



WEEKLY

Newsletter



Editorial Note

This week, we explored the theme “Panic Attacks or Spiritual Attacks: Understanding the Difference.” Our events highlighted the connection between faith and psychology, two powerful influences on how we understand emotional distress in African communities. Through open discussions and shared experiences, participants learned that while spiritual encounters are meaningful, mental and emotional challenges also require empathy, awareness, and professional care.

I am especially proud of the ICTMH Clinical Team and our Campus Wellness Hubs for leading these important conversations. Their work reflects one of ICTMH’s core beliefs: that mental wellness is not just the absence of illness but the presence of balance, spiritual, emotional, and psychological.

This edition also highlights our founder’s recent participation in the World Bank Retreat held in the United States of America. Although the event primarily focused on technology and the economy, she skillfully integrated the mental health dimension to emphasize the need for balance. As Africa continues to advance in technology and economic development, it is vital to remember that the mind remains the true driver of progress. By nurturing emotional resilience and mental awareness, we equip ourselves to lead with wisdom, compassion, and purpose.

Let us keep building the bridge between faith and mental health, helping everyone find peace through understanding, not fear.

Ese Ogheneovo
for ICTMH

Weekly Webinar Training

Date: October 24, 2025
Venue: Virtual
A Summary Of Dr. Charles Sunday Umeh’s (Clinical Psychologist) Session on Panic Attacks or Spiritual Attacks: Understanding the Difference

Introduction
Human beings are complex, spiritual, emotional, and physical in nature. When someone experiences intense fear, anxiety, or distress, the cause can be understood in different ways depending on their beliefs or background. Some people interpret these experiences as medical or psychological, while others view them as spiritual.

Understanding the difference between a panic attack and a spiritual attack is important. It helps people avoid fear, misdiagnosis, or the neglect of proper care. Both conditions can feel very similar, a sudden sense of dread, a racing heart, or the feeling that something terrible is happening but their roots and treatments differ.

Understanding Panic Attacks
A panic attack is a sudden, intense surge of fear or discomfort that peaks within minutes and often occurs without a clear or immediate cause. It is both a psychological and physiological response.

Key Characteristics
Sudden onset: It happens abruptly and can occur during rest, sleep, or ordinary activities.
Short duration: Most attacks peak within 10 minutes and fade after 20–30 minutes.
Physical symptoms: Rapid heartbeat, chest tightness, shortness of breath, dizziness, sweating, nausea, shaking, or chills.
Psychological symptoms: Fear of dying, losing control, or “going crazy,” with possible detachment from reality (called derealization or depersonalization).
Common triggers: Stress, trauma, caffeine, stimulant use, lack of sleep, or no identifiable trigger at all.

Panic Attack vs. Panic Disorder
A single panic attack does not mean a person has a mental disorder. However, Panic Disorder is diagnosed when:

- Panic attacks occur repeatedly and unexpectedly.
- There is ongoing fear or worry about future attacks.
- The person changes behavior (e.g., avoiding public spaces or exercise) to prevent recurrence.
- Panic disorder is a recognized medical condition listed under anxiety disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5). It may require therapy, lifestyle changes, or medication.

Key Differences between Panic and Spiritual Attacks		
Aspect	Panic Attack	Spiritual Attack
Origin	Psychological and physiological	Spiritual or metaphysical
Onset	Sudden, often triggered by stress or trauma	Often during or after spiritual activity or exposure to negative energy
Symptoms	Physical signs like rapid heartbeat, chest pain, or dizziness	Feelings of oppression, confusion, heaviness, or evil presence
Duration	Usually lasts 10–30 minutes	May last hours or days, sometimes recurring in waves
Relief	Calms with relaxation, therapy, or breathing exercises	Relieved through prayer, worship, or faith practices
Medical Recognition	Recognized and treatable under anxiety disorders	Not medically classified; interpreted through faith frameworks

Understanding Spiritual Attacks

A spiritual attack is viewed as a negative influence or oppression believed to come from evil or dark forces targeting a person’s spiritual, emotional, mental, or physical well-being. It is a faith-based concept found in Christianity, Islam, African traditional religion, and other belief systems. In most cases, people describe spiritual attacks as attempts by unseen powers to weaken or distract them from faith, peace, or purpose

