the University.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the study

This study sought to understand the relationship between mental health and spirituality and how best these terms are conceptualized among Makerere University students. My research examines the meanings and experiences that students at Makerere University attribute to mental health and spirituality.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2011), defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes his/ her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and be able to make a contribution to his/her community. Alicia (2016) also defines mental health as a positive psychological functioning associated with a positive sense of self, a sense of purpose and growth overtime, connections with others and a sense of autonomy and agency. It is also commonly viewed as a state of psychological, social, physical, emotional well-being and not merely the absence of mental illness.

Mental health can be thought of as a successful mental functioning that results in productive activities, fulfilling, relationships and the ability to cope with change and diversity (Len Sperry, 2016).

The WHO (2018) reported that nearly one billion people are living with mental health problems globally. Mental illnesses affect more females (11.9%) than males (9.3%) more than 26 million people are diagnosed with several mental illnesses at one time (Wainberg et al., 2017). World in Data (2018) shows that over 970 million people in the world are affected by a mental disorder and 1 in 4 people is affected by mental illness in their lifetime. It is also estimated that mental disorders contribute to 14.3% deaths worldwide and approximately 8 million deaths each year. (JAMA Network, 2015). Additionally, with more than 75% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa with mental health related problems do not receive treatment. Statistics from the World Health Organization (2018) have also clearly pointed out that mental health problems are one of the most significant public health challenges worldwide.

According to the United Nations (UN) (2018), 6.8 million out of 42 million people in Uganda have some degree of mental illness which include anxiety and depression. Uganda is also ranked among the top six countries in Africa with a high prevalence rate of depressive disorders. It is also estimated that 35% of Ugandans who suffer from illness, it is likely that the incidence of mental illnesses and thus the need for treatment is much higher (Molodgnski, Cosack & Nixon, 2017). As Kaduwamena (2018) notes, Uganda is one of the sub-Saharan nations suffering with mental health problems.

The mental health of college and university students has attracted growing attention in the past three or four decades and, consequently over the years, little information on the current mental health state of University students in Uganda is known. However, a recent study by Nalugya (2021), indicated a high rate of mental disorders (21%) mainly depression and anxiety disorders among secondary school students suggesting that students joining Makerere University might have carried their mental health conditions from earlier years. Similarly, as reported by Kotera et al. (2021) poor mental health among university students has been reported in many countries commonly leading to depression, anxiety and high stress. Salem et al. (2013) also reported that university students often claim to experience stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression, eating disorder and other psychological issues with 1 in 10 students needing to see a psychiatrist as reported by the Digital Library (2022).

Spirituality, refers to a deeper sense of aliveness and interconnectedness which typically involves a search for meaning in life (Early. E. Bakken's Centre for Spirituality and Healing, 2011) and as reported by Dan (2021), “the idea of spirituality means different things for different people”. People may find their spirituality commonly through their affiliation to a given religious domination which could be exhibited through their association with a church, temple, mosque or synagogue. Contrary to what many people might think, spirituality and religion are not the same but are linked. You can be spiritual but not belonging to any religious group (WebMd, 2022). Religion thus refers to a specific set of organized beliefs and practices usually shared by a community or group as defined by Reach out Australia (2022) and as reported by Dan (2021), religious people follow a particular faith and maybe connected with specific groups or traditions. With the commonest religious groups being Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Animism with Christianity being relatively the biggest religious movement comprising of religious groups like Catholics, Anglicans, Born-again, Advents,

Jehovah's witnesses, Presbyterians with the most recent being the Phaneroo Religious Movement (PRM) / Phaneroo Religious Group (PRG).

In Uganda, the concept of spirituality was the indigenous form of worship of the African Traditional Worship where worship and allegiance was made to different types of gods. Gods for each and every activity were available for example, childbearing and success. The traditional form of worship was very animistic in nature as even the slightest change in weather was attributed to the doing of the gods. For example, a heavy rainstorm would be interpreted as anger from the gods while rain in the opportune moments could be interpreted as a reward from the god of land or harvest. However, it did involve a number of uncouth practices which involved killing of animals, offering food to the gods, sacrifice of virgin young ladies, raping of virgins and even killing of innocent people to simply "please the gods". Following the wave of colonisation of Africa, a better and peaceful version of worship, as the colonialists called it was introduced. A creator, a white god, an all mighty and all powerful omnipotent and omnipresent being, a God that answered much faster than the numerous gods, a god that desired no form of sacrifice or offertory, just a "loving God" that would forgive even the worst in the community contrasting the existent "barbaric god". This therefore saw the genesis of Christianity and advancement from the "indigenous barbaric numerous gods" to a loving omnipotent, omnipresent, understanding God of Abraham". The greater paradox however remains that today, this once "all loving God" requires monetary offertory to be pleased and for one to actually earn the graces of this "almighty God of Abraham, one definitely must give to receive for the bible has declared that a good measure will be given equivalent to what one chooses to give. The irony in the worship system today is that originally one would just appear in front of the "loving God" the way he /she was because he was a very "welcoming father", however today, one must be smartly dressed in a lovely attire fit for worship as the lord the God of Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Jacob etc should not be "distracted" by the poor dressing of his people. The religious hypocrisy that is manifesting today is not only sickening but disgusting too. The indigenous god never had a need for monetary offerings, our numerous gods never asked or required us to sell the little we had to buy the "men of God" cars, houses and even educate their children from abroad. Our "barbaric, unrealistic forms of worship" didn't require us shouting on the streets like mad men and didn't require us subscribing for special blessings through buying of holy items neither did they require us contributing for a new building each and every day they were comfortable in those bushes we prayed to them

from, they needed no Italian windows nor German imported doors neither did they require the ACS and live streaming programs among the many, our indigenous “narcissistic” form of worship like the colonialists called it, didn’t involve setting aside special seats for the “chosen” few in the places of worship. Our local form of worship never required us to give while closing our eyes and neither did it call us to abandon our families, work and values in the name of preaching the gospel and following the way of life of the disciples. At this rate, it is not only right to ascertain that we sold our values for a worse evil but also right to stop here for this would rather be a research of its own maybe yet another time.

The "Phaneroo" Religious Movement started in Uganda in 2014 with its first meeting on the 6th August 2014 at the MTN Arena where the prayer sessions originally used to be held until they were shifted to the UMA multipurpose hall Lugogo until later shifted to UMA upper gardens where they are held every Thursday from 5 pm to 9 pm and on Sundays. The head offices of Phaneroo can be traced in the Minister's Village in Ntinda and the vision bearer of PRG being Apostle Grace Lubega helped by a total of 10 pastors. PRM has student-based fellowships commonly known as Manifest fellowship in every University and most institutions of higher learning in Uganda. In Makerere University, just like any other University, Manifest fellowship happens every Tuesday from 6 pm to 8 pm at Impis Grounds. These fellowships are run, managed and operated by the students and student team leaders as reported by Acayo (2022).

It is therefore upon this background that I intended to assess the relationship between mental health and spirituality, both which manifest in abnormal thoughts, perceptions, emotions, behaviour and relationships (WHO, 2019)

In Uganda today, religion has become the order of the day, with most people even deliberately foregoing activities, engagements and work specifically to attend a church sermon, a church function or a religious activity. In the study of Simak et al. (2019), it is shown that there is a significant relationship between gender and spiritual health however, Safavi et al. (2019) attributes it to the greater religious commitment of women. A number of people’s ways have been shaped to actually follow a certain spiritual mandate and the common person convinced of the presence of the “omnipotent God”. Today, it is very common for one to engage in a form of prayer or form of ritual before carrying out any given activity in their lives. With a few

individuals nearly becoming obsessive and a few others clearly latently obsessive with prayer, religion and spirituality.

It is therefore upon this religious obsession that a great deal of people in the country are beyond convinced that mental illness is as a result of spiritual related cases. In the study of Khadem et al. (2016), it was also shown that there is a significant inverse relationship between spiritual health and mental health. The general perception of the public has been shaped to trash and dismiss the idea of common happening of a mental illness however, a linkage made to spiritual related issues, cultural biases or madness. The present culture and religious preaching of negativity and emphasis on the evils of the world like enmity, anger and malice in the world has also clearly interfered with the diagnosis and treatment of most mental illnesses. Spirituality has actually shadow blocked people's minds that people would rather declare a natural phenomenon or calamity as merely baseless and meaningless but will treat the actual baseless statement of a religious leader backed with a "spiritual meaning and form of revelation" with so much contempt and respect. One would argue and even fight that a psychotic patient has been bewitched like the 'man of God' has said than rather take the patient for medical help. Churches, mosques, bushes, shrines are replacing wards and rehabilitation centres. The irony however is, the people are not even ignorant, they are fully aware of the existence of mental health, its importance and the occurrence of mental disturbances. It is still very unclear why an individual would opt for running to church and yet the actual hospital is present I wonder if religion has taught the believers that the church is actually a ward. Churches are labelling themselves healing centres, depressed patients urged to "spend more time alone and try to build their relationship with God", bipolar patients taken for crusades and worship nights so as to "cry and seek the face of God". Psychotic patients, schizophrenics tied onto polls in churches, beaten, pushed down and "urged to speak who has sent them". People are actually committing suicide due to self-guilt, harm and even peoples' families are convinced their relatives are gone for the "devil has borrowed their bodies". This kind of adamancy, ignorance and uncertainty surrounding these rather very sensitive topics of spirituality and mental health, is therefore one of the sole reasons I choose to take on this particular topic and carryout this research.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study focused on examining the different ways in which the Phaneroo Religious Group Members (PRGM) in Makerere University spiritually conceptualized mental health.

Previous research suggests that mental health has become a thoroughly studied concept in developed countries (Torrano et al., 2020), and that mental illnesses are the leading cause of disability as indicated by the WHO (2017). Given that most of the major mental disorders begin not in childhood but during adolescence Dwight et al., (2015), it is important to know that many studies have shown a significant relationship between spiritual health and increasing quality of life, religious commitment and self-efficacy as well as reducing stress, anxiety and depression (Yazgan & Denmir, 2019)

The complexity and extensiveness of the topic mental health, supported with the diverse and barely understandable influence of spirituality and religion, can therefore not only make conceptualization of mental health difficult but also vague and shallow despite the availability of rich literature on mental health and extensive government input in being part of the global mental health awareness campaign and thus, it is therefore upon this complexity that I sought to pursue this particular study on grounds that;

This study would help in identifying, exploring, examining, understanding and documenting the spiritual conceptualization of mental health as clearly stated in my research topic above," Spiritual Conceptualization on Mental Health among Makerere University Students. A case study of the Phaneroo Religious Group."

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The major objective for carrying out this particular research were as explained below but broken down into general and specific objectives.

#### **1.3.1 General Objective**

This study general objective is to examine how mental health is spiritually conceptualized among students of Makerere University, that in particularly belong to the Phaneroo Religious Movement.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

To explore the spiritual meaning of mental health among students of Makerere University.

To document the understanding of spiritual mental health disturbances among students of Makerere University.

