(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Prevalence and Awareness of Student Deviant Behaviors: A Quantitative Survey at the Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu

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Abstract

Background: Deviant behavior among university students is a global concern, undermining academic integrity and the learning environment. This study investigated the prevalence and awareness of student deviant behaviors at the Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu.

Methods: A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Using purposive sampling, 105 respondents including student union executives (68), examinations staff (16), hostel staff (9), social workers (8), and student affairs staff (4) completed a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results: The respondent profile was predominantly female 20 (55.5%) over male 16 (44.4%), aged 34-41 years 19 (52.7%), and highly educated 31 (86.1% held a tertiary qualification). In terms of experience, the largest group had 11-14 years of service 19 (52.7%), followed by those with 0-5 years 7 (19.4%), 15 years and above 5 (13.9%), and 6-10 years 3(8.3%). The findings revealed a high prevalence of deviant behaviors, with examination malpractice being the most common 30 (65.2%), followed by cheating 8(22.2%), with stealing and truancy being less common 4(6.6% each). A significant majority of respondents 28(77.7%) were aware of deviant behaviors among students. However, the study identified a critical challenge of underreporting, attributed to perceptions of ineffective institutional reporting mechanisms.

Conclusion: The study confirms that academic malpractice is the predominant form of deviance at FEDCOTTEN. While awareness among a mature and experienced staff and student leader cohort is high, institutional responses are hampered by reporting inefficiencies. The findings underscore the need for the university to strengthen its institutional framework with clear reporting protocols and targeted interventions, such as academic integrity campaigns and enhanced counseling services, to foster a more conducive learning environment.

Keywords: Deviant Behavior; Prevalence; Awareness; Examination Malpractice; University Students

1. Introduction

Deviant behavior, defined sociologically as actions that violate established social norms and values, is a persistent feature of human societies [1. 2]. While social cohesion relies on adherence to shared standards, deviations are commonplace, presenting a significant concern for individuals, groups, and institutions [3]. In essence, human behavior can be categorized along a spectrum encompassing pro-social and anti-social, conformist and non-conformist, and criminal and non-criminal actions. The manifestation of deviance poses a tangible threat to an individual's physical and social well-being within key environments like the family and the school [1, 3]. The phenomenon is particularly

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disruptive in universities, where it can undermine the learning process and create an environment unconducive to academic achievement.

Within the university setting, incidents of deviant behavior among students have become increasingly severe and widespread. Prevalent issues include truancy, vandalism, bullying, theft, examination malpractice, drug abuse, and disrespect towards educators [4, 5, 6]. These behaviors pose a significant threat to the academic, social, and environmental well-being of students, as well as the overall safety and effectiveness of the educational environment. The negative impact on student outcomes is profound, disrupting the teaching and learning process and leading to poor academic performance, increased dropout rates, and diminished opportunities for social mobility and development.

These behaviors have significant repercussions, not only for the students involved but also for the academic staff. Research consistently links disruptive student behaviors to teacher exhaustion and burnout, highlighting the systemic impact of deviance on the educational environment [7-13].

The etiology of such behavior is multifaceted. Scholars, particularly in the context of economically disadvantaged nations, attribute it to a complex interplay of factors including peer pressure, inadequate parental socialization, poverty, and the influence of social media [14]. In the specific context of academic misconduct, such as examination malpractice, contributing factors include intense socioeconomic pressures, the high stakes of academic success, fear of failure, and limited future employment opportunities [1]. This aligns with observations that rules and regulations are frequently flouted in educational institutions, as seen in cases of truancy, indecent dressing, sexual offences, and other negative behaviors that signify a departure from expected functional conduct [15]. Consequently, some commentators have urged government bodies, parents, and school administrators to take decisive action to eliminate these behaviors from schools [5, 16].

Despite the persistence of these issues, institutional responses often appear inadequate. A critical challenge is the potential underreporting of incidents, which limits a comprehensive understanding of the problem's scope. Academic and administrative staff may prefer to address deviance directly rather than navigate institutionalized procedures perceived as ineffective or unsatisfactory. This ineffective response can stem from a lack of qualified professional counsellors and clinical social workers, or weak university leadership, leaving schools seemingly helpless in curbing the problem.

