

**Navigating the Storm: A Case Study of Fluctuating Moods and Ego in Research Supervisors at Higher Institutions of Learning in Uganda**

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**Abstract**

This mixed-methods study investigated the prevalence, impacts, and determinants of mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors in Ugandan universities. A convergent parallel design was employed, involving a cross-sectional survey of 384 postgraduate students from five purposively selected institutions, complemented by 15 in-depth interviews, 12 key informant interviews, 6 focus group discussions, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using univariate statistics, bivariate correlations, independent t-tests, and structural equation modeling to examine relationships between institutional factors, supervisor behaviors, and student outcomes. Results revealed that 75.3% of students experienced mood fluctuations and 80.5% encountered ego-driven behaviors from supervisors, with intellectual superiority displays (84.9%) and inconsistent emotional responses (81.3%) being most prevalent. Public universities exhibited significantly higher levels of both behavior categories compared to private institutions. Bivariate analyses demonstrated strong negative correlations between supervisor problematic behaviors and research progress ( $r=-0.58$  to  $-0.62$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), academic performance ( $r=-0.44$  to  $-0.47$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and positive correlations with anxiety ( $r=0.61$  to  $0.64$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and depression ( $r=0.57$  to  $0.59$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Students experiencing high exposure to problematic behaviors showed 46% lower research progress, required 45% more time to reach milestones, and exhibited clinically significant psychological distress. Structural equation modeling ( $\chi^2/df=2.87$ , CFI=0.94, RMSEA=0.069) identified supervisor workload ( $\beta=0.42$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), lack of training ( $\beta=0.38$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and job insecurity as significant predictors of problematic behaviors, while institutional support showed protective effects ( $\beta=-0.34$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Supervisor behaviors mediated relationships between institutional factors and student outcomes, with significant indirect effects confirmed through bootstrapping analyses. The study concluded that mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors represented systematic institutional problems rather than isolated individual failings, with measurable consequences for student academic success and psychological well-being. Recommendations included mandatory supervisor training and certification programs, evidence-based workload redistribution and supervisor-student ratio standards, and robust student feedback systems with supervisor accountability mechanisms to transform supervisory cultures and protect student welfare in Ugandan higher education.

**Keywords: research supervision, mood fluctuations, ego-driven behaviors, postgraduate education, supervisor-student relationships**

**Introduction of the Study**

The supervisor-student relationship in postgraduate research represents one of the most critical yet complex dynamics in higher education. This relationship significantly influences research quality, student persistence, and overall academic success (Kikooma et al., 2023; Rahiman & Kodikal, 2024). In Uganda's rapidly expanding higher education sector, where postgraduate programs have proliferated across universities, the quality of research supervision has emerged as a paramount concern. Recent observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that some research supervisors exhibit fluctuating moods and ego-driven behaviors that substantially impact the supervisory process. These behavioral patterns—ranging from inconsistent feedback and unpredictable emotional responses to superiority

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complexes and dismissive attitudes—create turbulent academic environments that may hinder students' research progress and psychological well-being (Eager & Brunton, 2023; Sullivan et al., 2023). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing interventions that enhance supervisory effectiveness and student outcomes in Ugandan universities (Essel et al., 2022; Kebirungi, 2021; Liu et al., 2022). This study explores the nature, manifestations, and consequences of fluctuating moods and ego among research supervisors, providing empirical evidence to inform policy and practice in postgraduate education.

### **Background of the Study**

Higher education institutions in Uganda have experienced remarkable growth over the past two decades, with the number of universities increasing from three public universities in the 1990s to over forty accredited institutions by 2024 (Awacorach et al., 2021; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025). This expansion has been accompanied by increased enrollment in postgraduate programs, particularly master's and doctoral degrees, as Uganda seeks to build its research capacity and knowledge economy. However, the rapid expansion has outpaced the development of adequate supervisory capacity and quality assurance mechanisms (Julius & Nancy, 2025; Khamis et al., 2021). Research supervision, which requires specific pedagogical skills, emotional intelligence, and professional maturity, has often been assigned based solely on academic rank or subject expertise without consideration of supervisory competence or psychological suitability. International literature highlights that supervisor personality traits, emotional stability, and ego management significantly affect supervision quality and student satisfaction (Geng & Wei, 2023; Julius, 2024). Studies from various contexts reveal that supervisors with mood instability or inflated egos create stressful environments characterized by power imbalances, inconsistent guidance, and poor communication. In the Ugandan context, cultural factors such as hierarchical academic structures, limited feedback mechanisms, and the high power distance between supervisors and students may exacerbate these challenges. Furthermore, institutional pressures including heavy teaching loads, limited research funding, and inadequate recognition systems may contribute to supervisor stress and emotional volatility (Julius, 2025a, 2025b). Despite these challenges, empirical research examining supervisor behavioral patterns and their impacts within Ugandan universities remains scarce, creating a knowledge gap that this study addresses.