To examine how spirituality affects mental health among students of Makerere University.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Analysing the various ways in which Phaneroo religious group members spiritually conceptualize mental health and how their spirituality and religion influenced their understanding of mental health. The study therefore was very essential in exploring the various meanings and understanding of mental health. It also examined the role of spirituality in both promoting and undermining mental health so as to contribute to mental health literacy (MHL) among both students and stakeholders in order to improve the general mental health situation of students in Makerere University.

#### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

Against a background that a proper mental health state is very important for the proper functioning of each and every individual, coupled with the fact that favourable stable mental health is the most necessary asset in one's day to day lives as reported by WHO (2018), supported with the fact that religion and spirituality do affect one's mental health. As research shows, in societies with rich and deep-rooted beliefs, attention to these beliefs is one of the best ways of caring (Bagheti, Dehgan & Khosho., 2019).

To most students, their success or failure at times is commonly attached to either blessings, curses, karma, bad luck, and most therefore tend to turn to religion as their coping mechanism. Hence involving themselves in a number of religious activities like going to church, fasting, worshipping, making pilgrimages to holy places when faced with a distortion in their general mental wellbeing something which might be directly or indirectly be an influencing factor in either promotion or undermining of their wellbeing. It is therefore upon this background that I carried out this particular study.

This study has directly exposed the influence of religion and spirituality towards the conceptualization of mental health among religious groups in the University and will therefore assist the various stakeholders and students in the best ways of handling their mental health. It will also highlight how best religion can be used as a tool of creating mental health literacy in the University. It will also aid in identifying ways how the University can incorporate religion and spirituality in the treatment and understanding of Mental health disturbances among students at the University.



## **1.6 Scope of the study**

The study was conducted in Makerere University in Kampala District. This is because Makerere University being one of the biggest institution for higher education in Africa has approximately a large number of University students and coupled with the prevalence of the religious freedom in the institute, a great deal of students are actually members of a given religious groups. Owing to the fact that the Phaneroo Movement is one of the newest religious movements in the University and yet does hold a large number of follower students, hence the focus on that particular religious group/movement.

The study focused on understanding how the Phaneroo religious group members actually perceived, interpreted and understood Mental health.

The study was also be carried out for approximately 16 weeks and included, data collection, analysis, transcribing, supervision at each step and writing of this final report into a dissertation.

## **1.7 Introduction and definition of general topics**

### **Mental Health.**

As defined by Alicia (2016), mental health refers to a positive psychological functioning associated with a positive sense of self, a sense of purpose and growth overtime, connections with others and a sense of autonomy and agency.

### **Mental illness.**

The American Psychological Association defines mental illness as health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking, or behaviour. On the other hand, Mental Health Foundations (2021) refer to mental illness as a wide range of conditions which affect mood, thinking, and behaviour of an individual. It could also refer to the daily exaggeration of the things we do on a daily basis. Mental illnesses also comprise of two categories those with Any Mental Illness (AMI) and those with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) with the commonest mental illness being depression, bipolar, psychosis, mania, schizophrenia among the many. As stated by Siewert et al, (1999) “mental illness cannot be separated from the individual social and cultural context and culture plays an important role in the perception of mental illness”.

## **Mental Disorders**

Sperry (2016), defines mental disorders as primary disorders of the brain with multiple causes and resulting from complex interactions between individual's genes and their environment lifestyle factors and health behaviours. Some of the collectively diagnosable disorders include anxiety disorders, eating disorders, mood disorders, psychotic disorders, personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, dissociative disorders, factitious disorders, sexual and gender disorders, somatic disorders and tic disorders among the many as compiled by the Mental Health Foundations, (2021).

## **Mental Health Literacy**

The term mental health literacy refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental health disorders that aid in recognition, management or prevention. It includes the ability to recognize disorders and obtain mental health information, knowledge of risk factors, self, treatments and professional help and attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help seeking. Jorm et al., (1997)

## **Conceptualization**

Conceptualization refers to the process of forming and understanding of an idea or a concept.

## **Spirituality**

According to Macro Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, researchers and authors of the spiritual Brain, spirituality means any experience that is thought to bring into contact with the drive. The Oxford dictionary also describes it as a quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material things.

## **Religion**

This is a belief system that is clearly defined including what one should believe, why and how to do so. It may have a specific God or numerous gods, it may also include worship, teachings, theology and strong beliefs as reported by the FHE Health (2019).

## **Diagnosis**

Robert Edwin Rakel (2015) in his article about medicine refers to diagnosis as the process of determining the nature of the disease or disorder and distinguishing it from other conditions. The term also comes from the Greek gnosis meaning knowledge and can also refer to the identification of the nature of an illness or other problems by examination of the symptoms.

## **Treatment**

Treatment refers to the way we deal with or behave towards someone or something it could also be the way something is considered and examined or even use of drugs, exercises and others to cure a person of an illness. Just like FHE Health (2019) reports, often times the stigma surrounding the issue of mental health and its treatment prevents many people from reaching out for quality help even when a better life is possible.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a review on the available literature based on the current study objectives. The chapter explains the various terms and factors in line with my topic. The chapter expounds on the spiritual meaning of mental health, mental disturbances, and influence of spirituality and highlights the gaps in the existent literature.

#### 2.1 Meaning of Mental Health

As defined by the WHO (2011), mental health refers to the state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes his/her ability to cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and be able to make contribution to his /her community. In simple terms mental health is definitely that state where one is fully functional and one is definitely in a position to fulfil what is expected of them and is able to be productive.

Mental health however doesn't clearly mean the absence of communicable and non-communicable diseases but rather a state of overall positive performance and fulfilment of one's day to day life purposes. Just like Thompson (2007) states, a good mental health refers to the successful functioning, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with others and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. However often times in our various societies, mental health is actually associated with proper reasoning and functionality of an individual and to most individuals, the absence of such is instantly labelled madness. In most of our societies today, various mental disorders that are mild like mood disorders or eating disorders aren't even recognized however the most serious like psychosis are the ones recognised and more so not even recognised correctly but rather generalised as madness.

It is therefore important for individuals to maintain good mental health as having a proper mental health can contribute significantly to the overall mental function of individuals. Tesfaye et al., (2021)

## **2.2 Meaning of Spirituality**

Despite the fact that the term spirituality is a very common and popular among students at Makerere University, it is barely understood by most of them. To many students, it could simply refer to being part of a deeper calling and understanding and view of the world and a more religious realm. The definition, meaning and conceptualization of spirituality remains very complex and broad as it is best understood differently by whosoever is defining it.

However, one thing that we can totally agree on is that spirituality is an important part of mental health and hence it is upon this importance that various scholars did set out to understand the term spirituality and how best they could define it in the domain of mental health. On grounds that many students do experience changes in personality and lifestyle Joo et al., (2017) and that spiritual health is the core of human health and acts as a core to coordinate the physical, mental and social dimensions and is needed to cope with disease easier. Ross et al., (2016)

Sigmund Freud, linked spirituality with neurosis as he strongly believed and looked at religion as an illusion that individuals create in their lives for satisfaction. Hence to him, spirituality was merely an illusion and neurosis projected through religion.

Other various scholars and psychologists directly refrained from addressing spirituality as a whole but rather chose to best identify the term through the pillar of religion in which he actually concludes by portraying religion negatively and he maintains his stand that both religion and spiritual experiences are nothing but examples of pathology.

Carl Jung too considered the psyche as a carrier of truth powerfully rooted in the conscious mind and to him religion and spirituality are nothing but beliefs deeply embedded in our conscious self. These and many other scholars did try to define and understand the term spirituality but given complexity and broadness of spirituality, the results were yet more ambiguous and vague than satisfying. However, fairly satisfying, many psychiatrists do believe and did conclude that to many patients, religion and spirituality are resources that help them to cope with the stresses of life including those of their illnesses too and hence many saw it necessary and largely supported the movement to incorporate religion and spiritual treatment of most Mal health disorders on grounds that lack of spirituality can interfere with interpersonal relationships which can later contribute to the genesis of psychiatric disturbances.

Spirituality as a globally acknowledged concept involves beliefs and obedience to an all-powerful force (GOD) who is beloved to control the universe and the destiny of man for example, Christian spirituality is a conceived and accessible overview of the ways Christian's overtime have approached God in prayer and practice as suggested by Lawrence (1996), It also involves ways in which people fulfil what they hold to be the purpose of their lives and a search for meaning of life and connectedness to the world. Religion however, is institutionalized spirituality with themes and practices embedded in scripture, journeying, meditation contemplation, asceticism, mysticism, solitude, and community, friendship, Eucharist among the many. (Paulist Press, 1996).

In summary, the universality of spirituality extends across the creed and culture and it is a very much personal and unique experience to each and every person.

### **2.3 Spiritual Forms of Mental health**

With reference made to the fact that spirituality is an important aspect of mental health, coupled with the fact that lack of spirituality can interfere with interpersonal relationships which can contribute to the genesis of psychiatric disturbance, below are some of the spiritual forms of mental health as compiled from a series of research and literature review.

#### **Spiritual Awakening**

This refers to a situation where one may experience an increased sense of wellbeing. Daina et al. (1959), also defines this as a subjective experience in which an individual who transcends any ordinary and taps into a wider feeling of truth or reality. In most cases, this could be in form of practices like deliverance where an individual may feel detached from their old self and a new self and a much more increased self is added onto them.

#### **Spiritual Emergence**

This refers to the movement of an individual to a more expanded way of being that involves enhanced emotional and psychotic health, greater freedom of personal choices, and a sense of deeper connection with other people and nature around them. An individual feels very much more in sync with the people around them as entirely as a result of their spiritual life as emphasized by the National Empowerment Centre (2017) for example one may find interactions with one's peers very easy following their satisfying and happy spiritual life.

### **Spiritual psychosis**

This refers to a process of spiritual emergence or awakening that becomes traumatic leading to a state of psychological crisis that in some cases, mimic clinical psychosis. In most cases, this is one of the major mental health disturbances that could be fuelled by spirituality and religion as it can either delay diagnosis of some mental health conditions or even aggravate them through a number of spiritual practices like fasting, worshipping integrated and transcends one's biological and psychosocial nature as reported by NANDA (1994),It could be caused by fear, anxiety, grief, unresolved guilt, depression and in most cases unmet spiritual needs., praising ,prayer among the many.

### **Spiritual Suffering**

This is a form of suffering which occurs in situations where religious beliefs and practices fail to provide meaning or have a negative meaning. Negative meaning such as feelings of abandonment from God (Peteet & Balbani, 2013) detachment and alienation and this could possibly fuel mental illnesses like depression, anxiety disorders and bipolar among the many.

### **Spiritual Alienation**

This refers to a feeling that God seems very far from one's everyday life. This desperateness and desire to seek and find the Lord or to even get closer to God may draw one into taking part into a number of harmful practices which may only be done as a quest to find the Lord any yet are only aggravating one's mental illnesses. For example, one may involve themselves in an unhealthy fasting pattern hence leading to eating disorders or even actually withdraw from people in order to seek God which may fuel depression hence affecting one's mental health negatively.

