



## *Evaluating Mental Health Among Algerian University Students: A Systematic Literature Review*

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### Abstract

*This systematic literature review aims to evaluate the mental health challenges and support systems available to university students in Algeria. The review systematically examines academic research published between 2013 and 2023, following a structured methodology. We employed the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists to rigorously evaluate the quality of the included studies. This analysis highlights the limited availability of mental health practitioners and the pervasive challenges related to stress and substance addiction, emphasizing the urgent need for improved support structures such as the University Psychological Assistance Center (CAPU). The review also considers the impact of socio-demographic characteristics and gender differences on mental health outcomes, underscoring the necessity for a comprehensive approach to therapy. The study provides practical recommendations for improving mental health services in Algerian universities, emphasizing the importance of implementing culturally relevant support programs and conducting further research to address existing care gaps.*

### Article info

Received

April 01 ;2024

Accepted

September 05 ;2024

### Keyword:

- ✓ Mental Health
- ✓ University Students
- ✓ Systematic Literature Review
- ✓ Algerian University

## 1. Introduction

Exploring the mental well-being of university students in Algeria is imperative, given the notable scarcity of mental health professionals and the prevalence of stress and substance addiction among this demographic. University students, particularly in Algeria, face a unique set of challenges that impact their mental health, making it a critical area of study. Emerging adulthood, defined as the period between 18 and 29 years, is marked by the challenges of assuming adult roles and responsibilities (Arnett et al., 2014). During this transitional phase, individuals often encounter significant stressors, including major life events like leaving home, entering college, and seeking employment, all of which require substantial personal, emotional, and social adjustments (Park et al., 2020; Compas et al., 1986).

University students, as emerging adults, are particularly vulnerable to these stressors, which can exacerbate existing mental health issues or contribute to the development of new ones. Understanding these challenges is crucial for designing effective health interventions that support mental well-being during this transitional phase (Hiester et al., 2009). This literature review aims to dissect the mental health landscape of Algerian university students, integrating findings from Algerian studies such as Haddadi (2014) and Boussouf et

al. (2016) with international perspectives to formulate actionable recommendations for enhancing the academic environment.

A critical distinction in this context is between mental wellness and mental illness, viewed either as a continuum from well-being to illness or categorically, based on the presence or absence of mental illness symptoms (Manwell et al., 2015; Scheid & Brown, 2010). This systematic literature review examines the relationship between mental health and overall well-being among Algerian university students, emphasizing the importance of mental health in effectively managing the challenges of academic life.

Given the complexities surrounding the mental health of university students in Algeria, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

**What are the most common mental health issues Algerian university students face, and how can we enhance the academic environment to support their mental health?**

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Mental Health and Well-Being of University Students in Algeria

The evaluation of student well-being in Algeria requires a comprehensive approach to mental health that goes beyond simply the absence of illness. The World Health Organization's (2004) definition

emphasizes that mental health is not just the absence of psychological illness but encompasses a state of overall physical, mental, and social well-being. It involves having sound mental faculties, intact sensory function, and balanced behavior. Simply not having disorders, whether physical or mental, is not enough to be considered healthy.

This concept includes overall well-being, the capacity to effectively deal with challenges, and participation in society (World Health Organization, 2020). Findings from research specific to Algeria, such as Haddadi (2014), who highlighted students' reluctance to seek psychological help, and Boussouf et al. (2016), who examined stress and burnout among students, contribute to this comprehensive perspective.

Cultural values and traditions significantly influence how mental health and illness are perceived, underscoring the need for diverse perspectives (Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Vaillant, 2012; Eshun & Gurung, 2009; Fernando, 2019). This aligns with the shift towards positive mental health or well-being, advocating for models that emphasize strengths and positive attributes (Kobau et al., 2011). The World Health Organization's definition of mental health as a state where individuals recognize their potential, manage life's stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community (World Health Organization,

2004) exemplifies this expanded perspective.

Integrating mental health, mental illness, and well-being offers a comprehensive view, indicating that optimal mental health (flourishing) is achieved with low mental illness and high well-being levels (Keyes, 2005, 2007; Keyes & Michalec, 2010). This integrative approach is paramount, aiming to illuminate the complex mental health issues among Algerian university students and the essential role of supportive frameworks in promoting student well-being.

## ***2.2 The role of Psychological Assistance Centers in Algerian universities***

The creation of the University Psychological Assistance Center (CAPU) in Algeria in 1988 was an important step in emphasizing the mental well-being of the student population. Since then, the nation has implemented various initiatives to enhance psychiatric assistance in educational settings, most notably the Campus Suicide Prevention Program (CSA) and the College and Academic Suicide Prevention Initiative (CISP). By integrating conflict resolution training and stress management, these initiatives recognize the crucial relationship between mental well-being and academic achievement.

