



THE FALLING ACADEMIC CAREER AND MENTAL HEALTH IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Nnodim Johnkennedy*

Department of Medical Laboratory Science, Imo State University Owerri.

Article Info

Article Received: 07 February 2026,
Article Revised: 26 February 2026,
Published on: 10 March 2026.



*Corresponding author:

Nnodim Johnkennedy
Department of Medical Laboratory
Science, Imo State University Owerri.
johnkennedy23@yahoo.com

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19131131>

How to cite this Article:

Nnodim Johnkennedy (2026). "The Falling Academic Career And Mental Health In University Education." World Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Research, 3(3), 09-12.
This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

ABSTRACT

Going to University used to be a surefire way to gain social status, advance in chosen field, and develop once own unique perspective. Many people had the impression that academic independence and collegial governance characterised university life. Nevertheless, the academic profession has been profoundly affected by the recent shifts in governance structures, funding mechanisms, and evaluation systems. This article examines the intersection between mental health and dignity in University education and argues that the modern academic profession is in a state of decline because of managerialism, unstable work structures, extreme competition, and performance cultures driven by metrics. Using global trends and the reality of developing nations, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, it examines how mental health could be negatively impacted by a lack of professional autonomy and respect. To restore dignity, offer mental health care, and establish long-lasting academic contexts, this advocates changes to institutions, legislation, and culture.

KEYWORDS: Academic Career, Mental Health, University.

INTRODUCTION

Many people still hold the traditional view of universities as safe havens where scholars may follow their interests unfettered by the constraints of mainstream culture. A position in academia offered stability, room for growth, and the freedom to learn as much as I wanted. Collegial governance fostered an environment where decisions were frequently taken collectively, enhancing the sense of unity and mutual respect among faculty members.^[1]

University education has been impacted by structural reforms that accompany neoliberal economic policies over the last 20 years. The management of universities is increasingly resembling that of corporations, with an emphasis on productivity, efficiency, and numerical outcomes. More administrative scrutiny, more grant competition, more work, and greater publishing pressure are all problems that faculty members face today.^[2]

Much will be affected by these alterations. There is a mental health crisis in academia due to the loss of autonomy, job stability, and recognition. In contrast to its formerly lauded reputation, today's academic careers are frequently characterised by anxiety, low self-esteem, and a lack of

security. Reform, then, is urgently and permanently required.^[3]

Indeed, having good mental health entails being emotionally strong, stable mentally, and able to deal with stress in a healthy way while still being productive. Some mental health issues are on the rise in the academic community.^[4]

Nowadays, being an academic means constantly battling burnout. No one is immune to burnout; it strikes both Lecturers and students. Extreme fatigue, a lack of accomplishment on a personal level, and depersonalisation are symptoms. There is a lot of mental strain due to the constant barrage of due dates, performance evaluations, and competitive financing applications.^[5]

When all of these pressures are felt, it can lead to both individual suffering and systemic issues. Institutional morale plummets, research creativity dwindles, and classroom instruction suffers when lecturers are emotionally and mentally exhausted.^[6]

Honestly recognising the inherent worth of individuals in professional environments is essential for maintaining

dignity in the workplace. Dignity in the academic community is defined as: Deference to scholarly expertise, Independence to do one's own study, Open and equitable treatment, Credit where credit is due for creative work, and Fair compensation as well as job stability.^[7]

Dignity takes a back seat when organisations prioritise analytics, informal contracts, and surveillance over building trust and respect among employees. Lecturers already feel left out due to administrative marginalisation and decision-making that primarily occurs at the top. Before their mental health deteriorates, people frequently experience a loss of self-esteem and power in systems they once admired.^[8]

Furthermore, a great deal has changed in the administration of universities since the advent of managerialism. Colleges and universities are increasingly adopting business models based on KPIs, rankings, and quantifiable outcomes. A lot of the time, people only value intellectual curiosity when it comes to measurable results.^[9]

One manifestation of this shift is the "publish or perish" mentality. Success is often measured more by the quantity of publications, the number of citations, and the amount of money received than by the quality of the scholarship itself. Places like this encourage individuals to compete rather than collaborate, which in turn increases stress and decreases collegial unity.^[10]

Delays in promotions, adjunct work, and short-term contracts are global phenomena. Sometimes, beginning academics have to contend with a lack of stability in their pay, little benefits, and an uncertain future. There is never a good time to plan for the future when your employment structure is so unpredictable.^[12]