### **Spiritual gas lighting**

This refers to a condition where someone invalidates a person's personal experience by taking scripture usually out of context and applying it to their hardships. This is majorly common among most religious leaders and members of most church groups who have been elevated to a certain level of recognition in church. In most cases, people's mental health illnesses are overlooked or undercooked as they are made to believe in particular scriptures that at times are out of context but rather to relive them.5**Spiritual bypassing**

As described by John Weleood,1980, this is an act of using explanations of enlightenment or catch-all sentiments to avoid complex psychological issues. In most cases, spiritually most mental health conditions are actually just bypassed by most spiritual practices, people are made to feel a slight relief, but however in a bid to overlook the complex psychological issues, explanations either in terms of scriptures are provided.

### **Toxic spirituality**

This refers to any aspect of spirituality that is used to blame, shame, guilt a person into feeling bad or worse about themselves. In most cases a person may be made to feel bad about a certain religious practice which might end up affecting their mental health for example a member may be shamed for failure to turn up regularly for church service or blamed constantly for not being spiritually active as others and this may later force one into depression or even anxiety among the many, one may even be guilt tripped into eating disorders so as to be at par with other members of the religion and feel much more closer to them and yet, instead of finding happiness, one is constantly unhappy with their spirituality.

## **2.4 Spiritual Mental health Disturbances**

These refer to a wide range of mental health conditions and also are often referred to as mental illnesses or disorders

According to the WHO, (2017) mental illnesses refer to a wide range of mental health conditions that affect one's mood, thinking and behaviour. As stated by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, there are nearly 300 mental disorders with 1 in every 8 people in the world living with a mental disorders with anxiety and depressive disorders as the most common. The commonest disorders including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, psychotic disorders, eating disorders, schizophrenia, dementia and personality disorders among the many. Mental health disturbances are majorly caused by psychological factors, emotional factors, physical and social factors however, most psychiatric symptoms can have a religious context.

## **2.5 Influence of spirituality on mental health**

Just like spirituality is recognized as one of the most important aspects of one's life, it certainly does hold a certain level of influence on one's life. This is majorly due to the unexplainable form of power that religion holds onto people's lives. For example, people are refusing to eat



certain foods because the religion doesn't permit for example, most Muslims all over the world have gone ahead and stopped eating pork because the holy book doesn't permit them too. Seventh Day Adventists refuse to do any sort of work on the seventh day of the week simply because even in the bible, the lord rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, There are state-wide open divisions, killings, separation and even discrimination on grounds of religion. This filial attachment and mandatory practices that come with the practice of spirituality do not only seem to exist but form to shape and influence people's lives in a certain type of way that may tend to interfere or also promote their mental health accordingly.

The different practices often times tend to help in fostering peoples mental health through the rehabilitation of various peoples thoughts and also offering people a relative amount of protection and sense of belonging something that directly impacts on the peoples mental health, in most cases, most mental illnesses are always triggered by the various physio social factors or one's environment something that religion seems to have indirectly tackled and just like the studies have shown, "it helps to maintain and enhance the self-esteem, creates a sense of purposeful and meaningful life, increases psychological comfort and hope" Bami et al., (2020)

Religion has tackled people's loneliness and has given people a form of purpose that even the lowliest of society seem to achieve some form of status as members of a various church group. A place and space to freely communicate one's problems have equally been granted at these various places of worship together with even the meaningful friends people tend to make from the various places of worship that they do go to. Feelings of alienation, isolation and despair have also been checked with the enormous scriptures and biblical references as in most cases an individual will feel much more than ready to overcome any challenge because of close referencing to a similar individual that actually went through that state in the bible. Considering the fact that experts believe that many factors such as stress, anxiety and depression are determinants of life(Yilmaz & Cengiz, 2019), The notion of hope even in the most trying times has also been largely sowed into the people and thus has actually enabled a number of people to keep calm even in the most challenging situations and also overcome any form of trying time hence checking and maintaining their mental health, yes, spirituality might not be fully in positive to offer a more curative approach to mental ill-health but it has actually contributed to the promotive, preventive and rehabilitative side of mental health.

On grounds that there can never be a perfect remedy, spirituality has also created some scenarios that have directly overlooked, undermined or even fuelled mental ill health and raised a number of mental disorders in people. At times, religion tends to constantly expose people to a certain type of self-guilt resulting from the underlying pressure of trying so hard to be perfect and be like God. A great deal of times, a number of “good Christians” have failed to literally enjoy their lives as the only form of enjoyment they have is in the word of God, the common notion of them desiring not to live as children of the flesh is very pathetic considering the fact that they are on the world and not in the spirit realm. The underlying pressure of a perfect being has actually sent most believers into unseen depression and constant self-guilt with even the a most extreme cases seeing most believers committing suicide for very common mistakes. Similarly, sometimes the adamancy and exaggeration of most spiritual activities has seen staunch believers lose out on useful friendships on grounds that most of them feel like they can’t be seen doing things that other people are doing, this exaggeration of biblical practices has seen most believers subjected to isolation and even alienation from other people. Sometimes most people do find these “staunch believers” very nagging and unbearable in society as they often do come off as very judgmental and pompous to other people in the community. The exhausting nature of most of these believers has also pushed most people in society away from them and the fact that instead of actually seeking for help, they will justify their unbearable nature with a scripture makes the situation yet worse and annoying. Often times, the element of spirituality has actually fuelled mental illnesses in people’s lives through overcrowding their judgment on even the slightest matters of life. A believer will assure you that you’re at “war with the seven demons in your family” simply because of a recurring migraine headaches, a believer may interpret one’s anxiety into a “punishment of restlessness” from the lord our God. Often times mere situations such as making a new friend may highly be spiritualized. We have a number of believers tolerate abusive partners simply because the “word of God” is against divorce. We have a number of Christians fail to express themselves on grounds that they don’t want “the spirit of anger to take control of their lives”, believers are failing to address underlying issues and are failing to work on their interpersonal relationships with those around them, on grounds that even the Messiah was hated, the unrealistic stories coupled with the grandiose delusions, exaggerated sense of self-importance and constant references to people they didn’t even see or know seems very much exhausting and often times does fuel the different mental illnesses among the believers.

With these few compiled facts, it is therefore right to ascertain that there is a thin line between the positive and negative impact on the influence of spirituality on individual mental health however, with the right dose of positive influence, an individual's mental health would be promoted and encouraged however one's mental health would be threatened with the start of spiritual exaggeration and exaggerated faith by an individual. So, one definitely ought to find a balance for one to use spirituality as a helping tool rather than a destructive element.

## **2.6 Emerging Gaps**

Having carefully perused and reviewed the necessary existent literature, a number of issues are not sufficiently addressed.

Against a background that, most of the major mental disorders begin not in childhood but during adolescence Dwight et al., (2005) it is right to ascertain that most of the existing literature is majorly on the older years and therefore literature on the much earlier years and adolescence is lacking for example, as pointed out by Aird (2005), development of adulthood depression is associated with youth onset and yet depression is majorly looked at a later earlier stage and actually not really tackled at the earlier years for example it is estimated to affect 1 to 10% and up to 20% of the population before the age of 18 and yet the studies have relatively remained unchanged about adolescence and early onset years.

Studies concerning other mental illnesses given the fact that in Africa depression continues to be the leading mental illness are shallow and scanty with much emphasis only on depression given the fact that" illness cannot be characterized by a single symptom Dwight et al., (2005) and on average, males have their illness onset 3 to 4 years earlier than females. Dwight et al., (2005) it is therefore lacking to only concentrate majorly on depression and leave out other disorders. Equal or similar emphasis should be shown/ given to other disorders as well. Research too given to depression, anxiety and other common disorders should also be similarly vested into dealing with yet more other complex and not commonly existent disorders.

Similarly, the role of ethno-cultural factors has been understudied. Dwight et al., (2005) Although heritable factors appear to be the most consistent predictors of risk for major depression in children, environmental factors also play an important role. Harold et al., (2002). Most emphasis has been drawn to substance abuse and role of emotional weakness yet ethno-cultural factors too play a significant role yet understudied and underexplored Additional, the

manner in which symptoms manifest themselves may need to be considered within a developmental framework, as children exhibit several effective symptoms differently than adults Geller et al., (2002).

The complexity of spirituality and religion has also not been very vastly explored. It is proper to actually point out that even the authors addressing this subject do face a great deal of difficulties in establishing a definition or concept of spirituality. Just like Borges et al. (2021) also notes, “there has actually been no compiled data to identify evidence on this particular topic and yet most health-related quality of life is determined by multiple factors that include components to such as spirituality.

There is a wide range of mental health studies however most focus on a particular aspect for example addiction. Most interventions and prevention programs are actually often available only for those in crisis as noted by Rickhi (2015), and yet it is estimated that 35% of Ugandans suffer from a mental illness and that the incidence of mental illnesses and the need for treatment is much higher. Molodgnski et al., (2017)

Despite the fact that spirituality is an important aspect of mental health and that religion is important directly, indirectly in the etiology, diagnosis, symptomatology, treatment and prognosis of psychiatric disturbances, religion still doesn't have a place in most of the psychiatry textbooks. It is barely discussed in most books that deal with treatment and mental health related treatments and yet it is one of the most important pillars that can't be undermined.

Owing to the fact that spirituality and sexuality influence the way people conceive themselves, others and the world across them, as well as their behaviour, it is rather unfortunate that the current body of knowledge on the relationship between religion, spirituality and mental health is however predominantly based on institutionalized forms of religion. The literature available provides little insight into the nature of this relationship for non-institutionalized forms of religious expression as noted by Aird (2015), the non-institutionalized forms have been largely skipped and forgotten about with most emphasis placed on those established like churches, cathedrals, mosques etc.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research approach, design and associated methods that were used to conduct the study. It includes the study area, study population, selection of participants, data management and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research approach and design**

##### **3.1.1 Research design**

This study adopted a case study design in order to understand the concepts and ideas. This design was adopted in order to generate in depth information about the knowledge PRGM at Makerere University put into consideration when discussing mental health issues within the university. Just like Sekaran and Bougie (2010) emphasize, the major purpose for the case study design is to clearly understand concepts and ideas.

The study was Makerere students' spiritual conceptualization of mental health and took on Phaneroo Religious Group Members students as the case study.

##### **3.1.2 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Given the fact that the qualitative research approach is associated with methods of data collection like in-depth interviews, coupled with the fact that it promotes the notion of no agreed truth and that concern should be about recorded meaning, Owing to the complexity of mental health and the variance in the conceptualization that various groups of people at the University carry towards mental health made it the most suitable approach to adopt. This approach is also multifaceted and dynamic thus helped me as a novice researcher to be generally accepting of the various perceptions, interpretations, and attitudes that students carried on mental health.

#### **3.2 Area of the study**

This study was carried out in Makerere university main campus. Makerere University is located in Kawempe Division, bordered by Bwaise to the North, Mulago in the East, Wandegaya and

Nakasero to the South East and approximately 2.5 kilometres by road North of Kampala businesses Centre.

Makerere University is located on Makerere hill which is one of the many hills of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. The main campus is 5km to the North of the city centre covering an area of 300 acres. I chose this particular area of study due to the religious freedom existent in the University and free practice and manifestations of the PRG in the University.