### **Problem Statement**

Research supervision in Ugandan higher institutions is increasingly characterized by reports of supervisor mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors that negatively impact the supervisory relationship and student research outcomes. Students frequently encounter supervisors who display inconsistent emotional responses—being supportive and encouraging during one interaction but dismissive and harsh in subsequent meetings without apparent justification (Janet & Julius, 2023; Julius & Geoffrey, 2025; Julius & Nelson, 2024). Additionally, some supervisors exhibit ego-centric behaviors including intellectual superiority, reluctance to acknowledge student contributions, insistence on their methodological preferences regardless of research appropriateness, and punitive responses to student disagreement or independent thinking (Charondo et al., 2023; Nabiddo et al., 2022; Trigwell & Shale, 2004). These behavioral patterns create anxiety, confusion, and demotivation among postgraduate students, potentially leading to prolonged completion times, compromised research quality, and even student attrition (Julius & Godfrey, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025). The problem is compounded by weak institutional mechanisms for supervisor accountability, limited student recourse options, and cultural norms that discourage questioning authority figures. While students bear

the immediate consequences through delayed graduation and psychological distress, institutions suffer through reduced research output quality, damaged reputations, and inefficient resource utilization (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2024; Rista & Mukli, 2022). Despite the apparent prevalence and severity of this problem, systematic empirical investigation into the nature, extent, determinants, and impacts of fluctuating moods and ego among research supervisors in Uganda has been lacking. Without evidence-based understanding of these dynamics, universities cannot develop targeted interventions to improve supervisory quality and protect student welfare.

### **Main Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the nature, manifestations, and impacts of fluctuating moods and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors in higher institutions of learning in Uganda.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To examine the prevalence and patterns of mood fluctuation and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors in Ugandan universities.
2. To assess the effects of supervisor mood fluctuations and ego on postgraduate students' research progress, academic performance, and psychological well-being.
3. To identify the institutional, individual, and contextual factors that contribute to mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the prevalence and what are the common patterns of mood fluctuation and ego-driven behaviors exhibited by research supervisors in Ugandan universities?
2. How do supervisor mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors affect postgraduate students' research progress, academic performance, and psychological well-being?
3. What institutional, individual, and contextual factors contribute to mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors?

### **Methodology**

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design conducted across five purposively selected universities in Uganda representing public, private chartered, and private licensed institutions to capture diverse institutional contexts. The quantitative component involved a cross-sectional survey of 384 postgraduate students (master's and doctoral candidates) selected through stratified random sampling based on university type and program level, who completed a structured questionnaire measuring supervisor mood fluctuation patterns, ego-driven behaviors, supervision quality, student research progress, academic performance indicators, and psychological well-being using validated scales adapted to the Ugandan context. The qualitative component consisted of 15 in-depth interviews with postgraduate students, 12 key informant interviews with research supervisors, and 6 focus group discussions with mixed groups of students to explore lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual nuances of the supervisory relationship dynamics. Document analysis of institutional supervision policies, student complaints, and program completion records provided additional contextual data. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24, beginning with univariate analysis including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations to describe the prevalence and patterns of mood fluctuations and ego behaviors, followed by bivariate analysis employing Pearson correlation coefficients, independent t-tests, and one-way ANOVA to examine

relationships between supervisor behaviors and student outcomes across different demographic and institutional categories. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test hypothesized pathways between institutional factors, supervisor characteristics, mood fluctuation patterns, ego-driven behaviors, and their sequential effects on student research progress, academic performance, and psychological well-being, with model fit assessed using chi-square statistics, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), while mediation and moderation effects were examined using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to determine indirect effects and confidence intervals (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Prevalence and Patterns of Mood Fluctuation and Ego-Driven Behaviors Among Research Supervisors (N=384)**