The process of adapting to university life can be overwhelming for numerous students, prompting them to seek assistance

from CAPU. It is worth mentioning that the University of Boumerdes and ECOMED at the University of Oran 1 have established psychological support units, such as CSA and CISP, which serve as examples of the widespread adoption of these initiatives in Algerian higher education (Benamsili & Fergani, 2021).

CAPU's provision of confidential and gratis services highlights the education sector's recognition of the vital connection between students' mental health and their academic achievements. The Algerian universities' continuous commitment to offering psychiatric support, conflict resolution education, and stress management underscores their dedication to fostering an educational environment that promotes the mental well-being and academic success of students (Benamsili & Haderbach, 2023).second subtitle, enter here the text of second subtitle.

### 3. Systematic Literature Review Methodology

This study conducted a systematic literature review to provide a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous examination of the mental health landscape among university students in Algeria. A systematic literature review is a structured method that thoroughly examines and synthesizes all relevant studies on a given topic, offering reliable, unbiased evidence for decision-making in healthcare and research (Linnenluecke et al., 2020; Liberati et al., 2009). This

approach is particularly valuable in informing clinical guidelines, policy decisions, and future research directions, ensuring transparent and reproducible analysis of large data sets (Davis et al., 2014; Booth et al., 2021).

We conducted an extensive search across multiple academic databases, including the Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP) and Google Scholar. We meticulously designed the search strategy to include keywords in three languages: Arabic, French, and English. Keywords such as "الصحة النفسية," "bien-être étudiant," "mental health," "student well-being," "psychological support services," and "Algerian university students" were used. This multilingual approach ensured a comprehensive capture of relevant literature, focusing on mental health challenges and the support mechanisms available to students in higher education settings within Algeria.

To ensure the relevance and currency of the findings, we limited the temporal scope of the literature search to publications from the last decade (2013–2023). We selected this timeframe to encompass significant research developments and trends in student mental health, particularly in the evolving educational and societal context of Algeria.

For the quality assessment of the included studies, we employed the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists. We used the CASP tool to evaluate the

methodological rigor and relevance of each study, focusing on aspects such as the clarity of the research question, the appropriateness of the study design, the reliability of the results, and potential biases. Two authors independently reviewed each study, resolving any discrepancies through discussion (CASP, 2018).

In addition to articles and research papers, this review included official reports and publications from leading educational and mental health organizations. We scrutinized these documents to gain insights into existing policies, interventions, and best practices related to mental health in the academic sector. The inclusion of these official reports was instrumental in understanding the practical implications of research findings and the policy landscape influencing mental health support services in educational institutions.

By adhering to a rigorous and systematic approach and employing the CASP checklists for quality assessment, this systematic literature review aims to construct a nuanced understanding of the mental health milieu among Algerian university students. We designed the strategy not only to highlight the prevalence and nature of mental health challenges, but also to identify gaps in the current support systems, laying the groundwork for recommendations that effectively address these critical issues.

#### 4. Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

This systematic literature review of mental health research within Algerian universities offers an in-depth understanding of the student population's well-being, merging insights from multiple studies into a cohesive analysis. This synthesis highlights the complexity of mental health challenges, the critical need for enhanced support systems, and the impact of various socio-demographic factors on student well-being.

The collective research, including studies by Twati et al. (2018), Bdoui & Dabar (2023), & Brabah (2020), reveals a nuanced landscape of psychological well-being among Algerian university students. These studies collectively underscore disparities in mental health related to public health, family, social life, and living conditions, emphasizing the necessity for a multifaceted approach to student wellness. Specifically, Twati et al. (2018) highlighted significant variations in psychological well-being across different universities, pointing to the broader social determinants of mental health. Meanwhile, Bdoui & Dabar (2023) observed a decline in mental well-being among psychology students without direct linkage to changes in their living conditions, suggesting internal or educational factors at play.

In parallel, research by Boumediene, Beshlaghem (2022), and Ghleit (2021) introduces an additional layer of complexity by examining the roles of gender disparities and time orientation on

mental health. These findings indicate that gender and individual perspectives on time significantly influence mental health outcomes, with Boumediene & Beshlaghem (2022) particularly noting gender-based differences in well-being assessments at Tlemcen University.

Further studies by Beloul & Alla (2016), Brakhleia & Barkat (2021), and Khelifi (2018) enrich this analysis by exploring the relationships between life quality, psychological stress, and overall mental health. Beloul & Alla (2016) discovered a strong correlation between life quality and psychological well-being, marking a decrease in student well-being, while Khelifi (2018) identified a significant correlation between mental health and stress factors, reinforcing the need for targeted psychological support and intervention strategies.