### **3.3 Study participants**

The study comprised of Makerere University students that belonged to the Phaneroo Religious Group both males and females. The study focused on students who were in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year respectively and had enrolled as students in the university. Only students who took part in the study willingly were included in the study population.

### **3.4 Selection of participants**

The earmarked sample size was majorly primary participants who were Phaneroo Religious Group Members both male and females and were selected basing on data saturation theory Guest et al., (2010). I did continue to select new participants up to a point where no new information was emerging and new themes could no longer be developed from the data collected.

The primary participants were selected through convenience or accidental sampling technique. This is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher merely chooses the person he or she comes across. Given the fact that my study population was Makerere university students with varying timetables of study, accidental sampling was therefore the best given that it was very flexible for both the researcher and the participants.

### **3.5 Data collection methods and tools**

The data collection methods that were used in the research process included in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The tools used included in-depth interview guides, key informant interview guides and focus group discussion guides.

### **Key informant interview guides**

Key informant interview guides were conducted with 2 key informants all being students at Makerere University. The guides had a total of 15 questions all which the key informants were expected to answer to the best of their knowledge and in a very relaxed and free manner as possible.

The interactions were very educative in nature and very interesting as the key informants were cooperative and enthusiastic about the process.

### **In-depth interview guides**

Information for this study was generated through interviewing of the primary participants. Personal and informal in-depth interviews were carried out between the researcher and the primary participants so as to ensure getting of particular information. Ten in-depth interviews were carried out and 2 focus group discussions too carried out. I recorded the information with a smart phone and all interviews lasted for 30-40 minutes. The interviews were structured in nature. Owing to the sampling procedure adopted which is accidental, the primary participants were randomly selected and therefore made the unstructured interviews the best data collection method given the variance in the perceptions, attitudes, and interpretations of the mental health by the different primary participants.

### **Focus group discussion guides**

Focus group discussion guides were also drafted and information exhausted in these group discussions. The discussions lasted a period of 40 minutes and were carried out in the students' hostels.

The group discussions were very interactive in nature and enabled the participants to open up freely on the concepts.

### **3.6 Data management and analysis**

Having received informed consent from the participants, the interviews were recorded on gadgets like phones or sound recorders and later transcribed for proper storage. A thematic data analysis technique was adopted for the study. Borrowing from Braun and Clarke's framework

of thematic analysis which comprises of familiarizing yourself with data generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

#### **3.7.1 Plagiarism**

As a researcher, I ensured that the information got from other sources was properly managed by acknowledging the authors through citations and proper referencing of my research using the APA format. I also obtained clearance from the college of humanities and social sciences and the department of social work and social administration, Makerere University for permission to proceed with the research study.

#### **3.7.2 Informed consent**

As a researcher, I did obtain written consent from the participants. They were informed about the purpose of the study, selection criteria and benefits of participation prior to their involvement. They were informed about their rights to voluntary participation and withdraw from the study at any point if they wished so.

#### **3.7.3 Confidentiality and anonymity**

As a researcher, I ensured interviews were conducted away from other people. The names of participants were kept anonymously and therefore in this case pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' real names unless if one was willing to be cited and credited.

### **3.8 Study limitations and solutions**

The limitations that were faced during this study were included the following:

lack of adequate resources

For me as a young researcher. Resources were very inadequate in the process of my study. There was scarcity for some resources like money, which was very much necessary in carrying out activities like transportation, movements and facilitations. Tools too were very inadequate and not very much at disposal. Given the fact that the study had to be carried out d with in the academic period, time was also very inadequate and hard to create. However, having drafted a



favourable timetable, I was able to find a balance between the study and other activities. I also was able to receive monetary aid from my mother and this enabled me to carry out this study.

#### Conflicting loyalties between my primary participants

Given the fact that they were University students who needed to attend their lectures and also spare time for other University activities, they were not prioritizing the study and hence made it difficult and slow to achieve information. The participants were always busy with other academic programs making them very hard to even locate. However, with continued persistence, I managed to collect the data from them. I also located the students outside school areas by approaching them in their hostels and halls of residence and this greatly helped achieve my goal.

#### Ambiguity of information in relation to mental health

Given the complexity of mental health as a subject, most students were very ambiguous with the information and as a result ended up providing very scanty information on certain topics. They did have a wider knowledge and positive response on the spiritual aspect but not the same was for the mental health concept. I didn't give up rather carried out more interviews and focus group discussions and this helped me accumulate enough information. I also constantly introduced probe questions during the various interviews so as to ensure that the participants aren't far from the study objectives.

#### Ignorance on some concepts.

Considering the complexity of mental health as a concept, most of the primary participants were very green and completely ignorant about the concepts. This led to most of them gaslighting the interview sessions rather than providing straight forward answers for example most would really resort to introducing a biblical story or saying in case a concept was not clear to them in order to cover it up and be able to move to the next one. Introduction of probe questions largely helped me overcome this limitation as the probes exposed the students to a variety of answers and also widened their interpretation. Comprehension of key terms too was made easier with the introduction of probes and hence aided me in completing my study.

#### Lack of cooperation from my study population.

Spirituality and mental health were considered very sensitive topics to some of the participants and as a result, their response to certain aspects of the study wasn't as positive as expected. The participants weren't very excited and interested in responding to particular topics and this made the research study difficult to carry out. However, with constant reminding that the research was for a greater good, introduction of probes, continuous affirmation of the importance of both spiritual education and mental health literacy, I was able to carry out my research and accomplish my study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings that address the various study objectives. The social demographic characteristics of the participants are presented with a detailed overview of the findings backed by necessary literature reference and quotes in close reference to the research objectives, research questions.

#### 4.1 Socio demographic characteristics of participants

Name	Age	Year of study	Sex
Monica	21	3	F
Daphine	22	2	Female
Heinrich	22	2	Male
Martin	23	3	Male
Beatrice	21	2	Female
Queenie	22	3	Female
Jonathan	23	2	Male
Ryan	22	2	Male
Jeremiah	23	3	Male
Maria	22	1	Female
Clint	23	1	Male
Timothy	22	2	Male

A total number of 12 participants were interviewed individually and two focus group discussions were carried out. The participants were all students from Makerere University in the age bracket of 21-23years qualifying as young adults. All were unmarried with some being in relationships but most of them single. A great number were continuing students while a few of them were in their final year of study.

## 4.2 Meaning and understanding of mental health spiritually

The participants reported different opinions and explanations that make up their spiritual conceptualization of mental health as indicated below:

### 4.2.1 Mental health as a gift from God

To some participants, mental health is one of the many gifts that they have received from God as his children and being diligent followers to his word. It is a reward that they get to enjoy from God as his children. They largely believe that for one to enjoy a good mental health and proper functioning, it is clearly the doing of the lord and a gift that God has given to them. As Monica stated:

*“According to me, when an individual is in sync with the promises of God and doing what is clearly expected of them from God, he/she will automatically receive mental health. One is very much assured and ought to receive mental health because it is one of those gifts that the lord has given unto his children for them to enjoy. Therefore, as children of God, we are much more guaranteed to receive mental health as a gift from our father in heaven” (Individual Interview,2022)*

As Monica noted, the spiritual understanding of mental health has been materialized among most members of the religious group, a great deal of them share a much more objectified interpretation and analysis on mental health. According to them, it is clearly something that is going to be received from their “almighty father”. Just as Clifton Saper a lead psychologist for AMITA health and director of clinical services affirms “Mental health is health. It is a gift from God.” Just like any parent would automatically give their child a gift, they too they have believed that mental health is part of those gifts that they do receive from their almighty father. For example, as Clint noted,

*“Unto us the lord has granted a number of gifts including love, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness and clearly for one to be able to comprehend and understand that these gifts have been given unto us from our father, one has to hold a clear understanding of the greater gift which is mental health so I believe mental health is one of those ultimate gifts we have received from our father in heaven” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

In this case, Clint listed the numerous gifts that believers are given from God. However, he mentions that for a much clearer comprehension of these gifts, one has to be able to own a

certain level of mental health and this therefore automatically makes mental health one of the ultimate gifts that the lord has provided unto them as his children.

#### **4.2.2 Mental health as a privilege from God**

Some students did hold a perception of a privilege of mental health from God. As described and defined by these students, mental health is clearly a hierarchical privilege that they have automatically unlocked once they enter a relationship with God. To many of them, they actually do feel entitled to mental health as a part of the numerous benefits that a believer or child of God ought to receive. For example, Jeremiah noted,

*“We cannot speak of spiritual understanding of mental health without clearly understanding our stand as children of God. Once a Christian fully believes and understands what their position is in the life of the lord, then nothing isn’t promised unto them. Mental health is actually very small to what the lord has literally promised us his children. It is actually one of those privileges that we as his children are assured of” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

In clear understanding, these believers are actually convinced that mental health is actually a mere privilege that they ought to receive from the lord as his children and hence whosoever is in the lord, whosoever is a believer, there are automatically assured of the “privilege” of mental health something that Natasha Tracy in her article Mental Health Privilege, did strongly agree with. She noted, “There is such a thing as mental health privilege. Well mental health and the insidious thing about mental health privilege is that people don’t know that they have it. They don’t think about it. They don’t see it”. (Tracy, 2021)

#### **4.2.3 Mental health as a right and mandate as children from God**

Some participants reported that their spiritual understanding of mental health is clearly that of a right and a mandate. They are of a view that automatically if one is in a filial relationship with the lord, then they do possess the right to be his children and as children of God, they do have certain rights that t “other children” elsewhere don’t get to have.

As stated by Timothy:

*“Unto us his children, he has granted all the rights in the world, once one becomes a child of God, one of course has automatically earned the rights to be called a child of God and obviously these rights have no limit. In fact, everything good in this world is our right as children of God. So clearly mental health is our right. We*

*as children of God we have a right to receive good mental health because it's our father that is in charge.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Ryan also stated:

*“There has to be a distinction between us as children of God and those of the world obviously and I mean if our father is actually in charge of providing mental health to all people in the world, if he can even grant it to the unworthy ones, the prodigal sons, then us his children have automatically earned rights. It is actually our right to have good mental health. How can a child of God not have good mental health? It is an abomination, we are mandated, it is our right my friend we are blessed.” (Focus group discussion, 2022)*

The common presentation of themselves as not only believers but rather as “children of God” has greatly influenced their view on mental health and as reported by the Adventist world (2021), this conception survives mostly in certain African and East Indian people. This personal glorification and pride that they do carry has literally convinced them that they are not only believers but rather children of the almighty God and this has influenced them to come to a conclusion that mental health is clearly a right and something that they are solely entitled to once they are children of God. On grounds that religious people follow a particular faith and maybe connected with specific groups or traditions (WebMd, 2021) They definitely feel entitled and mandated to be on the receiving end and hence, they are convinced that with their spirituality, comes the sole right to attain good mental health.

