



PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT INFLUENCE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING DIMENSIONS OF NON-INDIGENE FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Positive psychology research suggests that social support is related to healthy psychological functioning of individuals. This study examined the direct influence of perceived social support on psychological well-being dimensions among a sample of undergraduate students in Nigeria. The research was designed as a cross-sectional ex post facto study. Participants included 142 male and 162 female non-indigene first year undergraduate students in a state-owned semi-rural university. Their mean age is 19.68 (S.D = 2.35). A self-report structured questionnaire with revalidated scales were administered on study participants. Results showed significant main effect of perceived social support on psychological well-being {F (6, 295) = 6.28, p = .000; Wilks' Λ = 0.78, partial η^2 = .113}. Result for independent influence showed that more favorable perception of social support predicted autonomy, positive relations and self-acceptance. It is recommended that access to more social support sources be improved for non-indigene first year students as this enhanced their psychological well-being.

Keywords: Perceived social support, psychological well-being, non-indigene students, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Social support may influence psychological outcomes including wellbeing. Lee, Chung and Park (2016) found that perceived social support consistently predicted wellbeing outcomes, and underscored the importance of social support in promoting positive psychological health. Researches by Cohen (1988) and Uchino, Bowen, Carlisle, and Birmingham (2012) elaborated the finding further when they established that higher levels of social support negatively predicted psychological health indicators. Johnsen, Eriksen, Indahl, and Tyeito (2017) confirmed this finding but explained that the manner in which the support is rendered may be more crucial than the amount of support received. Despite findings that have established that social support has salutary health outcomes, perceived social support influence on psychological well-being is in need of investigation, particularly among non-indigene undergraduate students who may experience psychological distress due to acculturative stress, adjustment difficulties and separation from a familiar environment. The present study therefore seeks to examine whether perceived social support influenced psychological well-being and its dimensions in a sample of non-indigene first year undergraduate students in a semi-rural Nigerian university.

Non-native First Year Undergraduate Students and their Psychological Well-being

The term non-indigene undergraduate is a parlance that may describe a student with no cultural, ethnic or linguistic affiliation to the community where their university is located. Such students often have to deal with challenges related to physical, cultural and linguistic adjustment to the new environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Additionally, a non-native student, as like an international student, has been shown to have a higher likelihood to report feeling isolated, have communication difficulty and perceive a lack of social support (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994). The dynamic interaction among leaving significant others (e.g. parents) and old friends behind, forming new friendships and adjusting to a new but higher academic expectation may combine to make the transition to university particularly stressful for new entrants (Papier, Ahmed, Lee, & Wiseman, 2015; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004; Salam Mahadevan, Abdul Rahman, Abdullah, Abd Harith, & Shan, 2015). Adjusting to this transition-induced stress may

have negative consequence that may result in dips in psychological well-being (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007).

Psychological well-being has been widely researched because of its applied implication. Psychological well-being describe positive psychological functioning in autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relationship with others, personal growth and self-acceptance (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Recent investigations by Emanuel, Howell, Taber, Ferrer, Klein and Harris (2018), and Hernandez, Bassett, Boughton, Schuette, Shiu, and Moskowitz (2018) have established that psychological well-being is associated with positive cognitive and health outcomes. More specifically, their findings demonstrated that psychological well-being positively predicted the ability to self-affirm, suggesting that psychologically healthy individuals may be more likely to reflect on values that are relevant to them when their sense of self is threatened (Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

The importance of psychological well-being in academic achievement is further demonstrated in the well-being literature. Bucker, Nuraydin, Simosmeier, Schneider, & Luhmann (2018) found a significant but non-linear relationship between well-being and academic achievement. Their finding revealed that low-achieving students were not necessarily low on well-being while high-achievers were also not normally high on well-being. This finding suggest that other variables may interfere in the relationship between well-being and academic achievement.

Topham and Moller (2011) reported that one out of every four new university students showed signs of psychological distress that manifested as moderate to severe social anxiety. This finding supported the result of a study which found that university students, but in particular first year entrants reported experiencing more strain on their well-being (Bewick, Koutsopoulou, Miles, Slaa, & Barkham, 2010). This finding can be attributed to the fact that university education often may entail significant reductions in financial and personal support that the student can access (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2011). Thus, the students may experience dips in their psychological well-being as a result of financial and personal resources inadequacy.