Common Features

- Emotional and mental signs: Sudden fear, confusion, hopelessness, or persistent negative thoughts.
- Physical or environmental disturbances: Sleep paralysis, nightmares, or sensing a dark presence.
- Spiritual struggles: Difficulty praying, reading scripture, or feeling disconnected from God.
- Life disruptions: Unexpected setbacks, conflicts, or loss of motivation.
- Spiritual Responses
- People often respond through:
 - Prayer and fasting
 - Quoting scriptures or affirmations (e.g., “The armor of God,” Ephesians 6:10–18)
 - Seeking help from pastors or faith communities
 - Deliverance or anointing
 - Combining prayer with rest, nutrition, and, when needed, medical or psychological help.

Where They Overlap

Both panic and spiritual attacks can:

- Produce intense fear and feelings of losing control.
- Cause physical symptoms such as sweating or trembling.
- Affect sleep, attention, and motivation.
- Occur during times of high stress or emotional strain.

Because the experiences can look alike, careful discernment and assessment are necessary before labeling them.

Assessment and Care Approach

For Counselors and Pastors

- Listen compassionately and without judgment.
- Encourage medical evaluation to rule out panic or health issues.
- Offer faith-based support (prayer, scripture, community).
- Collaborate with mental health professionals when necessary.

For Health Professionals

- Respect clients’ spiritual worldviews.
- Address physical and psychological symptoms.
- Recommend balanced routines involving rest, diet, and social support.
- Refer to spiritual care providers when the client requests it.

For Individuals

- Observe personal triggers, sleep patterns, and stress levels.
- Practice relaxation or grounding techniques to calm the body.
- Maintain spiritual disciplines that bring peace and balance.
- Seek both medical and spiritual help when needed, not one at the expense of the other

Conclusion

1. Don’t panic about panic attacks , they feel dangerous but are not fatal.
2. Take note of triggers such as stress, lack of sleep, or caffeine.
3. Breathe and ground yourself when panic rises, slow, deep breaths help regulate the body.
4. If symptoms repeat or worsen, seek professional help from a psychologist or physician.
5. Maintain spiritual balance, prayer, meditation, and faith support can bring calm.
6. Avoid extremes , don’t dismiss mental health concerns as “only spiritual,” and don’t ignore your faith when seeking healing.
7. Wholeness is key, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being must work together.



Investing in Africa’s Future: The Human Side of Productivity

At the recent World Bank discussions on Boosting Productivity Growth in the Digital Age, African entrepreneur and philanthropist Tony Elumelu emphasized the importance of investing in Africa’s youth, infrastructure, and digital innovation. His message highlighted a vital truth: sustainable progress begins with people



That insight connects deeply to the mission of the Initiative for Cognitive Therapies and Mental Health (ICTMH)—a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that I (Dr. Stephanie Okolo) founded to support communities in Nigeria and across Africa in strengthening mental health awareness, access, and resilience.

ICTMH operates on a simple principle: a healthy mind drives a productive society. While digital and economic investments are critical, mental well-being is equally essential for sustainable growth. Across Africa, many young people face emotional and psychological challenges that limit their ability to learn, create, and thrive. Promoting cognitive-based education, therapy, and community engagement, ICTMH helps individuals and families build the inner stability needed to turn opportunity into achievement.

Our work is non-political, people-centered, and collaborative. We partner with educators, health professionals, and local organizations to promote resilience, inclusion, and hope. In doing so, we contribute—quietly but powerfully—to the same vision that leaders and innovators around the world share: empowering the next generation to reach their potential



As we look toward a more connected and productive Africa, let’s remember that mental health is not separate from development—it is the foundation of it. At ICTMH, we remain committed to nurturing that foundation, one community at a time



#Tony Elumelu
#Dr. Stephanie Okolo
#ICTMHmentalhealthweek
#WHOannualmeeetingworldbank
groupWashington2025

Weekly WhatsApp Interactive Session

ICTMH Mental Health Week

Report Theme: Panic Attacks or Spiritual Attacks? Understanding the Difference.

Date: October 20th – 26th, 2025
compiled by: Dr. Elizabeth Idowu

Overview

The Initiative for Cognitive Therapies and Mental Health (ICTMH) successfully hosted the 2025 Mental Health Wellness Week from October 20th to 26th, 2025, under the transformative theme “Panic Attacks or Spiritual Attacks? Understanding the Difference.” Held virtually via WhatsApp, the week-long program offered a safe and interactive space where students, educators, and young professionals explored how psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human experience intersect.