#### **4.2.4 Mental health as a projection of the spirit world.**

Participants reported that mental health is a representation of the internal peace and spiritual peaceful state of an individual. They did believe that for one to possess a good mental health state, one is clearly projecting what is in the spirit world physically. As noted by Martin:

*“What defines a person is what is inside not outside and what is there spiritually. How much God has put there. The spirit therefore controls things in the physical realm.” (Individual interview,2022)*

To Martin, he chooses to address mental health as an activity latently existing in the spiritual realm but rather manifesting in the physical realm. To them as believers, there isn't a biological or social connection between mental health and an individual but rather entirely the doing of the lord and the spiritual forces. For example, Martin further stated:

*“If anything is to manifest in the physical realm, it was there in the spiritual realm, that is why the prophets in the Old testament speak about Jesus before he even comes in the New testament. The spiritual realm is quicker than the physical world.”*  
(Individual interview,2022)

This particular assertion may seem more ambiguous and confusing to a scholar however as a researcher, and on grounds that the idea of spirituality means different things for different people, (WebMd.,2021) I don't carry the power to dismiss an individual's view on what feels like is the spiritual understanding of mental health despite its far-fetched nature. Given the fact that the African Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences (2022), did report spiritual health as one of the main determinants of mental health, it isn't entirely wrong I guess to consider these believers ascertainment of mental health as a projection of the spirit world as clearly the science direct too reported most mental health indicators as highly dependent on spiritual health. (Science Direct, 2022)

#### **4.2.5 Mental health as a factor of distinction from the rest of the world**

Against a hierarchical background that most believers have adapted and the common reference to themselves not merely as believers but as rather “children of God”, this accompanied with those other positive terms that they do use to address themselves has led them to believe in various happenings and in believing that they are much more privileged than the rest of the world.

Often times these students do address themselves as the “chosen generation, children of the most high, direct descendants of Abraham, children of Yahweh, Jehovah's babies”, and the most common being “children of God”. These terms have actually forced the students to be convinced of the unseen privileges and bounties that they ought to receive as those men and women of God. In this case, the “chosen generation” is much more than convinced that mental health is something that has been granted to distinguish the “good from the bad”. They are convinced that the lord has granted them the “grace of mental health” to elevate their status and not be merely looked at as children of the world. To them, mental health is merely a grace and one that hasn't been granted out to every individual but rather to a chosen few.... As stated by Martin:

*“Christians we don’t speak to possess but we speak because we have. For example, a king saying he is a king doesn’t mean he wants to become a king, it is merely a chance for him to manifest his kingship” (Individual interview,2022)*

Jonathan also notes that:

*“The bible has given us authority to claim whatsoever we desire and clearly even Jesus rebukes the individual that wanted to receive the miracle of healing when he was a non-believer, Jesus himself clearly said that food of the children cannot be given unto the dogs. Hence, as his children we are definitely supposed to enjoy certain privileges that children of the world can’t enjoy. Our father in heaven cannot permit food for his children to be granted to the dogs and we cannot argue with the word of God.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Just like Khadem et al. (2016) reported, “when one considers himself in relation to a higher power, a great deal of this assumed power is literally projected unto their outside world”. This, coupled with the biblical reference of the non-believers as “dogs” and for them as believers as “children of the lord”, The borrowed imagery right from a biblical parable has been used to back up their conceptualization and to seal and affirm their status as very much special kinds of people and equally justified their feeling of exaggerated self-importance and grandiose delusions.

#### **4.2.6 Mental health as a symbol of the relationship with God**

The most interesting piece of this research I can say, was the fact that for every assertion made, a clear biblical story of reference was given. And the same has been carried to justify every remark. As originally stated, mental health was guaranteed basing on one’s relationship with God or if one was in sync with God, the participants later came to a conclusion that mental health is a symbol of this synchronization and internal unseen relationship with God. The participants were convinced that mental health is only and only going to be given if your relationship with God is doing okay then mental health will clearly be the outward symbol of this relationship.

So, to the students, for one to actually possess good mental health, it is basically a sign of justification and more so an affirmation of the flourishing relationship an individual has with the creator. As stated by Queenie:



*“Our God is a very jealous God. He is a God that doesn’t let anything slide and he is a God that loves to be shown off and for the world to know that you do acknowledge him. He is a God that loves to be acknowledged and he too acknowledges his children. Our God definitely does very many things to acknowledge us so basically once one enters into a relationship with him, once one gets to be called his child, he will automatically justify their relationship and definitely reward the individual so basically mental health can be viewed as a form of justification from God.” (Individual **interview,2022**)*

To this strand of believers, the lord their God basically choses to acknowledge their relationship by providing outer symbols like good mental health that will enable them be actively functioning and be productive in society and to those around them. So, to the students, the concept of mental health is merely a symbolic element that affirms and confirms one relationship with God. Just like today practices like weddings are officially carried out to legalize unions and symbols like rings are shared to clearly mark these unions, to them too, rings of mental health are being provided and therefore one doesn’t have to do a lot of digging or asking. One can clearly see from one’s mental health and tell that this individual is in a healthy relationship with God. It is therefore upon this understanding that it has been reported as extremely helpful to include spirituality in the treatment of mental health difficulties, (WebMd, 2022).

#### **4.2.7 Mental health as a making of the lord and not man**

A group of participants also largely claimed that mental health was clearly and solely the making and doing of the lord. To them, the physical, social, economic and environmental or even individual factors that often influence the mental state of an individual are clearly undermined and even neglected. Those respective factors are actually under looked and not even considered at all. To them, mental health is clearly the doing of the lord and therefore no “force” rather than God himself is in position to make such a big thing like mental health occur. As Maria stated:

*“Human beings today are so caught up in the element of self-glorification to the extent that most of them have actually forgotten who the creator is. We cannot speak of the living without acknowledging the power of God because even for one to grow up and be healthy, it is entirely the doing of the lord. Honestly if it wasn’t for the lord, one wouldn’t be created so if he is in charge of that, then what of mental health, he is responsible for it too it is all his doing, not the doctors, not the*

*environment, not an individual but rather God and the earlier that the world gets to learn of this, the better for them” (Individual **interview,2022**)*

To them mental health is clearly the making and will of the lord and therefore its Gods decision to determine who is worthy and who isn't worthy of this “precious gift” of mental health. Jonathan also noted that:

*“Even the bible has stated it that in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God, it therefore goes ahead to tell us that each and everything in the world is of God and God in it clearly justifying that nothing in this world belongs to us apart from God. Jeremiah 29:11 clearly shows God confirming that he knew us before we were born meaning he knows what's best for us, he is aware that you deserve the mental health or not and if you feel you deserve the mental health but haven't received it, all you have to do is go to God in prayer and ask for it because he says in the bible ask and you will receive and our God is a God of promises, he keeps his promises” (Individual **interview,2022**)*

Against a background that spirituality influences many decisions people make (WebMd., 2022) To these participants therefore, mental health isn't something that any individual can choose to have or to possess rather something that the lord their God chooses to give, since he was present at the genesis of the world, he is therefore in position to determine what each individual requires and if a particular individual feels cheated, he/she should just pray to God and he will be assured of the mental health. This decision however is a much more spiritualized decision and clearly in favour of the reported notation that spirituality influences most decisions in this believers' lives.

#### **4.2.8 Mental health as a supplement of the spirit**

Participants actually emphasized that mental health is clearly nothing but an activity of the spirit world. An individual has been categorized into the soul, body and spirit like Daphine stated:

*“Discipleship class teaches about the three parts of the body, mind and soul. The spiritual part is the real you and it interacts with God” (Individual **interview,2022**)*

Martin also noted that:

*“Man has three parts spirit with a soul in a body and a state of your soul either controlled by the spirit or body. the spirit is either controlled by darkness or light. Light is of God and darkness is of the world” (Individual **Interview,2022**)*

To them, mental health just supplements and compliments the spirit as an element of the spirit world and therefore justifies the actual happenings in the spirit world. They do ascertain that mental health is entirely a making of the spirit independent of the flesh and hence those in spiritual communities have the necessary support of mental health as clearly reported by Dan Brennan's study on how spirituality affects mental health (2021).

### **4.3 Understanding of spiritual mental health disturbances**

Below is how the various participants view and perceive the existing spiritual mental health disturbance;

#### **4.3.1 Do the spiritual mental health disturbances exist or not?**

It is right to say that this particular section brought a relatively large debate among the participants with some arguing that these spiritual forms of mental disturbances didn't exist while some did agree to the existence of these spiritual mental disturbances for example Monica stated:

*“Every individual is prone to having mental ill health. Besides mental disturbances do not affect the insane but they affect everyone and everyone is therefore a victim”*  
**(Individual interview, 2022)**

Daphine also noted that:

*“In this life, we are all supposed to go through problems.”* **(Individual interview, 2022)**

Heinrich also affirmed that they did exist as he stated:

*“Yes, they strongly exist I do agree. They do exist, I agree they exist.”* **(individual interview, 2022)**

This clearly means that the participants aren't in denial of the existence of these disturbances. However, they have summarized them in the following categories.

#### **4.3.2 Disturbances as spiritual tests**

A group of participants came up with a description of these mental health spiritual disturbances as spiritual tests. To them, they are clearly tests that the lord their God has actually set for them to actually test their spiritual resilience and to test their faith in their religion and their beliefs.

They are rather addressing them not as permanent setbacks but rather temporary in nature and only sent to actually assess their belief and level of spirituality. As Beatrice said:

*“Christianity was never meant to be the easier way out, definitely there are going to be situations our lord is definitely going to test his children and he hasn’t promised us that the tests are going to be very easy, noooo he can actually send you a spirit of depression, emptiness, weariness to see how loyal you are and how unshaken and to what extreme you can actually go for him.”* (Individual interview,2022)

Timothy also said:

*“Me am going to use the famous story of Job in the bible, Job was one of the greatest and most loyal Christians in the bible, however it didn’t stop God from sending him death, depression and loss just to simply test his faith. And in the end, there was actually a reward for all that he went through, a greater reward in fact.”* (Focus group discussion, 2022)

Clint said:

*“We as human beings unfortunately have refused to understand the language of the spirit, it’s never as direct as we may want it to be, what we look at as disturbances, these are actually just tests from God, his just clearly testing our faith and preparing us for the greater good coming our way.”* (Focus group discussion, 2022)

The participants are actually quick to dismiss the element of the negativity of the mental disturbances, they rather create a positive cloud around these spiritual disturbances by labelling them doings of the lord and merely addressing them as tests from the lord preparing them for their greater bounties ahead once their faith has been found worthy just like it was the case for Job a famous biblical character.