Social Support and Psychological Well-Being

Social support are psychological and material resources that enable individuals to handle stressful everyday life events successfully (Cohen, 2004). Supportive social relationships have been shown to be important predictors of psychological health and well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Frisch, 2005; 2014; Seligman, 2011). Nielsen, Newman, Smyth, Hirst, and Heilemann (2016) found that teacher support positively predicted well-being in a sample of graduate students, suggesting that the more favorable the teacher support, the higher the students' psychological well-being. Social support predicted psychological well-being among elderly persons (Wedgeworth, LaRocca, Chaplin & Scogin, 2017), which suggest that support resources may contribute to improved psychological health such as life satisfaction (Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014) across the life span.

The findings from the reviewed literature align with the proposition of the stress and coping social support theory (Cutrona, 1990) which argue that social support promote adaptive appraisal (positive thoughts, problem solving mindset) and coping in individuals who are confronted with stressful events. According to the theory, the development of problem solving cognitions is crucial because it buffers against the negative effect of stress on health. Not surprising, non-significant social support influence on psychological well-being have also been reported. For instance, Sharifian & Gruhn (2018) did not find any buffering effect of social support on psychological well-being decline in a sample of older people.

Several forms of social support are identified. Social embeddedness is a measure of the frequency of contact with those in one's social network (Barrera, 1986; Granovetter, 1985). Actual received support either emotional support, tangible support, or informational support, is known as enacted support (Barrera, 1986). A positive relationship was demonstrated between enacted support (received support) and psychological well-being (Finch, Okun, Pool, &

Ruehlman, 1999). Provided support describe the help that an individual is able to give to others and has been linked to health and well-being (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003). Similarly, evidence from previous studies have shown that support provided by a close-knit group (e.g. a religious group/family) predicted reduction in psychological distress and improved psychological well-being (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Chatters, Taylor, Woodward, & Nicklett, 2015; Diaz & Bui, 2017; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez & Myers, 2007). This finding suggest that resources (psychological, spiritual, material) that could be accessed from close-knit social groups may serve as important sources for boosting psychological wellness. It could be that believing that the family is a guaranteed source of support and would provide it when it is needed may enhance the sense of well-being.

The Present Study

In this study, the aim is to investigate the influence of three levels of perceived social support (low, moderate and high) on psychological well-being dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relationship with others, personal growth and self-acceptance) among non-indigene first year university students in a semi-rural public university in Nigeria. The struggle that tend to accompany adjustment to an environment that is significantly different socially and culturally from their home environment may increase psychological distress among non-indigene first year students. Consequently, it is hypothesized that perceived social support dichotomized into three levels (low, moderate, high) will influence psychological well-being dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relationship with others, personal growth and self-acceptance) among non-indigene first year undergraduate students in Nigeria.

METHOD

Design and Participants

The study adopted an ex post facto cross-sectional design. Study participants are 304 new entrant undergraduate students admitted into a semi-rural public university in Nigeria. They comprised of 142 male and 162 female non-indigene freshmen selected using purposive sampling technique. The mean age of participants is 19.68. Participants were selected from the five faculties in the university - Arts, Education, Science, Social and Management Sciences and Law. Participants had to satisfy the following inclusion criteria to be selected (i) they must be undergraduate students (ii) they must first year students (iii) they must have no cultural or linguistic affiliation with the host community of the university. Questionnaire distribution was carried out during the week on the university campus. Respondents consented verbally to participate in the study.

Instruments

A two-section questionnaire was used for data collection. Demographic information (age, gender and faculty) were captured in section A and section B measured perceived social support and multidimensional psychological well-being. In this study, perceived social support is reported as the independent variable, and psychological well-being dimensions are the dependent variables.

Ryff's (1989) Psychological well-being is a 42-item scale that measures psychological well-being on six subscales: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. In each subscale are 7 items with responses on a 5 point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree = 1; disagree = 2; undecided = 3; agree = 4 and strongly = 5). Items are aimed to assess feelings individuals have about their life in general. Sample items in the scale are: 'In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live'; 'The demands of everyday life often get me down'; 'When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am'. The 20 items listed next are reverse coded: 3, 5, 10,

13,14,15,16,17,18,19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 39 and 41. In the present study, a Cronbach alpha of .82 was reported for the composite scale.

Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley (1988) is a 12-item three dimensional scale and widely used to measure perception of support from three primary sources: friends, family and significant others. Each subscale is comprised of 4 items that are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Sample items one from each of the subscales are: 'There is a special person who is around when I am in need'; 'My family really tries to help me'; 'My friends really try to help me'. Wongpakaran, Wongpakaran & Ruktrakul (2011) reported good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 among Thai students. Mohammad, Sadat, Yim and Chinna (2015) obtained Cronbach's alpha was 0.78 with a Nigerian sample. The Cronbach alpha of the scale with the present sample is .81.

Procedure

In this study, a self-report questionnaire comprised of three sections that measured demographic information, perceived social support, and psychological well-being were administered on those who met the inclusion criteria set for the study. The inclusion criteria are; i) that they must be non-indigenes of the host community; ii) must be first year undergraduate students, and iii) must be duly registered for the current academic session. Purposive sampling technique was considered appropriate for selecting study participants because of the nature of the study. Students were approached at different locations within the campus during the week. Those who indicated they shared no ethnic or linguistic affiliation with the institution's host community were identified and taken to a quiet location for the next stage of the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the selected students, thereafter a request to indicate their willingness to participate in the study was made by the researcher. Verbal consent was obtained from participants. A set of questionnaire was then distributed to those who consented to the study to complete. The researcher determined in a pilot study that it should take about 12minutes to complete each questionnaire fully. Participation in the study did not pose any significant psychological, emotional or social risks to respondents.

Data analysis

SPSS version 25 was utilized to analyze the data collected. Participants' demographic characteristics were analyzed with descriptive statistics that included mean and frequency. One - Way MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was performed to investigate perceived social support differences in psychological well-being dimensions. The independent variables were autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance which are the six dimensions of psychological well-being.

RESULTS

Table 1

Significant multivariate effects of perceived social support on dimensions of psychological wellbeing

Effect	Wilks' Lambda value	F	Df	p	η^2
Perceived social support	0.903	6.28	6.000	0.001	0.78

Table 2

One-Way MANOVA Showing Significant Univariate Effect of Perceived Social Support on Psychological Well-Being Dimensions of Non-Indigene First Year University Students

Source	Dependent variables	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	η^2
Perceived Social Support	Autonomy	244.339	2	122.169	9.892	.000	.062
	Environmental Mastery	86.334	2	43.167	4.232	.015	.027
	Personal Growth	124.802	2	62.401	2.904	.056	.019
	Positive Relations	345.970	2	172.985	13.272	.000	.081
	Purpose in Life	34.895	2	17.447	.676	.509	.004
	Self-Acceptance	466.069	2	233.035	15.347	.000	.093
Error	Autonomy	3705.246	300	12.351			
	Environmental Mastery	3060.286	300	10.201			
	Personal Growth	6446.452	300	21.488			
	Positive Relations	3910.017	300	13.033			
	Purpose in Life	7742.062	300	25.807			
	Self-Acceptance	4555.284	300	15.184			
Corrected Total	Autonomy	3949.584	302				
	Environmental Mastery	3146.620	302				
	Personal Growth	6571.254	302				
	Positive Relations	4255.987	302				
	Purpose in Life	7776.957	302				
	Self-Acceptance	5021.353	302				

Perceived Social Support and Psychological Well-Being Dimensions

The results in table 1 showed there was a statistically significant difference among low PSS, moderate PSS and high PSS on the combined dependent variables, $F(6, 295) = 6.28, p = .000$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.78$, partial $\eta^2 = .113$. This means that the three levels of perceived social support (low, moderate and high) accounted for 11% of the variance in the combined dependent variables.

Table 2 showed that independently, there were statistically significant difference using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .008 (i.e. .05/6) for autonomy $F(2, 300) = 9.89, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .062$; positive relations $F(2, 300) = 13.27, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .081$, and self-acceptance $F(2, 300) = 15.34, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .093$ psychological well-being dimensions.