Motivational Monday – “Faith and Mental Health: Finding the Balance”

The opening session, delivered in lively Pidgin English, set an engaging tone for the week. It emphasized that while spiritual warfare is real, not all distress is spiritual—some are signs of stress or emotional strain.

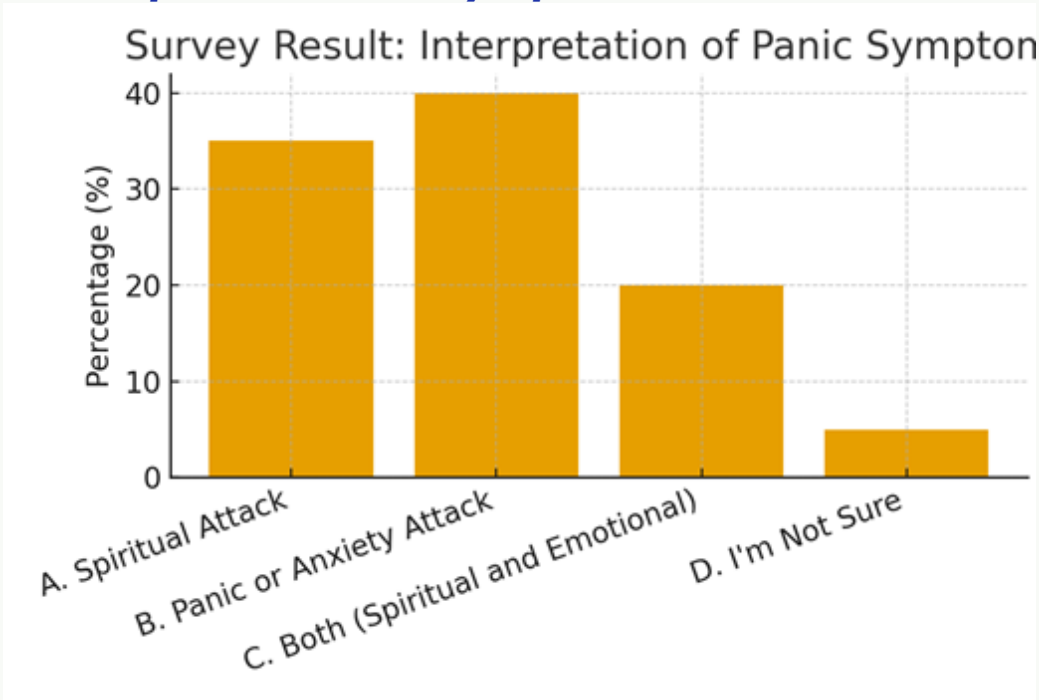
Key Message

“Pray, yes but also care for your mental health. God gave us a sound mind, not a fearful one.” Participants learned to combine prayer with practical mental care techniques such as breathing exercises, relaxation, and seeking support

Talk-It-Out Tuesday – “Your Voice Matters”

This session promoted open conversation on how people interpret distressing experiences. A short survey helped gauge how participants perceive panic attacks and spiritual experiences. Survey Question: When you experience symptoms like rapid heartbeat, fear, or shortness of breath, what do you usually think it is?

.Figure: Bar Chart Showing Participants’ Perception of Panic Symptom



Interpretation

The majority of respondents (60%) acknowledge the psychological aspect of panic symptoms, while a significant proportion (35%) still interpret such experiences as purely spiritual. This underscores the continued need for integrated mental health education in faith-based settings.

Wellness Wednesday – “Listening to Your Body’s Whisper”

A moving story illustrated how panic attacks can mimic spiritual warfare. Participants were taught to recognize bodily signals such as heart palpitations, fatigue, and sleeplessness as calls for rest rather than demonic activity.

Practical Tips: Step away from stress triggers

- Breathe deeply and hydrate
- Pray and rest both are sacred

Key Quote

“Your body is a temple; listen when it whispers before it screams.”

Thankful Thursday – “Gratitude Calms the Mind”

The day emphasized gratitude as a powerful mental wellness tool. Shifting focus from fear to thankfulness reduces anxiety and strengthens faith.

Takeaway

“A thankful heart calms an anxious mind.