#### **4.3.3 Disturbances as spiritual punishments**

Other participants choose to refer to these disturbances as spiritual punishments. To them for one to actually experience a mental disorder or mental illness, spiritually, they have actually failed and as a result, these mental illnesses are an outward punishment for their spiritual deviance and wrong doings as Monica stated:

*“God sent King Saul the spirit of depression when he backsliding David also experiences mental ill-health when his sons divide the kingdom, King Hezekiah’s*

*mental health also deteriorated when he walked away on god and he actually ran mad.” (Individual interview,2022)*

Heinrich further noted:

*“Yes, clearly they are punishments, because the bible clearly states, I will punish them because I loved them, so definitely for our God to inflict such suffering on his children, it definitely has to be a punishment.” (Individual interview,2022)*

Jeremiah equally agreed:

*“Our God is a jealous God, and most Christians tend to forget that, and in most cases, even at the slightest deviation or slight sense of deviation, he will act, he can punish you with anxiety, depression, isolation he can punish you with even forgetfulness until when you acknowledge him in your life.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

From the participants’ discussions, the participants are actually convinced that these various spiritual forms of mental illness are as a result of the lords doing and a direct response for their wrong doings. In simple terms, the participants are actually convinced that whosoever experiences a mental illness is very much deserving and has wronged the lord so is therefore paying for it, just like Saper (2022), reports,” some people see mental health problems as a sign of weakness of faith or self-discipline and believe that if people just prayed harder, they could overcome these problems,”

#### **4.3.4 Disturbances as spiritual projections physically**

Another group of participants is actually convinced that the various spiritual mental health disturbances are actually projections of the spirit world. Against an assertion that the spirit world projects directly on the physical world as Martin said:

*“If anything is to manifest in the physical realm, it was there in the spiritual.” (Individual interview, 2022)*

So, to these believers, these mental disturbances are clearly a projection of the unresolved spiritual turmoil, guilt, unrest and un happiness that is actually ongoing in the spiritual realm. They are convinced that these disturbances will clearly manifest as a reminder and projection that one’s spiritual realm isn’t in sync and isn’t at peace. Just like Queenie said

*“For me am just human and for me definitely to be reminded or to be made aware that sometimes there is something that am not doing right, God will definitely find ways of letting me know about it and definitely when I see maybe something I cannot explain, maybe I will re-evaluate myself and my ways actually.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

To the participants, therefore spiritual mental health disturbances are clearly an outward phenomenon explaining the unseen spiritual negative activities and clearly a reminder to the believers that the spiritual world is not moving as it should be. Clearly affirming what was reported by Ironson (2016), “When spiritual wellbeing is seriously compromised, one may experience mental disorders such as loneliness, anxiety and loss of meaning in life,”

#### **4.4 How spirituality has affected mental health of students at the University**

Below is how the different students feel about the role of spirituality in either undermining or promoting their mental health.

##### **4.4.1 Spirituality in promoting mental health of students**

The participants highlighted different ways in which they felt that their spirituality actually has contributed to their mental health given the fact that “Spirituality affects our mental health in a variety of ways as reported by Brennan (2021), below are the various ways,

The participants mentioned that services like counseling are being provided at church where they have different roles that are being designed to help them to actually overcome their stresses and to also help them overcome specific situations in their lives. As stated by Beatrice:

*“Spiritual mothers and fathers are present at church that we can always talk to in case of any problem, we always constantly refer and go to them to counsel us and also talk to us in case of anything and this helps keep one in line with the promises of God” (Individual interview,2022)*

To them, as Beatrice ascertained, the role of these very influential figures has actually helped keep a great deal of these children sane and always assured that they can and always have someone to speak to no matter what. Ryan also noted that:

*“Counseling is provided at church, you may not even necessarily need to a church elder because you might feel judged or shy but we have different leaders and youth*

*ministers amongst ourselves, special days are even put in place where one can actually access church counseling.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

So, to these participants, the church has actually promoted their mental health through provided safe places for them to understand that it's okay to not feel okay and actually provided counseling services through the various members in church hence keeping them in line and promoting their mental health something that is in line with the recent reports by the Science direct of 2022 that “spiritual health has a significant effect on coping with disease and recovery from illness.”

Another group have also confirmed that the presence of particular practices done in church like fasting, praying, worshipping and praising have helped them feel like they have actually answered all the prayers to whatever might seem to be stressing them out in life. To them, the presence of such activities helps strengthen them and assures them that they can actually do better and face whatever is going on with them. Jonathan stated

*“One cannot stay the same once one goes to church, no matter how depressed or sad or uncertain one is, once one leaves their home and goes to church, even their moods are actually changed”. (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Monica said:

*“One might actually reach church feeling very hopeless and honestly someone gives a testimony in church, where you feel like yeah that's exactly what am going through honestly that feeling alone just gives you hope and just get the energy and then you just know that yes, am suffering today but since that person went through this, I can equally go through it too” (Individual interview,2022)*

Timothy also noted:

*“There those times you actually feel like whatsoever the man of God is speaking, it is all surely meant for you, you just feel like God is literally communicating and passing through that man of God to clearly pass on that message to you and honestly, you just find yourself feeling a lot better than you were when you entered church.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Clint also said:

*“Honestly, every time we worship, no matter what type of situation you are honestly going through, you automatically feel changed and feel very much better than you actually came. Even though you are depressed, you can actually forget about your*

*condition at that time and automatically become grateful to God for whatsoever is happening in your life.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

As reported by the Science Direct (2022), spiritual mental health is one of the determinants of mental health. There is a close relationship between spiritual health and mental health.” And hence, the participants are clearly agreeing that the various aspects and practices that are largely promoted by the church do help them to overcome the various situations in their lives that would have fuelled mental illnesses. They emphasize the restoration of hope and the rehabilitative role that the church plays in promoting their mental health just like the International Journal of Africa Nursing (2021), reported that most “mental health indicators are highly dependent on spiritual health.”

The students also mentioned that the gospel that has been taught at church helps to restore hope to the youth and also helps give them a purpose and a meaning for their lives hence serving as a wakeup call for most of them for example Daphine said:

*“God didn’t say you wouldn’t go through problems however, the gospel of Jesus Christ brings hope to the individuals it gives you hope to actually look forward for better days and actually help you to remain sober and un shaken no matter what situation one might be going through.” (Individual interview,2022)*

Martin also agreed that:

*“Honestly if it wasn’t for the gospel most of us wouldn’t have made it in life, you can be going through a very bad day and then a notification just pops up on your phone and honestly, it’s just exactly what you wanted to see. Honestly the gospel is very therapeutic and rehabilitative.” (Individual interview,2022)*

To the participants, the gospel has actually provided solutions to whatever situation an individual may seem to be going through on grounds that “most of these mental disorders are progressive and disabling and because of their threatening nature, they cause isolation and loss of independence in one’s life” Borji et al., (2016) and as a result many of them have been able to stay calm and composed no matter the trying situations that one might be going through as an individual. The element of hope that has been fronted by the gospel has also helped a number of them not to give up but to stay trying no matter the situation one is going through in life and has a result has prevented them from going through conditions like depression, bipolar, mania, anxiety among the many.



Another group of participants also ascertained that the element of spirituality has paved way for them to make meaningful friendships and has shaped their lives into making meaning relationships in their lives that have helped them overcome different stages of lives. They also mentioned the elements like constant fellowships and among the students as they are commonly referred to as prayer groups where the students are always meeting and praying over situations and constantly checking on one another. The element of a family and Christian love that has been promoted in these various groups has not only shaped their lives in appositive way but has introduced them to friends and a familiar group of people that they feel wont judge them but will be very supportive of them and generally accepting. These prayer families have also created an element of security for these students as they feel safer and much more loved in these groups something that has helped them to actually be peaceful in their lives and actually avoid different mental disorders clearly highlighting what was reported by the Science Direct (2022), “religious and spiritual beliefs can have significant effects in the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression”. As explained by Martin:

*“We actually meet every week in between the weekdays to actually and pray about particular situations that we might be going through in our lives and honestly no matter how rough you were having the day or week, you cannot stay the same when you attend’ (Individual interview,2022)*

Jeremiah also noted

*“Even if one missed a church sermon, at least your friends from the prayer group are going to check up on you, we are like a family honestly speaking, even when am sad or depressed, I will actually call upon someone from my prayer group to actually come and pray with me.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Maria also noted:

*“Honestly this is like the easiest way of making friends, at least I know I don’t have to worry about fitting in and being misunderstood because at least I know everyone in the prayer group is a man/woman of God so am at least very happy and free around them, I can even joke in tongues and I will still hear an amen somewhere.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Ryan also agreed that:

*“At least in the prayer groups, I am free to be who I am, I don’t have to pretend or even suppress my beliefs or compromise for someone, it is family, I feel safe, welcome and not even scrutinized at all. I just feel free to share even about my bad and good moments.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Following the different participants input, it is very vivid that the students have received a much more familiar feel from these particular groups and as a result, they don't have to be isolated or hideaway from people no matter what good or bad situation they are going through and it is therefore right to ascertain that spirituality affects our mental health in a variety of ways (Dan, 2021) however, there are several ways that spirituality can support your mental health (WebMd, 2021)

#### **4.4.2 Spirituality in undermining mental health of students of students.**

Throughout my entire research process, I can conclude that this was one of the most difficult parts to get information from the participants. The participants didn't only want to appear negative of their beliefs but also didn't want to accept that their spirituality did undermine their mental health state at the various points in time. However, following hardships and constant pressing, they did try to provide some information on this particular section.

The information however on this particular is therefore very scanty as most of the participants didn't seem to agree to the act that spirituality has actually played a role in undermining their mental health.

However, some students did address the fact that spirituality has actually created certain amount of pressure that has clearly fuelled certain conditions in their lives that have led to mental illnesses. They did mention that with spirituality, comes a certain pressure and element that people around you do address you as for example Jonathan stated:

*“There is a way people expect you to live your life as a child of God to an extent that the normal of the ordinary person aren't the normal for you. Society may actually judge you very harshly for skipping just one day of prayer and yet people who aren't as religious as us have actually done worse things and are able to go away un punished” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Timothy also noted that:

*“The world isn't very forgiving when it comes to a Christian doing certain things and yet it always turns a blind eye when it is non-Christians doing certain things honestly something which is a bit unfair to us.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

Clint also noted that:

*“Honestly even god himself, the way that he has designed us as his children, he is by far tougher and more responsive when it comes to us than when it comes to*

*those other children. You may find that god punishes me for something as little as forgetting to pray but thieves, murderers, liars, prostitutes are out here enjoying their lives as if nothing really happened.” (Focus group discussion,2022)*

The idea of the all perfect being and the desire to live a particular level of perfection has actually erased the element of humanity in most of these believers as they have been shaped to believe that they are supposed to live a certain type of way something that has clearly fuelled mental disorders like anxiety, depression among most of them. For example, Beatrice agreed that:

*“Honestly speaking me I can be very restless when I miss a day of church or even miss out because I know as a child of God, I know not only have I failed my heavenly father but I have also actually failed everyone around me. In fact, my entire week is spoilt because I be feeling very guilty.” (Individual interview,2022)*

Heinrich also said:

*“Honestly as a child of god, the depression becomes very overwhelming when you know you are not really doing what you are supposed to be doing honestly you cannot be happy, even your interaction with those around you is very much distorted the only time you actually get back to your normal self is clearly when you are sure you have mended your relationship with God” (Individual interview, 2022)*

Despite the disturbing situation, it is actually very unfortunate that these believers seem to have completely forgotten that they are merely humans that are actually prone to sin and weak to temptations, they are much more comfortable with the delusion of the perfect self-something that they cannot even describe but rather something that they are so hell bent on achieving. This desire for exaggerated perfectionism in a bid to please to please their father has actually thrown some into very worse stages with some even isolating and others waking up to actually become obsessive with the spirituality hence affecting their mental health.