Therefore, a significant gap exists in the precise understanding of the prevalence of various deviant behaviors and the level of awareness among key university stakeholders regarding these behaviors, specifically within the Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu.

This study aims to address this gap by employing a quantitative survey to assess, from the perspective of staff and student leaders, the prevalence of observed deviant behaviors and their awareness of its occurrence. The findings are expected to provide a robust evidence base for developing targeted interventions and strengthening institutional mechanisms to foster a more conducive learning environment.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate for collecting numerical data from a sample of the population at a single point in time to describe the prevalence and awareness of deviant behaviors among students as reported by university staff and student leaders.

2.2. Study Setting and Population

The research was conducted at the Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu (FEDCOTTEN). FEDCOTTEN is located at latitude 6°29'07.1"N and longitude 7°29'42.5"E [17, 18]. The study population was 2,135 students in the school. This included members of the Student Union Government (SUG), staff from the Examinations and Records unit, the Student Affairs Directorate, Social Work staff, and Hostel staff.

2.3. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify and recruit participants who were deemed information-rich for the study's objectives due to their specific roles in student administration, support, and welfare. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to this targeted sample. Of these, 105 questionnaires were fully completed and

returned, yielding a high response rate of 87.5%. The final sample distribution was as follows: Student union Executives: 68, Examinations and Records Staff: 16, Hostel Staff: 9, Social Work Staff: 8 and Students Affairs Staff: 4.

2.4. Data Collection Instrument

Primary data was collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

- Section A: Collected socio-demographic data of respondents (e.g., age, gender, department/unit, years of service, highest qualification).

- Section B: Comprised closed-ended questions (e.g., multiple-choice, Likert-scale) designed to gather quantitative data on the respondents' awareness of the existence of deviant behavior among students and common types and prevalence of deviant behaviors observed

2.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The results were presented in tables and figures for clarity and to describe the distribution of responses.

2.6. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the fields of Social Work and Research Methodology to assess its clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensiveness. A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and usability of the tool, and minor adjustments were made based on the feedback received before the main survey was administered.

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3. Results

3.1. Distribution of Respondents by University Department and Unit

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, with 105 completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 87.5%. The respondent population was comprised of 68 student union executives (64.8%), 16 exams and records staff (15.2%), 9 hostel staff (8.6%), 8 social work staff (7.6%), and 4 student affairs directorate staff (3.8%). The distribution of these respondents is presented in Table 1.

3.2. Age distribution of the respondents

As shown in Figure 1, the largest proportion of respondents (52.7%, n=55) were between 34 and 41 years old, while the smallest group (7.8%, n=8) were aged 26 to 33 years, and finally 18-25 and 42 years above were 19.71%, n=21 respectively.

3.3. Gender distribution of the respondents

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of respondents were female (55.5%, n=58), while 44.4% (n=47) were male.

3.4. Distribution of Respondents of the Staff by Years of Service

Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents by years of service. The largest group, comprising 51.3% (n=19), had 11-14 years of service, followed by those with 0-5 years (18.9%, n=7), 15 years and above (18.9%, n=7), and 6-10 years (10.8%, n=4).

3.5. Distribution of Respondents by Department and Unit

As shown in Figure 4, respondents were distributed across various departments. The largest group was from Exams and Records (43.2%, n=16), followed by Hostels (24.3%, n=9), Social Work (21.6%, n=8), and Student Affairs (10.8%, n=4).

3.6. Highest Educational Qualification of Staff

As shown in Figure 5, the vast majority of respondents (83.7%, n=31) reported their highest qualification as tertiary level, while 16.2% (n=6) reported a secondary certificate.

3.7. Respondent knowledge of Deviant Behavior among Students Union Government

When asked about their knowledge of deviant behavior among students, as shown in Figure 6, 48(70.5%) of respondents answered "Yes," 15(22.0%) were "Not Sure," and 5(7.3%) answered "No."

3.8. Most Commonly Reported Types of Deviant Behavior

The prevalence of various deviant behaviors, as reported by respondents, is shown in Figure 7. Exam malpractice most prevalent cited issue 65 (61.9%), followed by stealing 20 (19.0%) and finally cheating and truancy each 10(9.5%) respectively, being less common 4(6.6% each).

