



Studies in Technology and Education

Volume 3, Issue 3, 2024

| <https://www.azalpub.com/index.php/ste>

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Article Info

Received:

June 26, 2024

Accepted:

July 17, 2024

Published:

September 15, 2024

Keywords

Anxiety Depression
Mental well-being
Severe
Stress

Suggested Citation:

Aguinaldo, J. J. P., & Garcia, G. D. (2024). Social support and mental well-being among junior high school students. *Studies in Technology and Education*, 3(3), 32-41.

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between social support and mental well-being among junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela, during the School Year 2023-2024. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study employs purposive sampling to select participants from both public and private schools, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of social support dynamics. The Social Support Survey Instrument and the DASS-21 are used to measure levels of social support and mental well-being indicators. The findings reveal varying levels of social support across different dimensions, with notable strengths in emotional backing during crises and tangible assistance with tasks such as meal preparation. Conversely, weaknesses are observed in areas like private worry-sharing and task assistance during illness. Significant mental health challenges are identified among respondents, including elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Correlation analysis reveals a nuanced relationship between social support and mental well-being. Emotional support, particularly through interpersonal sharing, is significantly associated with lower stress levels, while other dimensions show mixed or limited correlations. These findings underscore the importance of specific types of support in addressing mental health concerns among junior high school students. This study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between social support and mental well-being, contributing to the development of targeted interventions aimed at fostering positive social interactions and improving the overall well-being of junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela.

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INTRODUCTION

The well-being of junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela during the School Year 2023-2024 is a matter of critical importance within the broader context of Generation Z's development. Adolescents face numerous challenges as they transition from childhood to adulthood, making the role of social support a vital element in their mental and emotional well-being. This study examines the nuanced relationship between social support and mental well-being among these students, aiming to fill a significant gap in the existing literature and provide insights that could lead to improved interventions and support mechanisms tailored to this specific demographic.

Social support is a multifaceted construct that has been extensively studied across different populations. It encompasses emotional, informational, and tangible assistance provided by family, friends, and the broader social network. The positive effects of social support on mental well-being are well-documented. For example, Johnson-Esparza et al. (2021) demonstrated that social support plays a buffering role in the relationship between perceived stress and anxiety symptoms among Latinx college students. Their findings suggest that higher levels of perceived social support can mitigate the adverse effects of stress, leading to better mental health outcomes.

Similarly, Dopico-Casal et al. (2022) highlighted the resilience-enhancing potential of social support in the context of academic stressors and interpersonal conflicts. Their research, which focused on high school students in Spain, found that students who perceived higher levels of support from their peers and family members were better equipped to handle academic challenges and social conflicts, leading to lower levels of anxiety and depression. These findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments for adolescents, particularly during critical periods of their development.

However, the relationship between social support and mental well-being is not always straightforward. Harada et al. (2018) explored the complexities of social support dynamics, particularly the negative interactions within close kin relationships. Their study found that while positive social support can enhance mental well-being, negative interactions, such as criticism or emotional neglect, can significantly harm mental health. This dual nature of social support suggests that not all forms of support are beneficial and that the quality of social interactions is crucial in determining their impact on mental well-being.

Despite these insights from studies on broader demographics, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how these dynamics play out among junior high school students in specific local contexts like San Agustin, Isabela. The unique social, cultural, and environmental factors in this region may influence the nature and effectiveness of social support, making it essential to study this population in detail. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the specific social support dynamics among junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela, and their implications for mental well-being.

San Agustin, Isabela, was chosen as the study's setting due to its distinct regional characteristics that may influence students' social support networks and mental health outcomes. The town's socio-economic profile, educational infrastructure, and community dynamics provide a unique backdrop for examining the interplay between social support and mental well-being. Additionally, the increasing trend of mental health problems among Filipino students, as highlighted by Alejandria et al. (2022), underscores the

urgency of addressing mental health issues at earlier educational stages, such as junior high school.