Fun Friday – “Joy is Medicine Too”

Participants were encouraged to relax and celebrate progress. Joy was presented as a healing force that restores energy and perspective.

The day ended with the Staff Practicum Training Session (8 p.m.), highlighting the role of joy in productivity and emotional recovery.

Message:

“Don’t just survive learn to enjoy the journey.”



Self-Care Saturday – “Rest Before You Break”

The discussion reinforced that self-care is not selfish it’s wisdom. Participants learned that rest is both a biblical principle and a mental necessity.

Self-Care Tips

- Take a nap
- Step outside
- Eat nourishing food
- Do one joyful activity

Key Quote

“Self-care is not selfish its survival.”

Reflection Sunday – “Faith and Wisdom Work Together”

The closing session told Ada’s story a young woman who mistook panic attacks for spiritual attack until medical help revealed she was simply overwhelmed.

Reflection Point:

“Not every shaking is spiritual warfare sometimes, it’s your body begging for peace.”

The week concluded with a call to integrate faith with emotional wisdom, affirming that God’s love extends to our mental and physical well-being.

Conclusion

The ICTMH Mental Health Wellness Week was a resounding success. It bridged the gap between spirituality and psychology, fostering awareness that emotional distress is not a sign of weak faith but a call for balance and care.

In terms of outputs, improved understanding, renewed gratitude, and motivation to integrate prayer, self-awareness, and mental health support in daily living were harvested.

Campus Wellness Hub!



Initiative for Cognitive Therapies and Mental Health (ICTMH)
Campus Wellness Hub Weekly Report
Date: 20th October – 26th of October, 2025
Platform: WhatsApp (Virtual)
Compiled by: Khalid Musa

Overview

This week at the Campus Wellness Hub centered on motivation, self-awareness, and mindfulness. Members actively participated in daily reflections and discussions that inspired personal growth, gratitude, and emotional balance. Engagement remained steady, with consistent interaction throughout the week and an overall positive tone across all themes.

Weekly Highlights

Monday – Motivational Monday: “New Week, New Energy!”

The week began with an encouraging reminder that progress comes from consistency, not perfection. Members were asked to share one thing they aimed to accomplish during the week.
Engagement: Members shared personal goals such as studying for exams, improving time management, and maintaining focus. The post fostered optimism and accountability among participants.

Tuesday – Talk Tuesday: “What’s the Hardest Part of Being a Student in Nigeria?”

A poll was shared to highlight everyday student struggles such as financial stress, academic pressure, and burnout. The responses were insightful and honest, sparking empathy and awareness of shared experiences.
Engagement: High engagement. The poll received numerous votes and meaningful discussions, which later inspired a blog article on student challenges in Nigeria.

Wednesday – Wellness Wednesday: “Mind-Boosting Meals”

The post focused on nutrition and mental performance, highlighting foods that improve focus, memory, and alertness. Students were encouraged to make healthier food choices throughout the week.
Engagement: Moderate. Members responded by sharing favorite brain-fueling meals like fish, eggs, and fruits. The post helped bridge nutrition with mental wellness.

Thursday – Thought Shift Thursday: “Change Your Mindset, Change Your Day”

This post emphasized the power of perspective, encouraging members to replace negative thoughts with empowering ones.
Engagement: Members shared small mindset shifts, such as choosing peace over pressure and gratitude over comparison. The discussion was reflective and emotionally uplifting.

Friday – Fun Friday: “Friday Feels!”