Table 1 Distribution of Staff Respondents of the College

Sn	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Exams and Record	16	43.2
2	Social Work	8	21.6
3	Hostels	9	24.3
4	Students Affairs	4	10.8
	Total	37	100

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents of the SUG

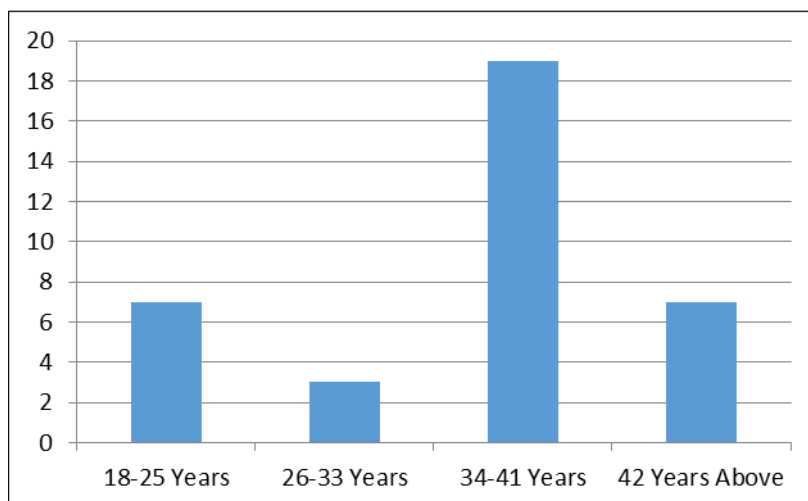| Sn	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Student Union Executives	68	100
	Total	68	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

Figure 1 Age distribution of the respondents
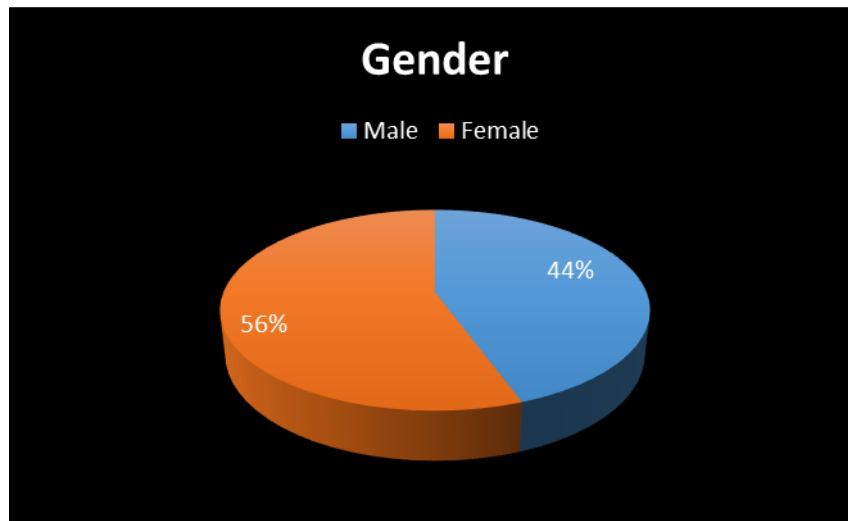
Figure 2 Gender distribution of the respondents
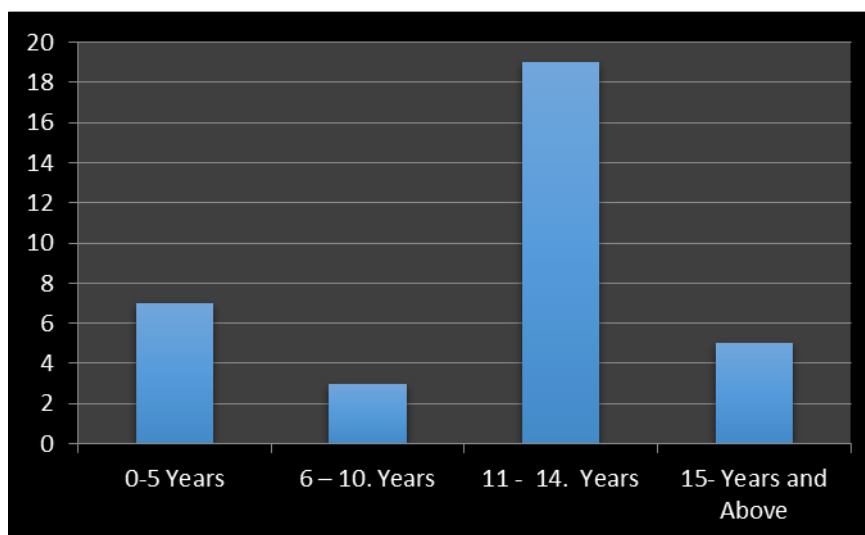