Not only does not knowing what the future holds for your career and sense of self-worth, but it also makes it harder to pay the bills. Academics may experience increased mental stress due to the expectation that they must work more in the absence of stability in order to secure future opportunities.^[13]

Government funding is decreasing, thus institutions must find alternative ways to generate revenue. In most cases, faculty members cannot sustain their research endeavours without securing additional funding from external sources. Due to the high rejection rate and the difficulty in predicting funding cycles, the competitive grant system both promotes competition and increases stress levels.^[14]

Bureaucratic activities, such as completing accreditation procedures, submitting compliance reports, and reporting on quality assurance, are taking up an increasing amount of time for academics. Academic activities such as teaching, mentoring, and research are diminished and job satisfaction is diminished as a result of these administrative chores.^[15]

Digital platforms have increased the difficulty of academic work. Extended work hours are a result of performance evaluation tools, online pedagogical systems, and continual email correspondence. People are exhausted and find it difficult to balance their job and personal lives due to the blurring of boundaries between the two.^[16]

All of these structural pressures have an impact, and it shows in

Burnout is becoming more common.
Keeping a cold shoulder toward academic work
Migraine in work happiness
Issues with resting
Leaving the academic world
Especially from underdeveloped nations, brain drain

Research shows that this has a disproportionate effect on female academics and early-career scholars. Systemic inequities make progress more difficult, and juggling caregiving responsibilities with research needs is stressful in and of itself.

The academic crisis is exacerbated in Sub-Saharan Africa by systemic problems

Disruptive payment schedules
Research is underfunded
Inadequate room for laboratory activity
There are more students than professors.
Government obstructed by politics
Workplace strikes that occur repeatedly

Students have a hard time keeping up with their education in countries like Nigeria due to long strikes and unpredictable funding. Employee morale and respect are negatively impacted by research funding shortages and promotion delays. Because of these reasons, a large number of academics are considering leaving the area, exacerbating the problem of brain drain.^[17]

Mental health and professional respect are impacted by structural instability, which is evident in the area's unstable academic systems.

Disparities between the sexes further complicate matters in the academic realm. There is a lot of veiled sexism, unequal opportunities for development, and excessive service responsibilities for women in academia. Mental stress is intensified by these additional obligations.^[18]

Researchers on shorter contracts at the beginning of their careers are under intense time constraints to establish a body of published work. People feel anxious and uncertain when they are pressured to achieve tenure or a permanent position fast. Already overworked systems become even more vulnerable when gender, racism, disability, and nationality are all considered intersectional inequities.

Institutional change for the benefit of people's mental health and dignity

Performance measurements should not be relied upon excessively.

Improve systems for joint policymaking

Create transparent and equitable procedures for advancement.

Facilitate access to private mental health services

Manage the distribution of tasks

Policy-Level Interventions

Increase public funding for universities.

Strengthen safeguards for individuals employed on contract

Establish nationwide systems that promote the well-being of educators

Promote equitable allocation of research funds

Colleges and universities should stop being so cutthroat and start becoming more collaborative. Projects that unite people, peer-support networks, and mentorship programs all contribute to building resilience. A healthy and valued faculty is essential to a successful institution over the long run, and leadership must realise this.^[2]

The downfall of the academic profession is not inevitable. A new perspective ought to center on: Personal autonomy, Honouring a variety of academic achievements, career's steadiness over the years, Comprehensive and well-balanced evaluation systems, Promoting a culture of wellness via governance.^[19]

Universities should return to their original purpose: advancing knowledge while valuing the humanity of those who create it.

CONCLUSION

The decline of the academic profession is a sign of major structural shifts occurring within universities. Mental health and professional dignity have taken a hit due to managerialism, precarious employment, and metric-based assessment systems.

Institutional, national, and international shifts are required to resolve this issue. Academic achievement and social advancement depend on preserving mental health and re-establishing dignity, which are not ancillary concerns.

More than simply academic member attrition, research innovation, student achievement, and the future of knowledge creation will suffer as a consequence of inaction on the part of institutions.

REFERENCES

1. Arima, M., Takamiya, Y., Furuta, A., Siriratsivawong, K., Tsuchiya, S., & Izumi, M. Factors associated with the mental health status of medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional study in Japan. *BMJ Open*, 2020; 10(12): e043728.
2. Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S. E., Golberstein, E., & Hefner, J. L. Prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among university students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2007; 77(4): 534–542.