Alejandria et al. (2022) reported a significant rise in mental health concerns among university students in the Philippines, with depression, anxiety, and stress being the most prevalent issues. While their study focused on older students, it raises important questions about the mental health trajectory of younger students, particularly those in junior high school. Addressing mental well-being at this earlier stage could potentially prevent the escalation of mental health problems as students progress to higher levels of education. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of mental well-being among junior high school students by focusing on the role of social support in their lives.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of social support and its impact on mental well-being, this study employs a purposive sampling approach. Participants are selected from both public and private schools in San Agustin, Isabela, ensuring a diverse sample that reflects the varied experiences of students in this region. The study utilizes well-established instruments, including the Social Support Survey Instrument and the DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales), to measure levels of social support and mental well-being indicators. These tools provide reliable and valid data, enabling the researcher to assess the prevalence of mental well-being issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress among the participants.

The findings from this study are expected to reveal the intricate relationship between social support and mental well-being among junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela. It is anticipated that different dimensions of social support will show varying levels of influence on mental health outcomes. For instance, emotional support, particularly through interpersonal sharing, may be strongly associated with lower stress levels, while other forms of support, such as tangible assistance, may have a more limited or mixed impact. These results will contribute to the academic discourse on social support and mental well-being, providing valuable insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by junior high school students in this locality.

Beyond its academic contributions, this research has practical implications for the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms aimed at improving the mental well-being of junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela. By identifying the most effective forms of social support, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals can design programs and initiatives that foster positive social interactions and provide the necessary resources for students to thrive. Moreover, this study aligns with various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), by addressing the mental health needs of a vulnerable population and promoting equitable access to support services.

The well-being of junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela, is intricately linked to the social support they receive from their families, peers, and communities. This study underscores the importance of understanding the specific dynamics of social support in this region, particularly as they relate to mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and stress. By filling a critical gap in the literature, this research contributes to the broader understanding of adolescent mental health and offers practical recommendations for fostering supportive environments that promote the holistic development of junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela. The findings of this

study will not only enhance academic discourse but also inform the creation of tailored interventions that align with the unique needs of this population, ultimately contributing to the well-being and success of the next generation.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to explore the relationship between social support and mental well-being among junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela. Through purposive sampling, respondents were selected from both public and private schools, allowing for a comprehensive examination of social support dynamics across different educational settings. Utilizing established instruments such as the Social Support Survey Instrument developed by RAND Corporation (n.d.) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) at the University of New South Wales, the study aimed to assess the extent of social support received by students and examine their mental well-being indicators. Data analysis relies on descriptive statistics to provide insights into participants' levels of social support and mental well-being, offering a snapshot of prevailing trends within the studied population. Correlation analysis further explores the relationship between variables, elucidating how different dimensions of social support correspond to distinct aspects of psychological welfare. By employing a systematic approach to data collection and analysis, the study seeks to derive meaningful insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the mental well-being of junior high school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from Table 1 offer insights into the extent of social support received by respondents across different dimensions, including Emotional Support, Tangible Support, Affectionate Support, Positive Social Interaction, and an Additional Item. Analysis reveals varying levels of support across these dimensions. Notably, respondents reported high levels of support for receiving good advice during a crisis (mean = 3.65) and experiencing love and affection (mean = 3.61), suggesting strong emotional and affectionate support networks. However, there were indications of less consistent support for sharing private worries and fears (mean = 2.68), performing tasks when sick or confined to bed (mean = 3.03), and receiving hugs (mean = 3.16). Additionally, while support for engaging in enjoyable activities with others was high (mean = 3.81), support for relaxation activities (mean = 3.45) and distraction from worries (mean = 2.90) received lower scores. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening support systems in specific areas such as private worry sharing, task assistance during illness, and consistent affectionate support. Furthermore, promoting positive social interactions and engaging individuals in enjoyable activities to distract from worries emerge as important strategies for enhancing overall well-being and resilience. Importantly, these implications align with previous research by Mulyadi and Saraswati (2020), emphasizing the significant contribution of social support to various aspects of students' lives, including academic engagement. Overall, this study sheds light on the nuanced nature of social support and its implications for well-being, informing interventions aimed at bolstering support networks and fostering positive social interactions within communities.