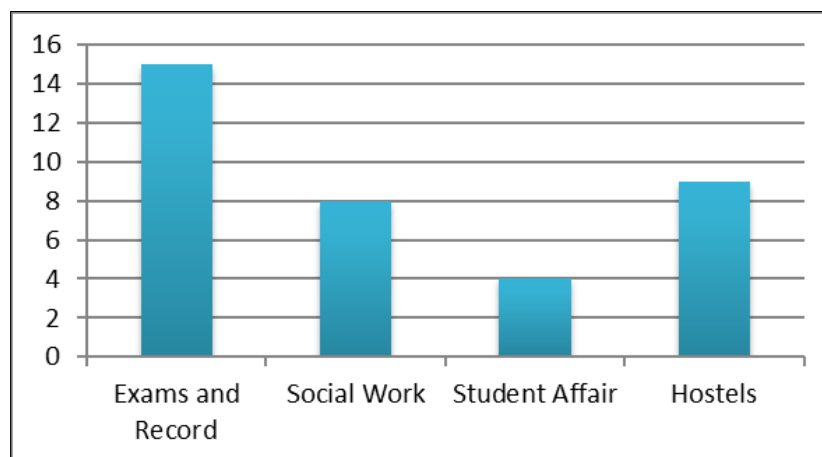**Figure 3** Distribution of Respondents by Years of Service

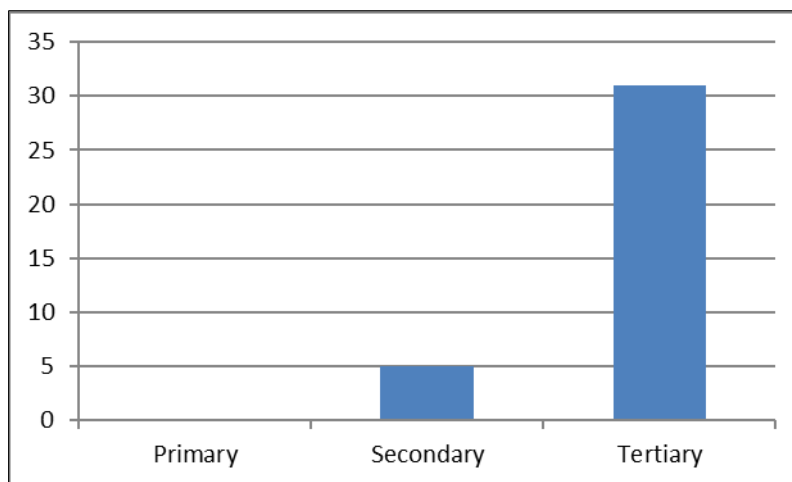**Figure 4** Distribution of Respondents by Department and Unit

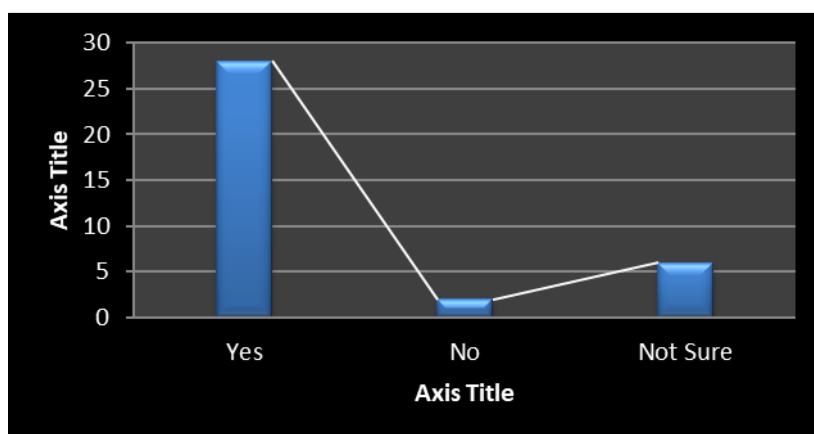**Figure 5** Highest Educational Qualification of Respondents