A different strand of the participants also mentioned that spirituality has actually opened them to different zones that people that aren't Christians cannot experience something that has had a direct impact on their mental health. On grounds that religious people follow a particular faith and maybe connected with specific groups or traditions (Dan, 2021) To some of them, sometimes they have realized their deeper “calling” as “children of God” and are called to service however to people of the world, it is clearly a show and thus has led them to be torn apart into who exactly they are expected to believe. As Beatrice stated:

*” Honestly speaking there those times the spirit is going to possess you and actually command you to speak in tongues and the people around you are simply looking at you like a show-off or a wiseacre and honestly you might even end up losing your own friends for just choosing to follow the word of God” (Individual interview,2022)*

Heinrich also noted that:

*‘The spirit is a very funny being as you will not know when the lord is calling you to serve, you might even be on your way to a party and the lord commands you to pray for the nation, honestly, there’s no way am going to disobey the lord for a friend’s party. so, u find that most of your friends are actually thinking you’re no longer a cool or good person, some people don’t even invite you to hang out with them because they know, you might disagree with them’* (Individual interview,2022)

Honestly, even if I was the friend the declaration that the spirit has instructed you to start fasting on my birthday, it may honestly make no sense to me and might honestly come off as just a pompous show of your faith to me. This together with the fact that some believers tend to be over doing their session of longing for God has actually distorted their interpersonal relationships or even mentally affected them for example, an individual may decide to starve themselves for a fortnight in a bid to improve their relationship with God. And as a result, one may develop eating disorders or even mood disorders all in the name of seeking for the face of God.

Another group of participants also claimed that the religion and spirituality have actually shaped their lives negatively and thus has led them to actually be vulnerable to mental ill health. Just like Brennan (2021), reported, “the variety of spiritual beliefs and customs varies to people who practice them. One thing they all have in common is the range of effects they can have on our mental health.’ They believe that the fact that they are expected to live a certain type of way and the fact that religion has shaped them into a certain type of way has deprived them of certain things and seeing other people being able to do them honestly makes them to be sad and angry something that is likely to fuel negative feelings or even force one to question their beliefs honestly for example Beatrice stated:

*“Every time I see my friends free to do things that they want to do honestly makes me feel very sad about my faith. I actually sometimes just get depressed and extremely sad when I see them enjoying because at times, I also want to do what they are doing but I know I can’t do that”* (Individual interview,2022)

Ryan also noted that:

*“Honestly sometimes our faith hasn’t really fully prepared us to handle some situations, we hardly enjoy our youthful ages, because we are literally praying all the times, of course you feel bad seeing your friends having all the girls, enjoying*

*themselves yet you your only option is prayer and fellowship” (focus group discussion,2022)*

Maria also supplemented:

*“Surely sometimes our faith is very boring, you can even get jealous and envious seeing some of your friends who you know that you are even better than them seem to be living a better life when you a Christian is just looking malnourished and poor honestly you can get depressed for real. Your mental health can get shaken.”*  
**(Focus group discussion,2022)**

Queenie also added that:

*“Most people who are Christians are very boring, I swear you might see acute guy but when his not a Christian, you know this alone can give you anxiety because you can just be sure he won’t find you attractive as a Christian because honestly you can’t compete with those other girls. You can even get depressed when you pray for him, but he still doesn’t notice you and yet the church boys are not your type.”*  
**(Focus group discussion,2022)**

As noted by the believers, despite their prescribed mode of life, many of them seem to be drawn to the liberal and much easier going way of life of the non-believers something that has fuelled confusion, resentment, jealousy and envy among most Christians. The fact that they do feel isolated from that other life by their religious demands and religious way of life has left many sad and left their mental health very challenged and vulnerable to disorders.

In conclusion, despite the fact that these believers have acknowledged their spirituality as one of the factors that undermine their mental health, they have however failed to accept the bigger role that spirituality actually plays for example, they don’t seem to agree that spirituality aggravates certain conditions, they don’t seem to agree that religious practices aggravate certain conditions in their lives for example their constant prayers and unrealistic fasting seem to endanger them , they don’t seem to agree with the fact that their spirituality actually harbours and normalizes certain mental conditions hence delaying treatment and diagnosis but rather choose to focus on a much smaller role due to reasons best known to them.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the study as entirely compiled by me as the researcher. The conclusions drawn in close reference to the views are also accompanied with the recommendations for future reference.

#### **5.1 Summary of findings**

Given the main objective of the study being the need to examine the spiritual conceptualization of mental health among students at Makerere University, a number of research questions were generated so as to aid in the accumulation of enough information and data to fully support my rationale for the study.

Having followed the right procedures of participant identification, data collection, transcribing and compiling, I do ascertain that the main objective has been met and the main research question has been answered during this study.

The study has clearly highlighted the spiritual conceptualizations students hold towards mental health and has exposed the pattern of understanding, level of understanding, level of familiarity, and various perceptions that the students do hold towards mental health. The study has also highlighted the student ignorance, adamancy and unfamiliarity with the various mental health concepts directly or indirectly due to their attachment to their religious norms and thus has clearly called for a great deal of criticism and recommendations so as to ensure increased mental health literacy and also foster the need for increased mental health attention and awareness in the University.

##### **5.1.1 Meaning of mental health to students in Makerere University**

Different views and meanings were raised by the students which were not only quite funny but rather did seem to appear far from the actual meaning of mental health, similarly, most students' views were highly spiritualized and actually supported by scriptures or biblical sayings and quotations.

To a great deal of the students, mental health was entirely God's gift to mankind. To them, it was clearly something that was a transactional relationship result where by one was fully assured of it if one was in good faith with the lord. To the participants, the spiritual meaning of mental health is clearly something that can be received as long as one is in sync with their religion and is doing exactly what is expected of them, clearly their mental health will just be fine. They also do ascertain that much as mental health is a gift, it can as well as be a punishment from God. To them mental health disorders, illnesses and disturbances aren't entirely a doing of the psychosocial, physical, emotional, or economic factors but rather as a punishment from God once one isn't in sync with God's grace.

Another strand of students however do feel that mental health is clearly a privilege and honour being granted to them as children of God. To them, they are of a belief that their almighty father in heaven has granted each and everything in this world and nothing less, they believe that mental health is therefore one of the various privileges that they get to enjoy as children of God and hence are convinced that there is nothing bound to shake off their peace and stability as children of God.

Similarly, terms like reward, right and honour have been used to describe mental health in the spiritual context as according to another strand of the participants, as children of God, everything good has been set aside for them and hence their understandings and views are entirely in line with what seems to be Gods promises to them as his beloved children. Therefore, mental health is therefore a form of birth right that they have inherited right from birth from their father. It is an honour and an equal reward that for as long as they are in Christ, and him in them, mental health is automatically secured.

A great fraction of the participants majorly highlighted the key issue of the 3 functioning parts of an individual. To most of them, their spiritual understanding of mental health is entirely based on the fact that a human being is a spirit with a soul in a body. They strongly ascertain that mental health is mostly to do with the mind and therefore, mental health is mostly a spiritual activity that is latent in the spiritual world and manifest in the physical world. to them, even once one is suffering from a mental illness, a connection is much more present in one's spiritual world and therefore one is only exhibiting what is already latent in the spiritual realm. To them, peace within one's spiritual world directly guarantees good mental health in the physical world and vice versa.



### **5.1.2 Understanding of spiritual mental health disturbances**

From the participant's point of view, different notions were raised which led to a development of different strands.

To one strand of the students, spiritual mental health disturbances are termed as a void resulting from the strained relationship one may have with God. Mental health disturbances are actually as a result of internal emptiness and the presence of the spirit of God to actually fill in and to actually settle into that void. They vehemently argue that within every man, the void is orchestrated by God himself and only God is the perfect fit for it.

To another strand, they ascertain that mental health disturbances are part of life and are often times a punishment from God himself.

Another strand however do emphasize that mental health disturbances do affect the soul and mess it up. They actually do originate from the spiritual realm and later manifest in the physical world. They argue that for one to outwardly experience a mental health disturbance like depression, it would be an outward symptom of the internal calamity, unrest, and general uncertainty in one's spiritual world.

They also do ascertain that in mental health disturbances don't only affect the insane but rather affect each and every one. They strongly pin that every individual is a victim however they also do emphasize that these disturbances are often triggered by forces beyond a human beings control. So, they largely emphasize that a human being can't go through these mental health disturbances alone but rather the presence of god is needed to assist an individual overcome these disturbances.

### **5.1.3 Influence of spirituality on mental health of students**

Throughout the entire research process, this did prove to be one of the most intriguing sub topic as it did bring about divide information. To a larger extent, the students are convinced that the element of spirituality and the fact that they belong to a religious group has promoted their mental health. They speak of the relief received through the biblical scriptures which they largely refer to as the gospel, they rejoice in the relationships that they have made from the churches and church groups. The students highlighted a notion of a family and present a

presence of hope that comes from the various prayer summons among the many. The students have also noted that counselling services have been provided at church. They boast and speak of internal joy, peace and sense of fulfilment that comes with the church and thus it is upon these key summarized factors that they are convinced spirituality promotes mental health of the students.

To a lesser extent however, the students have also mentioned and cited spirituality as a factor responsible for undermining their mental health. The students noted that the extreme pressure that comes with the religious life and the public comparisons and scrutiny have not only fuelled self-guilt but have rather pushed many of them into stress, depression and other mental disorders. The students also highlighted the constant ridicule and even isolation that most people in society inflict onto them as a result of their religion has also led most of them to live very unhappy lives and has even alienated them from most of their friends. The students also raised the feeling of loss and emptiness that religion sometimes creates in their lives. The fact that religion constraints and limits their enjoyment and happiness and hence as a result, many end up very sad, envious and jealous of their peers,

In conclusion, to I as a researcher the inverse is the positive because despite the student's assertion being a lesser extent, I still do maintain my stand that following the findings, to a greater extent, spirituality has actually undermined the student's mental health and has to a smaller extent promoted it.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Following the various findings from my data compilation and analysis, below are my personal conclusions on my topic following the successful study.

The study has relatively been one I can call very eye opening and also equally surprising because not only have I been exposed to a number of new concepts but I have also equally been taken aback by how little or less the students' knowledge on mental health actually is.

The most shocking of all being the fact that the students aren't entirely unaware of the phenomena but how much their spirituality and different religious activities are greatly interfering with their interpretation and comprehension of the phenomena for example,

Following their different spiritual understanding of mental health and the different terms that they actually are stating it out to be, I clearly with my full sense do conclude that most of these students are actually delusional. The fact that one will clearly shun away from the actual definition of mental health and that one would find comfort in believing and stating that a given physical activity is a representation of the spirit world is actually baffling. I am forced to agree that these students are not into their so-called spiritual zones like they paint it out to be but are rather very delusional. The exaggerated grandiose delusion that they do hold is actually very evident because honestly its very perturbing how one would conclude that “mental health is our gift as children of the most high, we are therefore enjoying it as a gift from our father”, yet clearly people are having stable mental health but are not even affiliated to any religious group. Does this mean their assumed father is vehemently very generous that he is giving out gifts to other children that aren't his and neglecting his own? Because we have clearly seen church members exhibiting clear symptoms of mental health disturbances and non-Christians being very stable and functioning.