Table 1. The Extent of Social Support Received by the Respondents

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
Emotional Support		
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk	3.29	Some of the time
Someone to give you information to help you understand a situation	3.03	Some of the time
Someone to give you good advice about a crisis	3.65	Most of the time
Someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems	3.45	Most of the time
Someone whose advice you want	3.48	Most of the time
Someone to share your most private worries and fears with	2.68	Some of the time
Someone to turn to for suggestions about how to deal with a personal problem	3.19	Some of the time
Someone who understands your problems	3.48	Most of the time
Tangible Support		
Someone to help you if you are confined to bed	3.03	Some of the time
Someone to take you to the doctor if you need it	3.23	Some of the time
Someone to prepare your meals if you were unable to do it yourself	3.55	Most of the time
Someone to help with daily chores if you are sick	3.10	Some of the time
Affectionate Support		
Someone who shows you love and affection	3.61	Most of the time
Someone to love and make you feel wanted	3.29	Some of the time
Someone who hugs you	3.16	Some of the time
Positive Social Interaction		
Someone to have a good time with	3.77	Most of the time
Someone to get together with for relaxation	3.45	Most of the time
Someone to do something enjoyable with	3.81	Most of the time
Additional Support		
Someone to do things with to help you get your mind off things	2.90	Some of the time

The results from Table 2 indicate a concerning prevalence of severe to extremely severe states of mental well-being among the surveyed college population, particularly regarding depression, anxiety, and stress. Notably, a significant portion of respondents experienced extremely severe depression (41.94%) and anxiety (87.10%), highlighting pervasive levels of distress. Additionally, a relatively even distribution of stress levels, with 38.71% experiencing severe stress and 29.03% experiencing extremely severe stress, underscores the significant burden of stress among students. These findings align with previous studies by Ramón-Arbués et al. (2020), Limone and Toto (2022), and Lee et al. (2021), which emphasize the impact of academic pressure, financial concerns, and personal relationships on college students' mental health. Urgent implementation of targeted interventions and support systems is crucial to effectively address these mental health challenges and improve the well-being of college students.

Table 2. Prevalence of State of Mental Well-Being

Depression	Frequency	Percentage
Mild	3	9.68
Moderate	6	19.35
Severe	9	29.03
Extremely Severe	13	41.94
Total	31	100.00
Anxiety		
Normal	3	9.68
Severe	1	3.23
Extremely Severe	27	87.10
Total	31	100.00
Stress Level		
Normal	2	6.45
Mild	3	9.68
Moderate	5	16.13
Severe	12	38.71
Extremely Severe	9	29.03
Total	31	100.00

Table 3 illustrates correlations between mental well-being indicators (depression, anxiety, stress) and various dimensions of social support among respondents. Emotional support reveals mixed associations; while having someone to confide in or talk to correlates significantly with lower depression ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$) and stress ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$), other aspects like receiving advice show nonsignificant correlations. Tangible support displays limited associations with mental well-being, with most dimensions exhibiting nonsignificant correlations. Affectionate support presents mixed associations, with some dimensions correlating weakly to moderately with lower mental health symptoms. Positive social interaction demonstrates weak to moderate correlations with mental well-being, with engaging in enjoyable activities having some benefits. However, additional support for distraction purposes shows nonsignificant correlations with mental well-being indicators. These findings align with supporting studies; for example, Shensa et al. (2020) on emotional support, O’Conor et al. (2021) on tangible support, Lopes et al. (2020) on affectionate support, Fritz et al. (2023) on positive social interaction, and Deegan & Dunne (2022) on additional support. The nuanced relationships underscore the importance of specific forms of social support in mitigating mental health issues among respondents.