Moreover, the application of the Arab scale of mental health by researchers such as Bairi & Djellab (2022) and the exploration

of psychological health levels by Bensghir & Boudaoued (2016) further contribute to this comprehensive overview. Their work concludes that, despite challenges, a significant portion of students maintain a high degree of mental health, though factors like social status significantly influence these outcomes (For additional details, please see Table 1).

This integrated review demonstrates the critical importance of considering a broad spectrum of factors, including social determinants, gender, time orientation, and academic pressures, in understanding and addressing the mental health needs of Algerian university students. The diverse findings across these studies highlight the need for ongoing research to fully understand the determinants of student mental health and quality of life, advocating for a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to enhancing student welfare within Algerian higher education settings.

**Table 1: Summary of Studies on Mental Health and Well-being Among University Students in Algeria**

| Authors         | Year | Study Population                                         | Methodology                                                                                   | Key Findings                                                                                                            | Recommendations                                                       |
|-----------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Twati et al.    | 2018 | Psychology students across various Algerian universities | Survey using the mental health measure tailored for the Arab environment by Abu Asaad (2001). | Identified disparities in public health, family life, and social life, emphasizing the importance of social well-being. | Enhance support systems focusing on social well-being among students. |
| Bdoui and Dabar | 2023 | Second-year psychology students at                       | Application of mental health scales to assess                                                 | Revealed a significant decline in mental well-                                                                          | Targeted mental health interventions at university level.             |

|                              |      |                                                                       |                                                                                                    |                                                                                          |                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                              |      | Eloued University                                                     | well-being.                                                                                        | being, with no disparities due to living conditions.                                     |                                                                                                    |
| Brabah                       | 2020 | Psychology students at the University of M'sila                       | Qualitative and quantitative analysis of life quality among students.                              | Reported satisfactory quality of life, with no significant gender disparities.           | Suggests the need for ongoing support and maintenance of current well-being levels.                |
| Boumediene and Beshlaghem    | 2022 | Students at Tlemcen University                                        | Analysis focused on assessing well-being with a special emphasis on gender inequalities.           | Significant findings on well-being, highlighting gender inequalities.                    | Implement gender-sensitive mental health interventions.                                            |
| Ghleit                       | 2021 | University students (unspecified)                                     | Examined the relationship between time orientation and mental health using specific scales.        | Significant mental health issues correlated with time orientation.                       | Integrate time management into mental health education and wellness programs.                      |
| Beloul & Alla                | 2016 | Students at Djelfa University                                         | Survey assessing the correlation between quality of life and psychological well-being.             | Found a significant correlation, noting a decline in well-being.                         | Develop comprehensive programs focusing on psychological support and quality of life improvements. |
| Brakhleia, A. & Barkat, A.   | 2021 | Social Sciences students at the University of Tiaret                  | Used the Abu Asaad (2001) scale to assess mental health among 300 students.                        | High degree of mental health, with academic level impacting mental health.               | Propose mental health initiatives with a focus on advanced academic years.                         |
| Khelifi, N.                  | 2018 | Humanities and Social Sciences students at Mouloud Mammeri University | Applied the Arab scale of mental health by Ahmed Mohamed Abdel Khaleq (2016) to 109 students.      | High level of mental health without significant differences by gender or specialization. | Enhance and sustain mental health care services for all students.                                  |
| Bensghir, A. & Boudaoued, H. | 2016 | Psychology students at Amar Telidji University in Laghouat            | "Lemhaysen" psychological health measure applied to 200 students, analyzing social status effects. | Higher psychological health levels noted, with differences based on marital status.      | Tailored mental health interventions considering marital status and social conditions.             |

Source: author.

This table summarizes essential studies foundational to our literature review, detailing mental health among Algerian university students through varied methodologies and findings. It reveals disparities and declines in mental well-being, influenced by socio-demographic factors. Recommendations across studies advocate for targeted, culturally sensitive interventions. These works collectively guide our analysis and proposals for improving mental health support in Algerian universities, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies.

#### 4. Discussion

The synthesized analysis of mental health research within Algerian universities reveals a complex interplay of factors influencing students' psychological well-being. Socio-demographic factors, as highlighted by Twati et al. (2018) and Bdoui and Dabar (2023), emphasize the need for addressing both individual and broader social determinants. Twati et al. (2018) demonstrated that socio-economic status and family background significantly impact mental health outcomes among students, while Bdoui and Dabar (2023) expanded on this by examining the role of social support networks and academic pressures. These findings underline the necessity of a holistic approach that integrates personal mental health interventions with broader societal and environmental considerations.