I also do conclude that most of these students' definitions and meanings on mental health were very ambiguous and vague in fact, their meanings were very disturbing to me as a scholar and mental health student. I did find their views very disturbing and honestly, I still can't wrap my head around how one would rather gladly welcome a mental health disorder and comfortably live with it rather than seeking for help on grounds that it is “Gods will” for them to endure such suffering so as to be in sync with the will of God in their lives.

Much as I am very saddened by this, I have come to a conclusion that honestly spirituality has promoted unrealistic interpretation of the term mental health. Spirituality has actually shadow banned these students from clearly reaching out for treatment even when they do need it and that the situations are very severe and as a result it has harboured and aggravated a number of mental illnesses. The saddening element is that the students would rather be physically abused and embarrassed than actually seek for the actual help that they need and as one is still contemplating on the why? They will be ready to justify their actions with a spiritual story and relevant example. It is almost next to madness as to why honestly a Nakasi would be so hell bent on the God of Abraham. I mean you clearly are supporting and trying so hard to justify your actions on a God you have clearly said was a God of the Israelites are you an Israelite? A Levite, a Hebrew? I was actually forced to double check if we did have such tribes in Uganda because it honestly made zero sense to me. An individual would gladly allow to be severely

caned in church on grounds that the 7 demons from the great lakes are residing within them than actually going for a diagnosis that won't even involve any act of violence. At this rate, am convinced that spirituality has created an element of fear among the people that they would rather focus and believe that their situations are very complex and incurable than actually believing that there's hope and treatment.

Another conclusion that I drove at is the fact that one would choose to describe mental health as a mere force that is looming around the earth. The students speak of mental health as though it is nothing but a physical object, they speak of it as if they were referring to a cup. The hierarchy alone that these students have presented for attainment of a good mental health is actually very astonishing because honestly something so general as mental health being referred to as an honour, gift, privilege, right is very annoying. The fact that these so-called believers are very confident with their ignorance and adamancy is also very annoying and honestly, it is very annoying because it's coming from scholars like these university students that are expected to change the world.

Another conclusion that I have made is that most of these students are actually patients and that spirituality is one of the major causes of mental health disturbances. Much as people in the world do cherish and strongly uphold their religious beliefs and are strongly attached to their various religious dominations, it is actually sad to notice that religion has actually spearheaded, harboured and aggravated a number of mental illnesses. Religion has provided a habitant and a safe place for people with various mental illnesses to actually feel welcomed and normal and in doing so has promoted mental illness. For example, an individual with signs of mania or bipolar will be accommodated on ground that the spirit is using her to sing and worship and praise the lord gloriously while even much more complex situations like psychosis are neutralized with sayings like the holy spirit is using the person to communicate something. Symptoms are largely neutralized as doings of the lord while conditions are even enhanced. One may be pushed into depression for failing to be like other church members. One may even feel unworthy of being in the lord's presence because the church has labelled them sinners and unworthy. Often times, such individuals are constantly ridiculed and even sent into depression by the so-called men and women of God. Sad as it may be, spirituality seems to fuel and harbour more mental illnesses today as many of them experience changes in personality and lifestyle. Moradi-Joo et al., (2017)

Despite the fact that the negatives to outweigh the positives, spirituality has also had some positive impact on the mental health of the students and below are my conclusions too on this;

The students at Makerere University are very much aware of Mental health.

Despite their distorted perceptions and varying definitions of the term, the students are very much aware of mental health, its importance and the consequences of the neglecting of mental health. The students can actually name a great deal of mental illnesses and they can actually agree with the statistics that depression is one of the leading mental health disorders. Some students have actually gone an extra mile and have sought for services like counseling and therapy to improve on their mental wellbeing so therefore the term mental health wasn't such a new phenomenon to them.

Spirituality is actually one of the few things that have helped to promote sanity of the students and has also kept students in check with their mental health. Many studies have confirmed the positive effect of spirituality on mental health (Yousefi et al.,2019) Different religious activities that these students are actually involved in have given a number of them hope and have also helped a number of them feel connected, loved, appreciated and recognized something that has helped in promoting mental health of the students. Students have actually made friends from church, encouraged to share with friends in case of any underlying issues and often times the students feel protected and encouraged hence helping them overcome some illnesses like depression and anxiety but rather promote good mental health just like Trevino & Pargament (2014), report, "promoting spiritual health may not cure a disease but it does help one feel better, prevents some health problems and helps in adapting to disease or death."

In conclusion, just like Yaghoubipoor et al. (2021), reported, There are many controversies in the relationship between spiritual health and mental health I do ascertain that spirituality has to a larger extent affected the student's conceptualization and meanings on mental health negatively as clearly justified above. Yes, it has somehow positively impacted the interpretation but has largely fuelled the various misconceptions and debates on mental health. Religion has actually done more misleading than enlighten that at this point one would wonder whether religion is honestly not the actual problem here. It has promoted more sentimentalism and led people away from the actual truth but in doing so justified the wrongs with a biblical story of "Jonah in the whale's belly and the suffering times of Job". At this rate, honestly one

would really wonder whether religion is actually not the real problem here and raises a number of questions and debates whether spirituality and religion is really a friend or the actual enemy to us.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The following are the necessary revised recommendations that I do suggest.

I recommend that the University stake holders should put in more emphasis in creating awareness and improving mental health literacy among students in the university to ensure that students understanding of such complex issues isn't interfered with by individuals that would want to carry out their own personal agendas on grounds that, some people may take advantage of emotionally vulnerable people while pretending to support their spirituality (WebMd, 2021).

Religious leaders should also educate the general public about actual factual issues and that they should constantly carry out more research on complex issues rather than constantly justifying everything with quotations and biblical stories given the fact that many people with mental illnesses get a sense of hope by talking with a religious or spiritual leader (Dan, 2021). Religious leaders should therefore be aware of the power that they hold and the repercussions of their words to their believers and thus should seek out to spread more facts on such sensitive topics rather than speaking out of excitement.

The University should include the various religious dominations and groups and also bring the religious leaders on board to ensure that they work hand in hand in the dissemination of knowledge on mental health so as to promote mental health literacy in the University. Religious leaders should also be brought to counseling centres too and should also constantly advise students to seek for help in case of any mental health disturbances considering the fact that spiritual health has a significant effect on coping with disease and recovery from illness. (Science Direct, 2022)

The church is kindly reminded to stick to its role as a place of worship and not a substitute for hospitals. The church should therefore seek to encourage people to go for treatment and to stop detaining people that clearly need help with promises of miracles and divine healing given the fact that, if you are emotionally vulnerable, you can be more easily convinced to take part in unhealthy activities as a recent study by Dan (2021), reports. Churches should actually have

professionals on ground to ensure that barbaric and far-fetched mechanisms of treatment aren't encouraged but rather should help identify students that do need help and refer them for treatment.

The government should caution churches and other places of worship against spreading of false information to the people and strict punishments should be put in place to guard against that and to ensure that no misleading information from the "dear men of God" is sent out to the people owing to the unfortunate fact that some people may take advantage of emotionally vulnerable people while pretending to support their spirituality (WebMd.,2021)

The promotion of mental health in Universities should be concern of everyone in the University.it should be seen as a part of a student's health and a part of a picture of the student welfare .it is therefore not enough to provide counselling and psychiatric services however attempts should be made to develop the maximum extent those factors with in a University which allow each student to reach his greatest potential growth, both academically and as a human being and thus a mental health program should be geared to the normal educative process of the institution.(UNESCO, 1995)

Medical students should be trained for their roles as pillars of mental health. According to a study carried out in France, at least 50%of the medical work of the general practitioners is directly concerned with mental health and yet the general practitioner is less conscious of his key role in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental ills than with respect to diseases like tuberculosis or venereal disease as reported by the 1995 UNESCO courier on health.

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**Appendix i: In the depth interview guide for primary respondents.**

**Spiritual Conceptualization on mental health among students at Makerere University**

**Introduction and Informed Consent**

My name is Matharine Whitney Nakasi a third-year student at Makerere University posing a Bachelors of Social Work and social administration degree. I humbly request you to participate in an interview with reference to my dissertation titled “Spiritual Conceptualization on Mental health among students at Makerere University. A case study of Phaneroo Religious group. I humbly request for your cooperation and also emphasize that this is an entirely voluntary process and that you are free to stop the interview at free will. I will be using an interview guide fully guided and approved by my supervisor from Makerere University.

**Kindly do answer the questions as best as you understand**

What is your name?

What is your sex?

What is your age?

**Section One: meaning of mental health to students in Makerere University.**

What is your spiritual understanding on mental health?

What terms do you use to describe mental health in the spiritual context?

Probe to understand how mental health is understood and perceived in the spiritual realm

What are your spiritual experiences on mental health

What is your understanding of mental health

How is mental health described in church?

**Section Two understanding of spiritual mental health disturbances among students of Makerere University.**

1. What is 'spiritual mental health disturbance'?
2. When can you say / tell that one is spiritually mentally disturbed?

Probe to understand if spiritual mental health disturbances do exist or not.

3. How do spiritual mental health disturbances manifest?
4. What are the forms of spiritual mental health disturbances

Probe to understand which forms of spiritual mental health disturbances are latent and manifest and how they actually manifest.

5. How is spiritual mental health disturbances handled in the church?

Section three: How Spirituality has affected promotion of mental health of students at Makerere university.

Probe to understand how spirituality has promoted mental health of students at Makerere University.

1. How has spirituality promoted your mental health and encouraged you to promote it.
2. In what ways has spirituality helped you best understand mental health.
3. How has the church addressed mental health related issues?

Probe to understand how spirituality has undermined mental health of students at Makerere University.

4. What pressures has the church afflicted on you that interfere with your mental wellbeing.
5. How has spirituality fuelled/tampered with your mental health?
6. How has the church neglected mental health?

## **Appendix ii: Introduction and Informed Consent**

My name is Matharine Whitney Nakasi a third-year student at Makerere University pursuing a Bachelors of Social Work and social administration degree. I humbly request you to participate in an interview with reference to my dissertation titled “Spiritual Conceptualization on Mental health among students at Makerere University. A case study of Phaneroo Religious group. I humbly request for your cooperation and also emphasize that this is an entirely voluntary process and that you are free to stop the interview at free will. I will be using an interview guide fully guided and approved by my supervisor from Makerere University.

### **Focus Group Discussion questions.**

1. What is your understanding of mental health?
2. What is your spiritual understanding of mental health?
3. How is mental health described in church?
4. How do you define mental
5. What mental health disturbances does the church cause?
6. In what ways do mental health disturbances manifest?
7. How does the church address mental health disturbances?
8. What is the relationship between mental health and spirituality?
9. How does spirituality promote mental health?
10. What are your spiritual experiences on mental health?
11. What terms are can you use to describe mental health?