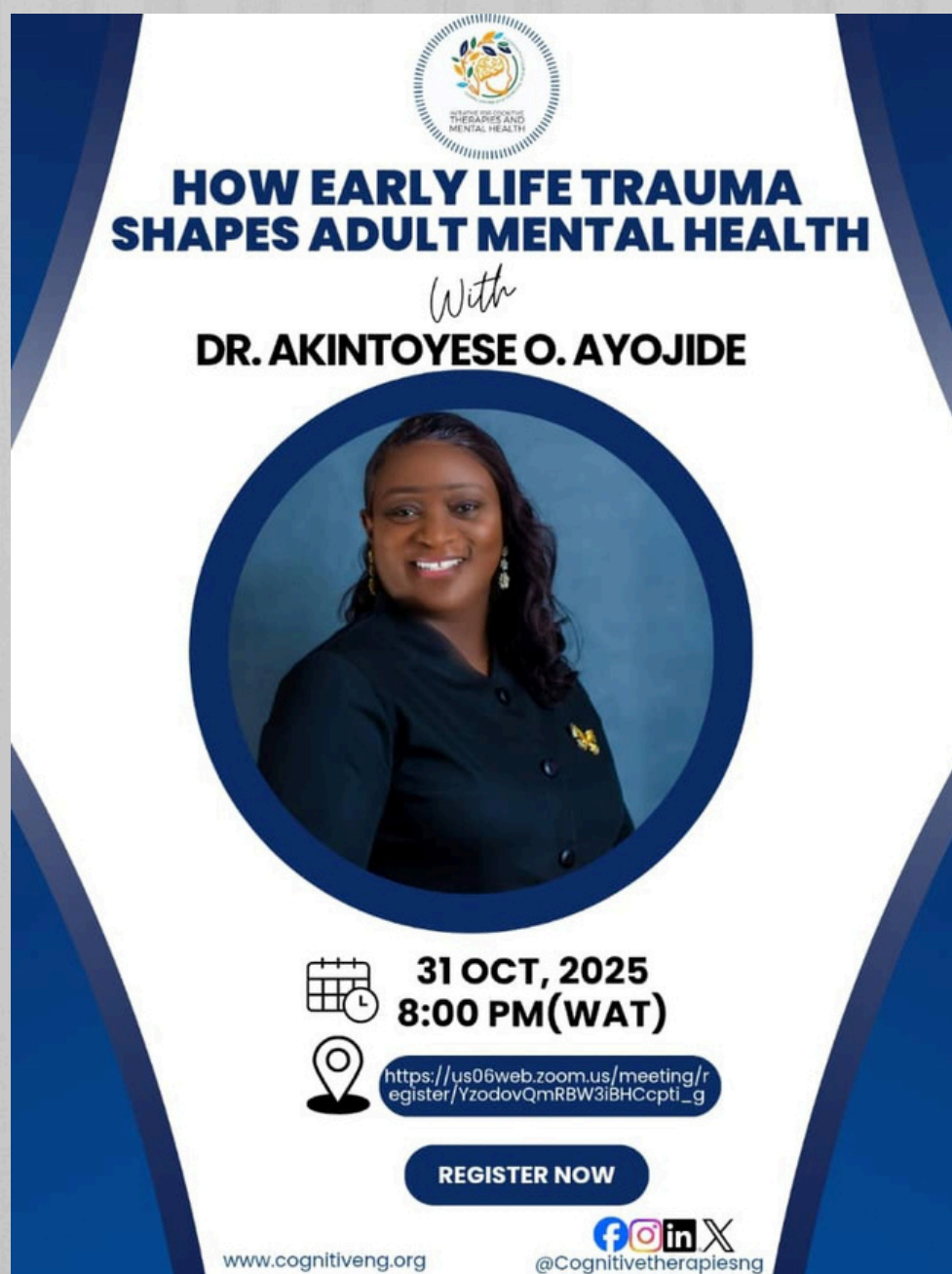
To close the week with lightness,

members were invited to react with emojis that best described their mood—👊 Motivated, 😌 Just Vibing, 🌿 Grateful, 😴 Tired.
Engagement: Excellent. Members actively reacted and commented, creating a cheerful atmosphere. The activity helped end the week on a positive, communal note.

Saturday – Slow Down Saturday

The day’s message centered on rest and mindfulness, encouraging members to slow down, pause, and recharge.
Engagement: Members responded warmly, sharing simple self-care ideas like journaling, praying, reading, and taking walks. The tone was soothing and reflective.

RESOURCE & ANNOUNCEMENTS



Call for Journal Articles - ICTMH

ICTMH invites submissions of journal articles focused on mental health and cognitive behavioral therapies, especially those offering African-based solutions. A list of suggested topics is available, but you're welcome to propose your own. Writing guidelines, including word counts and tips, are also provided. Interested? Contact Ese (07068487474) or Michael(08143296589) on WhatsApp. We're happy to support you through the process. Thank you!



To get feedback or stories? Email us at enquiry@cognitiveng.org

For volunteering opportunities, join our team via social media

[@www.cognitivetherapiesng](https://www.cognitivetherapiesng.org)

www.cognitiveng.org