Behavior Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score (1-5)	SD
<b>Mood Fluctuation Patterns</b>				
Inconsistent emotional responses	312	81.3%	4.12	0.89
Unpredictable feedback tone	298	77.6%	3.98	0.94
Sudden shifts from supportive to critical	276	71.9%	3.85	1.02
Volatile reactions to questions	234	60.9%	3.42	1.15
Mood-dependent availability	267	69.5%	3.67	1.08
<b>Overall Mood Fluctuation</b>	289	75.3%	3.81	0.82
<b>Ego-Driven Behaviors</b>				
Intellectual superiority displays	326	84.9%	4.28	0.85
Dismissal of student ideas	289	75.3%	3.92	0.96
Insistence on own methodologies	307	79.9%	4.05	0.91
Reluctance to acknowledge contributions	281	73.2%	3.88	0.99
Punitive responses to disagreement	253	65.9%	3.56	1.12
Taking credit for student work	198	51.6%	3.14	1.24
<b>Overall Ego-Driven Behavior</b>	309	80.5%	3.81	0.78
<b>Institutional Type Comparison</b>			<b>Mean Mood Score</b>	<b>Mean Ego Score</b>
Public universities (n=156)	-	-	3.92	3.95
Private chartered (n=128)	-	-	3.74	3.71
Private licensed (n=100)	-	-	3.68	3.69
F-statistic	-	-	4.23**	3.87**

\*Note: \* $p < 0.01$ ; Scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always

The descriptive statistics revealed alarmingly high prevalence rates of both mood fluctuation and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors in Ugandan universities, with 75.3% of students reporting experiencing mood fluctuations and 80.5% encountering ego-driven behaviors from their supervisors. The mean scores across both categories

(M=3.81, SD=0.82 for mood fluctuations; M=3.81, SD=0.78 for ego behaviors) indicated that these behaviors occurred "often" rather than occasionally, suggesting systematic rather than isolated problems. Specifically, intellectual superiority displays emerged as the most prevalent ego-driven behavior (84.9%, M=4.28, SD=0.85), followed by inconsistent emotional responses as the most common mood fluctuation pattern (81.3%, M=4.12, SD=0.89). The relatively lower standard deviations for these top-ranked behaviors (0.85 and 0.89 respectively) indicated substantial consensus among respondents regarding their prevalence, strengthening the reliability of these findings. One-way ANOVA results demonstrated statistically significant differences across institutional types for both mood fluctuations ( $F=4.23, p<0.01$ ) and ego-driven behaviors ( $F=3.87, p<0.01$ ), with public universities recording higher mean scores (3.92 and 3.95 respectively) compared to private chartered and private licensed institutions, suggesting that institutional context played a meaningful role in shaping supervisor behaviors.

These findings presented critical insights into the supervisory culture within Ugandan higher education and raised serious concerns about the quality of postgraduate education. The extraordinarily high prevalence rates—with over three-quarters of students experiencing these problematic behaviors—indicated that these were not aberrations attributable to a few difficult supervisors but rather systemic issues embedded within institutional cultures and practices. The predominance of intellectual superiority displays and inconsistent emotional responses suggested that supervisors operated within environments that either encouraged or failed to adequately check ego-centric and emotionally volatile behaviors, potentially reflecting broader issues of inadequate supervisor training, absence of accountability mechanisms, and hierarchical academic cultures that granted supervisors unchecked authority. The finding that public universities exhibited significantly higher levels of both behavior categories warranted particular attention, possibly reflecting higher workload pressures, larger student-supervisor ratios, resource constraints, and more entrenched bureaucratic hierarchies that created stressful conditions for supervisors while simultaneously reducing oversight. The moderate standard deviations across most behavior items indicated variability in student experiences, suggesting that while the problems were widespread, their intensity varied, potentially based on individual supervisor characteristics, disciplinary cultures, or specific departmental contexts. The fact that over half of students (51.6%) reported supervisors taking credit for student work represented potential ethical violations that extended beyond interpersonal dynamics into academic integrity concerns, necessitating urgent institutional intervention.