3. Eisenberg, D., Downs, M., & Golberstein, S. Stigma and help-seeking for mental health among college students. *Medical Care Research and Review*, 2009; 66(5): 522–541.
4. Auerbach, R. P., Alonso, J., Axinn, W. G., Cuijpers, P., Ebert, D. D., Green, J. G., Hwang, I., Kessler, R. C., Liu, H., Mortier, P., Nock, M. K., Pinder-Amaker, S., Sampson, N.A., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Al-Hamzawi, A., Andrade, L.H., Benjet, C., Caldas-de-Almeida, J. M., Demyttenaere, K., & Bruffaerts, R. Mental disorders among college students in the World health organization World mental health surveys. *Psychological Medicine*, 2016; 46(14): 2955–2970.
5. Buri, I., Sliškovi, A., & Penezi, Z. Understanding teacher well-being: a cross-lagged analysis of burnout, negative student-related emotions, psychopathological symptoms, and resilience. *Educational Psychology*, 2019; 39(9): 1136–1155.
6. Camp, J., Vitoratou, S., & Rimes, K. A. LGBTQ+ self-acceptance and its relationship with minority stressors and mental health: A systematic literature review. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 2020; 49(7): 2353–2373.
7. BlackDeer, A. A., Wolf, D., Maguin, E., & Beeler-Stinn, S. Depression and anxiety among college students: Understanding the impact on grade average and differences in gender and ethnicity. *Journal of American College Health*, 2021; 1–12.
8. Capone, V., & Petrillo, G. Mental health in teachers: Relationships with job satisfaction, efficacy beliefs, burnout and depression. *Current Psychology*, 2020; 39: 1757–1766.
9. Harrer, M., Adam, S. H., Baumeister, H., Cuijpers, P., Karyotaki, E., Auerbach, R.P., Kessler, R.C., Bruffaerts, R., Berking, M., & Ebert, D.D. Internet interventions for mental health in University students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 2019; 28(2): e1759.
10. Damayanti, R., Wardhani, R. W. K., Putri, B. D., & Lutfiya, I. The job stress, workload, exercise habits and metabolic syndrome in academic personnel at Airlangga University. *Malaysian Journal of Public Health Medicine*, 2020; 20(2): 276–284.
11. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2001; 86(3): 499.
12. Stallman, H. M. Psychological distress in University students: A comparison with general population data. *Australian Psychologist*, 2010; 45(4): 249–257.
13. Guthrie, S., Lichten, C. A., Van Belle, J., Ball, S., Knack, A., & Hofman, J. Understanding mental health in the research environment: A rapid evidence assessment. *Rand Health Quarterly*, 2018; 7(3).
14. Isa, K., & Palpanadan, S.T. Prevalence causes of stress and coping strategies among Malaysian university lecturers. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2020; 9(5): 312–321.
15. Awadalla, S., Davies, E. B., & Glazebrook, C. A longitudinal cohort study to explore the relationship between depression, anxiety and academic

- performance among Emirati University students. *BMC Psychiatry*, 2020; 20(1): 448
16. Jonge, J., & Huter, F. F. (2021). Does match matter? The moderating role of resources in the relation between demands, vigor, and fatigue in academic life. *The Journal of Psychology*, 155(6): 548-570.
 17. Kabito, G. G., Wami, S. D., Chercos, D. H., & Mekonnen, T. H. (2020). Work-related stress and associated factors among academic staffs at the University of Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia: An institution based cross-sectional study. *Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences*, 30(2).
 18. Kang, Y. K., Guo, W. J., Xu, H., Chen, Y. H., Li, X. J., Tan, Z. P., Li, N., Gesang, Z. r., Wang, Y. m., Liu, C. b., Luo, Y., Feng, J., Xu, Q. j., Lee, S., & Li, T. (2015). The 6-item Kessler psychological distress scale to survey serious mental illness among Chinese undergraduates: Psychometric properties and prevalence estimate. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 63: 105–112.
 19. Duffy, A., Keown-Stoneman, C., Goodday, S., Horrocks, J., Lowe, M., King, N., Pickett, W., McNevin, S. H., Cunningham, S., Rivera, D., Bisdounis, L., Bowie, C. R., Harkness, K., & Saunders, K.E. A. Predictors of mental health and academic outcomes in first-year University students: Identifying prevention and early-intervention targets. *BJPsych Open*, 2020; 6(3): e46.
 20. Hutchesson, M. J., Duncan, M. J., Oftedal, S., Ashton, L. M., Oldmeadow, C., Kay-Lambkin, F., & Whatnall, M.C. Latent class analysis of multiple health risk behaviors among Australian University students and associations with psychological distress. *Nutrients*, 2021; 13(2): 425. 10.3390/nu13020425