

# The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health Stigma: An Exploratory Survey Among University Students, Karu

Nongo Francis Se-eren\*, Oluwatoyosi A. Adekeye

Department of Community Medicine and Primary Health Care

\*Corresponding Author

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Mental health stigma remains a major barrier to care seeking globally, particularly among young adults. As social media has become a primary source of information for this demographic, it plays a dual and complex role: either disseminating positive awareness or reinforcing negative stereotypes. This study was conducted to explore the specific impact of social media use, whether it contributes to reducing or reinforcing mental health stigma among undergraduate students at Bingham University, Nigeria.

**Methodology:** An exploratory quantitative survey design was employed. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from a purposively selected sample of 378 undergraduate students (aged 18-25) across seven departments at the university. Data collection utilized both paper questionnaires and online distribution via Google Forms. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, were used to analyze the collected data using SPSS version 25.0.

**Results:** The most frequently used social media platforms were WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Findings revealed a dual outcome: while students strongly acknowledged the positive role of social media in spreading awareness and reducing overall stigma (with most agreeing that awareness has increased), they simultaneously highlighted significant concerns. These concerns centered on the frequent spread of misinformation, the trivialization of serious mental health conditions through humour and memes, and the perception that stigma continues to prevent peers from seeking help.

**Conclusion:** Social media plays a dual role in shaping the mental health perceptions of university students, acting both as a primary source of awareness and a propagator of harmful content. To leverage its positive influence while mitigating the negative, the study recommends the implementation of targeted awareness campaigns, strategic collaboration with verified mental health influencers, and the introduction of mandatory digital literacy training for students.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Mental Health, Mental Health Stigma, Digital Platforms