**Table 2: Effects of Supervisor Behaviors on Student Outcomes (Bivariate Correlations and Group Comparisons)**

<b>Student Outcome Variables</b>	<b>Overall Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Correlation with Mood Fluctuation</b>	<b>Correlation with Ego Behavior</b>	<b>High Exposure Group Mean</b>	<b>Low Exposure Group Mean</b>	<b>t-value</b>
Research Progress (1-10 scale)	5.84 (1.92)	-0.58***	-0.62***	4.12 (1.68)	7.56 (1.34)	-18.45***

Time to milestone completion (months)	18.67 (5.43)	0.51***	0.54***	22.14 (4.89)	15.20 (4.12)	11.89***
Academic Performance (CGPA)	3.82 (0.68)	-0.44***	-0.47***	3.51 (0.72)	4.13 (0.54)	-7.92***
Supervisor Satisfaction (1-5)	2.67 (1.14)	-0.69***	-0.71***	1.89 (0.76)	3.45 (0.89)	-15.34***
<b>Psychological Well-being</b>						
Anxiety levels (GAD-7)	12.45 (4.67)	0.64***	0.61***	15.78 (3.92)	9.12 (3.45)	14.67***
Depression symptoms (PHQ-9)	11.23 (5.12)	0.59***	0.57***	14.56 (4.34)	7.90 (3.78)	13.21***
Academic self-efficacy (1-5)	3.12 (0.98)	-0.52***	-0.55***	2.45 (0.87)	3.79 (0.76)	-13.45***
Stress levels (PSS-10)	24.78 (6.34)	0.66***	0.63***	28.94 (5.12)	20.62 (5.67)	12.56***
Intention to quit program	2.98 (1.34)	0.48***	0.51***	3.78 (1.12)	2.18 (1.21)	11.23***

\*Note: \*\* $p < 0.001$ ; High Exposure Group: combined mood & ego scores  $>3.5$ ; Low Exposure Group: scores  $\leq 3.5$ ;  $n=192$  per group

GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7); PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9); PSS-10 (Perceived Stress Scale-10)

The bivariate correlation analysis revealed robust and statistically significant negative associations between supervisor problematic behaviors and positive student outcomes, alongside strong positive correlations with adverse outcomes. Mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors demonstrated remarkably similar correlation patterns, with both showing strong negative correlations with research progress ( $r=-0.58$ ,  $p<0.001$  and  $r=-0.62$ ,  $p<0.001$  respectively), academic performance ( $r=-0.44$ ,  $p<0.001$  and  $r=-0.47$ ,  $p<0.001$  respectively), and supervisor satisfaction ( $r=-0.69$ ,  $p<0.001$  and  $r=-0.71$ ,  $p<0.001$  respectively). The magnitude of these correlations, particularly those exceeding  $r=0.60$ , indicated substantial shared variance between supervisor behaviors and student outcomes, suggesting that supervisor conduct explained considerable proportions of variance in student success metrics. Independent samples t-tests comparing students with high exposure to problematic behaviors versus low exposure demonstrated stark and statistically significant differences across all measured outcomes. Students experiencing high levels of mood fluctuations and ego behaviors reported research progress scores nearly 46% lower ( $M=4.12$  vs.  $M=7.56$ ,  $t=-18.45$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), required

approximately 45% more time to reach research milestones (M=22.14 months vs. M=15.20 months,  $t=11.89$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and showed meaningfully lower academic performance (M=3.51 vs. M=4.13,  $t=-7.92$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

The psychological toll of supervisor problematic behaviors emerged as particularly concerning, with strong positive correlations between supervisor behaviors and psychological distress indicators. Students exposed to high levels of mood fluctuations and ego behaviors exhibited clinically significant elevations in anxiety symptoms (M=15.78 vs. M=9.12 on GAD-7,  $t=14.67$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and depression symptoms (M=14.56 vs. M=7.90 on PHQ-9,  $t=13.21$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with mean scores in the high-exposure group approaching or exceeding clinical thresholds for moderate anxiety and depression. The correlation magnitudes for psychological variables (ranging from  $r=0.57$  to  $r=0.66$ ) rivaled or exceeded those for academic outcomes, underscoring that the impact of supervisor behaviors extended far beyond academic performance into fundamental student well-being. The finding that academic self-efficacy—a critical predictor of persistence and success—was substantially lower among high-exposure students (M=2.45 vs. M=3.79,  $t=-13.45$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) suggested that problematic supervisor behaviors undermined students' confidence in their scholarly capabilities, potentially creating lasting impacts on their academic identities and career trajectories. The elevated intention to quit among high-exposure students (M=3.78 vs. M=2.18,  $t=11.23$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) translated into tangible attrition risk, representing institutional costs through lost tuition revenue, wasted supervisory investment, and diminished research output. These comprehensive negative effects across academic, temporal, and psychological domains painted a troubling picture of supervision as a critical risk factor rather than a supportive resource, fundamentally contradicting the intended purpose of the supervisory relationship and demanding urgent institutional attention to protect student welfare and institutional effectiveness.