Table 3. Relationship Between Mental Well-Being and Social Support of the Respondents

Social Support	Mental Well-Being					
	Depression		Anxiety		Stress	
Emotional Support	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk	0.10 ^{ns}	0.59	0.00 ^{ns}	1.00	0.13 ^{ns}	0.48
Someone to give you information to help you understand a situation	0.12 ^{ns}	0.53	0.14 ^{ns}	0.45	0.22 ^{ns}	0.24
Someone to give you good advice about a crisis	-0.05 ^{ns}	0.81	-0.05 ^{ns}	0.81	-0.22 ^{ns}	0.24
Someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems	0.13 ^{ns}	0.48	0.14 ^{ns}	0.44	0.41 [*]	0.02
Someone whose advice you want	0.01 ^{ns}	0.98	-0.31 ^{ns}	0.09	-0.06 ^{ns}	0.73
Someone to share your most private worries and fears with	0.34 ^{ns}	0.06	0.11 ^{ns}	0.54	0.19 ^{ns}	0.31

Someone to turn to for suggestions about how to deal with a personal problem	-0.22 ^{ns}	0.23	-0.07 ^{ns}	0.70	0.13 ^{ns}	0.47
Someone who understands your problems	0.20 ^{ns}	0.28	0.04 ^{ns}	0.84	0.05 ^{ns}	0.78
Tangible Support						
Someone to help you if you are confined to bed	0.08 ^{ns}	0.66	-0.11 ^{ns}	0.54	-0.08 ^{ns}	0.67
Someone to take you to the doctor if you need it	0.03 ^{ns}	0.87	-0.11 ^{ns}	0.54	-0.14 ^{ns}	0.45
Someone to prepare your meals if you were unable to do it yourself	0.15 ^{ns}	0.41	-0.06 ^{ns}	0.74	-0.15 ^{ns}	0.42
Someone to help with daily chores if you are sick	-0.18 ^{ns}	0.34	-0.23 ^{ns}	0.22	-0.22 ^{ns}	0.24
Affectionate Support						
Someone who shows you love and affection	0.14 ^{ns}	0.47	0.29 ^{ns}	0.11	0.27 ^{ns}	0.14
Someone to love and make you feel wanted	0.22 ^{ns}	0.24	0.20 ^{ns}	0.28	0.25 ^{ns}	0.18
Someone who hugs you	0.20 ^{ns}	0.29	0.14 ^{ns}	0.47	0.09 ^{ns}	0.62
Positive Social Interaction						
Someone to have a good time with	0.21 ^{ns}	0.25	-0.15 ^{ns}	0.42	0.02 ^{ns}	0.91
Someone to get together with for relaxation	0.20 ^{ns}	0.29	0.09 ^{ns}	0.65	0.07 ^{ns}	0.72
Someone to do something enjoyable with	0.06 ^{ns}	0.76	-0.19 ^{ns}	0.30	-0.25 ^{ns}	0.18
Additional Support						
Someone to do things with to help you get your mind off things	0.10 ^{ns}	0.59	0.14 ^{ns}	0.46	0.07 ^{ns}	0.69

ns – not significant, * - significant

CONCLUSION

The study's findings reveal varied levels of social support across different domains, with notable strengths observed in emotional backing during crises and tangible assistance with meal preparation. These results underscore the importance of developing tailored interventions that address areas of weakness while reinforcing existing support structures. Moreover, the study identifies significant mental health challenges among respondents, including elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive mental health interventions. A significant correlation is observed between emotional support, particularly through interpersonal sharing, and reduced stress levels, suggesting that supportive relationships play a crucial role in mitigating stress. Consequently, promoting such relationships and implementing multifaceted strategies that address both social support deficits and mental health issues are essential for enhancing overall well-being and resilience among individuals facing mental health struggles. These findings emphasize the necessity of a holistic approach to mental health, one that integrates both social and psychological support mechanisms to foster resilience and improve mental health outcomes. The study contributes valuable insights that can inform the development of targeted programs aimed at bolstering social support networks and addressing mental health challenges, ultimately enhancing the overall well-being of individuals in need.

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