Figure 6 Respondent knowledge of Deviant Behavior among Students
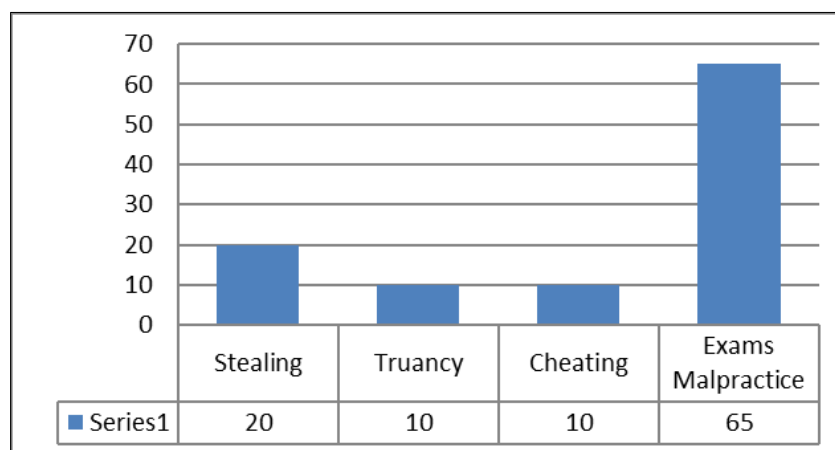

Figure 7 Most Commonly Reported Types of Deviant Behavior

4. Discussion

Regarding the prevalence and types of Deviant Behavior, our study identified examination malpractice as the most prevalent deviant behavior, reported by 61.9% of respondents. This was followed by cheating (19.5%), with behaviors like stealing and truancy being less common (9.5% each).

A growing body of research highlights mounting concern among Nigerian university administrations regarding the surge in student deviance, with academic malpractice being the most pressing issue [1, 19, 20]. This concern is strongly echoed in other studies, where Okere. .[3] also identifies examination malpractice as a primary deviant behavior in Nigerian schools, describing it as an "unholy act" driven by the pressure to gain "unmerited grades. "The study in Bungoma County, Kenya by Nabiswa *et al*. [16] found theft to be the most prevalent issue (21%), but also noted significant problems with exam-related dishonesty, such as the use of unauthorized materials. Cui *et al*. [21], in their study of Yi ethnic minority adolescents in China, found that cheating was one of the most common deviant behaviors, with a high probability in their "Borderline" class (62.0% conditional probability). The prominence of academic dishonesty across these diverse contexts from Nigeria to Kenya to China highlights a global crisis in academic integrity. It suggests that intense pressure for academic success, fear of failure, and high-stakes testing are powerful drivers of deviant behavior among students worldwide [1, 2].

Our finding revealed that, a significant majority of staff and student union executive leaders (77.7%) reported having knowledge of deviant behavior among students. However, the study also hints at a critical challenge: the potential underreporting of incidents, as staff may prefer to address issues directly rather than through perceived ineffective institutional channels. Studies on student malpractice indicates that lecturer/student dishonesty for academic integrity in learning and characters lead to increasing deviant behavior in universities [22, 23, 24, 25]. This aligns with observations in the Zambian study by Banda and Mweemba. [26], which noted that school rules are often fragmented and punishments inconsistently applied, creating a "loophole" that discourages formal reporting. Furthermore, the Cui *et al*. [21] study demonstrates the utility of sophisticated methods like Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to identify sub-groups of students (Normative, Borderline, Deviant) that might otherwise be missed in standard reporting, revealing a "hidden" prevalence of deviance. A common thread is the gap between the *awareness* of deviance and effective *institutional response*. Whether due to weak procedural mechanisms (as in Nigeria and Zambia) or the complex, hidden nature of the behaviors (as revealed by LCA in China), many educational institutions struggle to capture the full scope of student deviance.