**Table 3: Structural Equation Model Results - Pathways and Predictors of Supervisor Behaviors and Student Outcomes**

Structural Paths	Standardized $\beta$	SE	CR	p-value	95% CI
<b>Predictors of Supervisor Behaviors</b>					
Workload → Mood Fluctuation	0.42	0.068	6.18	<0.001	[0.287, 0.553]
Workload → Ego Behavior	0.31	0.072	4.31	<0.001	[0.169, 0.451]
Job Insecurity → Mood Fluctuation	0.28	0.065	4.31	<0.001	[0.153, 0.407]
Lack of Training → Ego Behavior	0.38	0.069	5.51	<0.001	[0.245, 0.515]
Institutional Support → Mood Fluctuation	-0.34	0.061	-5.57	<0.001	[-0.459, -0.221]
Institutional Support → Ego Behavior	-0.29	0.064	-4.53	<0.001	[-0.415, -0.165]
<b>Direct Effects on Student Outcomes</b>					
Mood Fluctuation → Research Progress	-0.35	0.058	-6.03	<0.001	[-0.463, -0.237]

Ego Behavior → Research Progress	-0.41	0.061	-	<0.001	[-0.529, -0.291]
Mood Fluctuation → Psychological Well-being	-0.47	0.064	-	<0.001	[-0.595, -0.345]
Ego Behavior → Psychological Well-being	-0.38	0.059	-	<0.001	[-0.496, -0.264]
Mood Fluctuation → Academic Performance	-0.26	0.062	-	<0.001	[-0.381, -0.139]
Ego Behavior → Academic Performance	-0.32	0.065	-	<0.001	[-0.447, -0.193]
<b>Indirect/Mediation Effects</b>					
Workload → Mood Fluctuation → Research Progress	-0.147	0.031	-	<0.001	[-0.213, -0.091]
Lack of Training → Ego → Psychological Well-being	-0.144	0.029	-	<0.001	[-0.206, -0.092]
Institutional Support → Mood → Academic Performance	0.088	0.024	-	<0.001	[0.045, 0.139]
<b>Model Fit Indices</b>					
$\chi^2/df$	2.87				
CFI	0.94				
TLI	0.93				
RMSEA	0.069 [0.062-0.076]				
SRMR	0.058				

Note: SE = Standard Error; CR = Critical Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval (bootstrapped with 5,000 resamples)

The structural equation modeling analysis produced a well-fitting model ( $\chi^2/df=2.87$ , CFI=0.94, TLI=0.93, RMSEA=0.069, SRMR=0.058) that successfully explained the complex pathways linking institutional and individual factors to supervisor behaviors and subsequent student outcomes, with all fit indices meeting or closely approaching recommended thresholds. The model revealed that supervisor workload emerged as the strongest predictor of mood fluctuations ( $\beta=0.42$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), indicating that as supervisors managed heavier teaching, administrative, and supervisory responsibilities, their emotional stability and consistency in supervisory interactions deteriorated significantly. Lack of supervisory training demonstrated the strongest association with ego-driven behaviors ( $\beta=0.38$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), suggesting that supervisors who had not received formal preparation in supervisory pedagogy, relationship management, or reflective practice were more likely to rely on positional authority and intellectual dominance rather than facilitative approaches. Institutional support showed significant protective effects against both mood fluctuations ( $\beta=-0.34$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and ego behaviors ( $\beta=-0.29$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), demonstrating that organizational resources, recognition systems, and collegial environments buffered against problematic supervisory conduct. The direct effects of supervisor

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behaviors on student outcomes were substantial and uniformly negative, with ego-driven behaviors exerting particularly strong negative impacts on research progress ( $\beta=-0.41$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) while mood fluctuations showed the strongest detrimental effect on psychological well-being ( $\beta=-0.47$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), suggesting somewhat differentiated mechanisms whereby ego behaviors primarily obstructed academic advancement while mood instability more directly damaged emotional health.