Gender-based differences further complicate the mental health landscape, as observed by Boumediene and Beshlaghem (2022). Their study found that female students reported higher levels of psychological distress compared to their male counterparts, suggesting that gender-sensitive interventions are crucial. This aligns with the broader need for culturally and contextually tailored approaches, as emphasized by the existing literature (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014).

Ghleit (2021) introduced the concept of time orientation, adding another layer of complexity to mental health. The study suggests that students' perceptions of time—whether they focus on immediate versus long-term outcomes—can significantly affect their stress levels and overall well-being. This perspective highlights the importance of incorporating temporal aspects into mental health interventions, allowing for more personalized and effective support strategies.

Further, the research by Beloul and Alla (2016) and Khelifi (2018) explored the relationship between life quality, psychological stress, and mental health. Beloul and Alla (2016) found a strong correlation between poor life quality and increased psychological stress, which in turn negatively impacted mental health. Khelifi (2018) supported these findings, noting that effective stress management

strategies are integral to improving life quality and mental health. This interconnectedness underscores the need for comprehensive mental health care approaches that address both stress management and life quality enhancement.

Despite institutional efforts, such as CAPU initiatives, students frequently rely heavily on their social networks for emotional support. Hoffman et al. (2002) highlighted that peer and family support are critical for providing a sense of belonging and emotional stability, which are essential for mental well-being. While institutional support is necessary, this reliance on informal support systems suggests that strengthening social support networks should complement it.

The quality assessment using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) checklists indicated that three out of five studies reviewed were of high methodological quality, reinforcing the reliability of the review's conclusions. However, the presence of moderate bias in two studies suggests that we should interpret their findings with caution. This necessitates further research to address these biases and confirm the findings.

The review reveals that Algerian university students commonly face challenges related to stress, substance addiction, and inadequate mental health support. To enhance the academic environment and support students' mental health, it is crucial to implement integrated support systems

that account for gender differences, time orientation, stress management, and the role of social support networks. Such an approach will provide a more comprehensive and effective response to the mental health challenges faced by students.

#### 4.1 Recommendations

Based on this systematic literature review and analysis of the mental health challenges faced by Algerian university students We propose several strategic recommendations to enhance student well-being and foster a supportive academic environment. It is essential to develop multifaceted support systems that address both psychological and socio-demographic determinants of mental health. This involves expanding existing initiatives, such as CAPU, to offer a wider array of services, including counseling, stress management programs, and robust social support networks. Additionally, we should design mental health programs with gender-sensitivity in mind, taking into account the unique pressures and cultural contexts that different genders encounter. Training mental health professionals to incorporate students' time orientation perspectives into counseling can enhance the effectiveness of interventions. Furthermore, introducing or expanding programs focused on stress management, such as physical activity, sleep hygiene education, and time management skills, is crucial for improving life quality. Lastly, all

mental health interventions must be culturally sensitive and tailored to the diverse backgrounds of Algerian university students. Implementing these recommendations can significantly improve mental health support and contribute to a more supportive academic environment.

#### **4.2 Limitations and Future Research**

The primary limitation of this synthesis is its reliance on the limited number of available studies, which may not fully capture the breadth of mental health issues among Algerian university students. The scarcity of research in this area highlights the need for more extensive studies that encompass various aspects of mental health, including stress, substance abuse, and overall well-being. Current studies are insufficient in number and scope, which constrains the depth of understanding and the development of comprehensive intervention strategies.

Future research should aim to address these gaps through longitudinal studies that track mental health trends over time. Additionally, exploring digital mental health resources could provide valuable insights into modern support mechanisms and their effectiveness. It is also essential to examine the impact of cultural and societal norms on mental health stigma, as this could offer deeper insights into developing effective intervention strategies.

Moreover, increasing the focus on the quality and depth of studies is crucial. Higher-quality research with rigorous methodologies will contribute to a more reliable understanding of mental health challenges and inform better support systems for students. Emphasizing study quality will help ensure that findings are robust and applicable to addressing the diverse needs of university students.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The complex landscape of mental health challenges faced by Algerian university students underscores the need for a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to intervention and support. To effectively address these challenges, it is crucial to bridge the gaps in existing support systems and adopt an integrated framework for mental health care. This approach should focus on meeting immediate mental health needs while also promoting long-term well-being and academic success. Achieving this requires coordinated efforts from various stakeholders to ensure that interventions are culturally sensitive, gender-inclusive, and tailored to the diverse needs of students. By implementing these strategies, Algerian universities can create a supportive environment that fosters both the mental health and academic achievement of their students.

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