While the FEDCOTTEN study primarily focused on prevalence and knowledge, studies has provided deep insights into the causal factors, which are crucial for interpreting our results. The study by Zhang *et al*. [4] in Chengdu establishes a powerful link between poor family functioning and deviant behavior. They found that students at risk of internet addiction (IA) who also exhibited high rates of deviance like deceit and running away from home came from families with significantly poorer communication, higher conflict, and inadequate parental control. Cui *et al*. [21] identified that adolescents in the "Deviant" class had significantly lower levels of school belonging and impaired self-control. Factors like risk-seeking, self-centeredness, and temperament were strong predictors of belonging to the deviant groups. This is supported by Okere. [3], who cites low self-esteem and an external locus of control (a concept related to self-control) as key psychological variables predisposing students to deviance. In some cases, the school system itself, through the actions of its staff, inadvertently fosters these behaviors. The Zambian study revealed a troubling factor where teachers sometimes model deviant behavior, citing instances of sexual relationships with students and collusion in exam malpractice [26]. This not only erodes the moral authority of the institution but can also stem from, or result in, a weakening of school governance [27]. When rules and regulations are applied inconsistently or ignored due to misplaced pity, complicity, or a lack of oversight, the entire disciplinary framework becomes weak. This creates an environment where deviant behaviors are not effectively deterred, thereby exacerbating the problem they are meant to solve.

The FEDCOTTEN study reported a respondent population that was predominantly female (55.5%), but did not extensively analyze deviance by student gender. Other studies fill this gap: Cui *et al*. [21] found a pronounced gender difference: the "Deviant" class was far more prevalent in males (6.5%) than females (1.6%). Males also had significantly higher odds of being in the Borderline or Deviant classes. Zhang *et al*. [4] also found that the risk of Internet Addiction (a catalyst for deviant behavior) was significantly higher among male students. This indicates that while deviance affects all students, interventions may need to be particularly targeted towards male adolescents, who appear to be at a higher risk for extensive deviant behavior patterns, possibly due to a combination of sociological, psychological, and biological factors.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study provides valuable insights but is not without limitations. The sample, while information-rich, was not representative of the general student body, as it did not include regular students. This limits the direct generalization of the findings to the entire student population. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from staff and student leaders is susceptible to social desirability bias and potential underreporting of sensitive issues. The cross-sectional design provides a snapshot in time but cannot establish causal relationships between the identified factors and deviant behaviors.

Despite these limitations, the study has notable strengths. The quantitative approach provided clear, descriptive data on the prevalence of observed deviant behaviors and the level of awareness among key campus stakeholders. The high response rate (87.5%) minimizes non-response bias and strengthens the reliability of the findings within the studied sample. Furthermore, the purposive sampling of key institutional stakeholders, including student leaders and various staff units, ensured that data was collected from individuals with direct and varied observations of student conduct, enhancing the credibility of the findings regarding deviant behavior on campus.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms a high prevalence of student deviant behaviors, particularly academic malpractice like examination fraud, at the Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu. While awareness among key stakeholders is high, institutional responses are hampered by underreporting and ineffective mechanisms. The findings underscore that this global issue is driven by performance pressure, family dysfunction, and weak governance. To foster a conducive learning environment, it is recommended that the university strengthen its institutional framework by establishing clear, enforced reporting protocols and implementing targeted interventions. These should include academic integrity campaigns, stress management workshops, counseling services, and staff training. Future research incorporating the general student population is crucial to validate these interventions and enable broader generalization of the findings.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Statement of ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research and Ethical Committee of Federal College of Dental Technology and Therapy, Enugu. The ethical approval is available with the author and can be obtain upon reasonable request. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the 2024 revised edition of the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki [28].

Statement of informed consent

Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was implied by the completion and return of the questionnaire. All participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and the collected data was used solely for the purpose of this academic research.

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