The mediation analyses provided crucial insights into the mechanisms through which institutional factors influenced student outcomes indirectly through supervisor behaviors, with all tested indirect effects achieving statistical significance and 95% confidence intervals excluding zero. Workload's indirect effect on research progress through mood fluctuations ( $\beta=-0.147$ ,  $p<0.001$ , CI[-0.213, -0.091]) demonstrated that institutional decisions regarding faculty workload allocation had cascading consequences for student academic advancement, operating through the mechanism of supervisor emotional dysregulation. Similarly, lack of training's indirect effect on student psychological well-being through ego behaviors ( $\beta=-0.144$ ,  $p<0.001$ , CI[-0.206, -0.092]) revealed that institutional neglect of supervisor professional development translated into measurable psychological harm for students via enhanced ego-centric supervisory practices. The positive indirect effect of institutional support on academic performance through reduced mood fluctuations ( $\beta=0.088$ ,  $p<0.001$ , CI[0.045, 0.139]) demonstrated that organizational investments in faculty support systems yielded tangible benefits for student outcomes by promoting supervisor emotional stability. The magnitude of these indirect effects, while smaller than direct effects as expected in mediation models, represented meaningful practical impacts when considered across entire student cohorts and over multi-year degree programs. The SEM results collectively established that problematic supervisor behaviors were not merely individual failings but were systematically produced by institutional conditions—particularly workload pressures and inadequate training—while also demonstrating that these behaviors functioned as critical mechanisms translating institutional deficiencies into concrete student harms. These findings shifted attribution from individual supervisors to institutional systems and provided clear targets for intervention: workload reduction, mandatory supervisor training programs, and enhanced institutional support structures emerged as evidence-based levers for improving both supervisor conduct and student outcomes, with the model explaining substantial variance in student success metrics and offering actionable pathways for institutional reform.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provided compelling empirical evidence that mood fluctuations and ego-driven behaviors among research supervisors in Ugandan universities were widespread, systematic problems affecting approximately three-quarters of postgraduate students, with particularly high prevalence in public institutions. The research demonstrated through comprehensive quantitative analysis that these supervisor behaviors exerted substantial negative effects across multiple domains of student functioning, including significantly impaired research progress, prolonged time to degree completion, diminished academic performance, and elevated psychological distress reaching clinically significant levels of anxiety and depression. The structural equation modeling revealed that these problematic behaviors were not isolated personality flaws but were systematically produced by identifiable institutional factors, particularly excessive workload, inadequate supervisor training, and insufficient institutional support systems, while also serving as critical mechanisms through which institutional deficiencies translated into measurable student harm. The convergence of

findings across univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses established robust evidence that the quality of research supervision in Uganda faced serious challenges requiring urgent attention, as the supervisory relationship—intended as a developmental partnership—had instead become a significant risk factor undermining both student well-being and institutional effectiveness. The study's identification of modifiable institutional predictors and mediating pathways provided actionable evidence for systemic interventions targeting workload management, professional development, and organizational support structures, offering pathways toward transforming supervisory cultures and protecting the academic and psychological welfare of postgraduate students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Mandatory Supervisor Training and Certification Programs:** Universities should develop and implement comprehensive, mandatory training programs for all research supervisors covering pedagogical approaches to supervision, emotional intelligence and self-regulation, effective feedback strategies, ethical supervisory practices, and recognition of power dynamics in supervisor-student relationships. These programs should include initial certification requirements before supervisors are assigned students, annual refresher workshops, and ongoing professional development opportunities. Training should incorporate reflective practice components where supervisors examine their own behaviors and biases, role-playing exercises to develop skills in managing difficult conversations and emotional situations, and exposure to student perspectives on supervision quality.

**Workload Redistribution and Supervisor-Student Ratio Standards:** Institutional leadership must implement evidence-based policies establishing maximum supervisor-student ratios (recommended 1:4 for doctoral supervision, 1:6 for master's supervision) and comprehensive workload models that appropriately recognize supervision within faculty members' overall responsibilities. Universities should conduct workload audits to identify faculty members currently exceeding sustainable supervision loads and develop phased plans to redistribute students or provide additional supervisory support. Workload allocation formulas should assign appropriate credit hours or equivalents for supervision responsibilities, recognizing the time-intensive nature of quality mentorship, and should account for supervision in promotion and tenure decisions.

**Student Feedback Systems and Supervisor Accountability Mechanisms:** Universities must establish confidential, regular feedback mechanisms allowing students to report on supervision quality without fear of retaliation, including anonymous mid-program and end-of-program evaluations that assess supervisor behaviors, communication patterns, emotional consistency, and supportiveness. Institutions should create student ombudsman positions or advocate offices specifically addressing supervisory relationship concerns, providing students with safe channels to report problems and seek mediation or supervisor changes when necessary. Aggregated feedback data should be reviewed by departmental leadership and used constructively in supervision quality improvement efforts, faculty development planning, and supervisory assignment decisions, with persistent problematic patterns triggering mandatory intervention including additional training, supervision mentoring, or temporary removal from supervisory roles.

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