An inspection of the mean score revealed significant differences in PSS groups on psychological well-being dimension. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated as follows: on autonomy, the mean score for low PSS group ($M = 22.12, SD = 3.82$) was significantly different from moderate PSS group ($M = 23.78, SD = 3.24$) and high PSS groups ($M = 24.19, SD = 3.44$). This means that those with more favorable perception of social support reported higher level of independence than those with low and moderate scores on perceived social support. High PSS group ($M = 25.16, SD = 3.91$) scored slightly higher on positive relations than both low PSS group ($M = 22.47, SD = 3.63$) and moderate PSS group ($M = 23.62, SD = 3.32$). It suggested that undergraduate students who reported more favorable perception of social support had better interaction with others than those with either low or moderate scores on perceived social support. Similarly, those with high scores on perceived social support ($M = 25.16, SD = 3.91$) were higher on self-acceptance than low PSS group ($M =$

22.94, SD = 4.31) and moderate PSS group (M = 25.46, SD = 3.51). The result indicated that those who perceived high social support were more likely to develop positive attitude than those with either low or moderate scores on perceived social support.

Table 3
Post hoc comparison using Tukey HSD test showing Means and Standard Deviation for Autonomy, Positive Relations and Self-Acceptance Dimensions of Psychological Well-being by Perceived Social Support

PSS	Autonomy			Positive Relations			Self-Acceptance		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Low	22.12	3.82	107	22.47	3.63	107	22.94	4.31	107
Moderate	23.78	3.24	109	23.62	3.32	109	25.46	3.51	109
High	24.19	3.44	87	25.16	3.91	87	25.62	3.81	87

Note: PSS - perceived social support; M – mean, SD-standard deviation

Figure 1
Perceived social support influence on autonomy

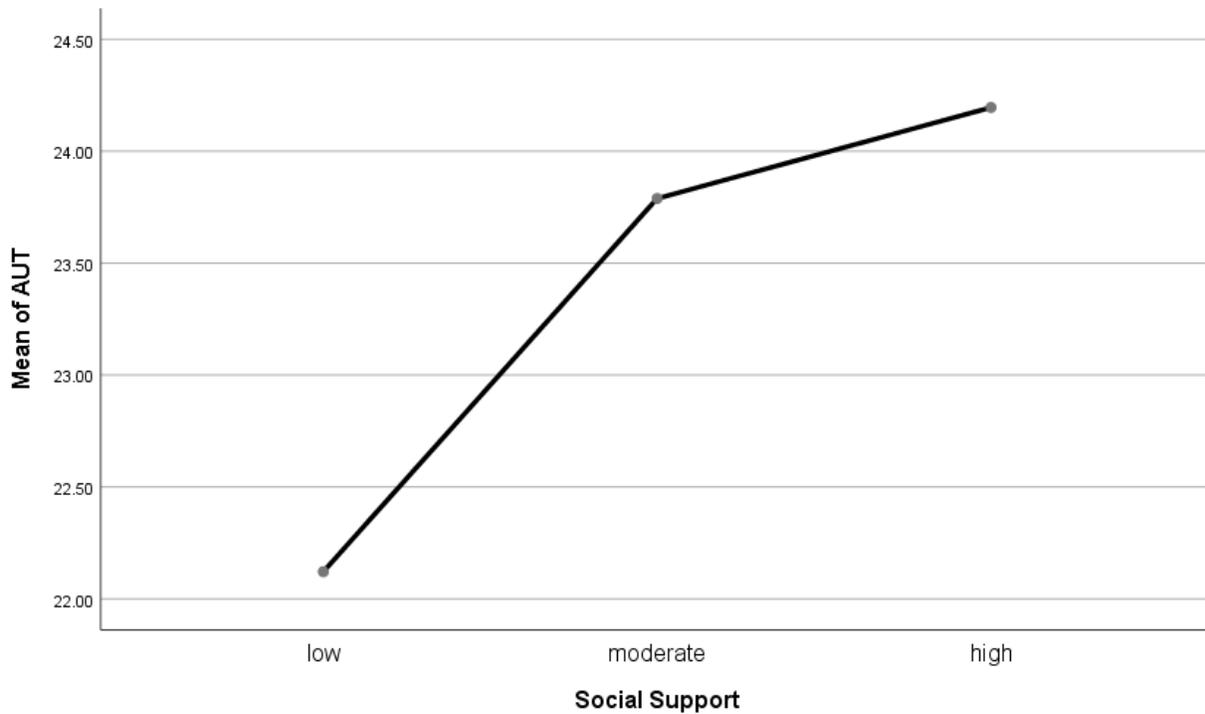


Figure 2
Perceived social support influence on personal relations

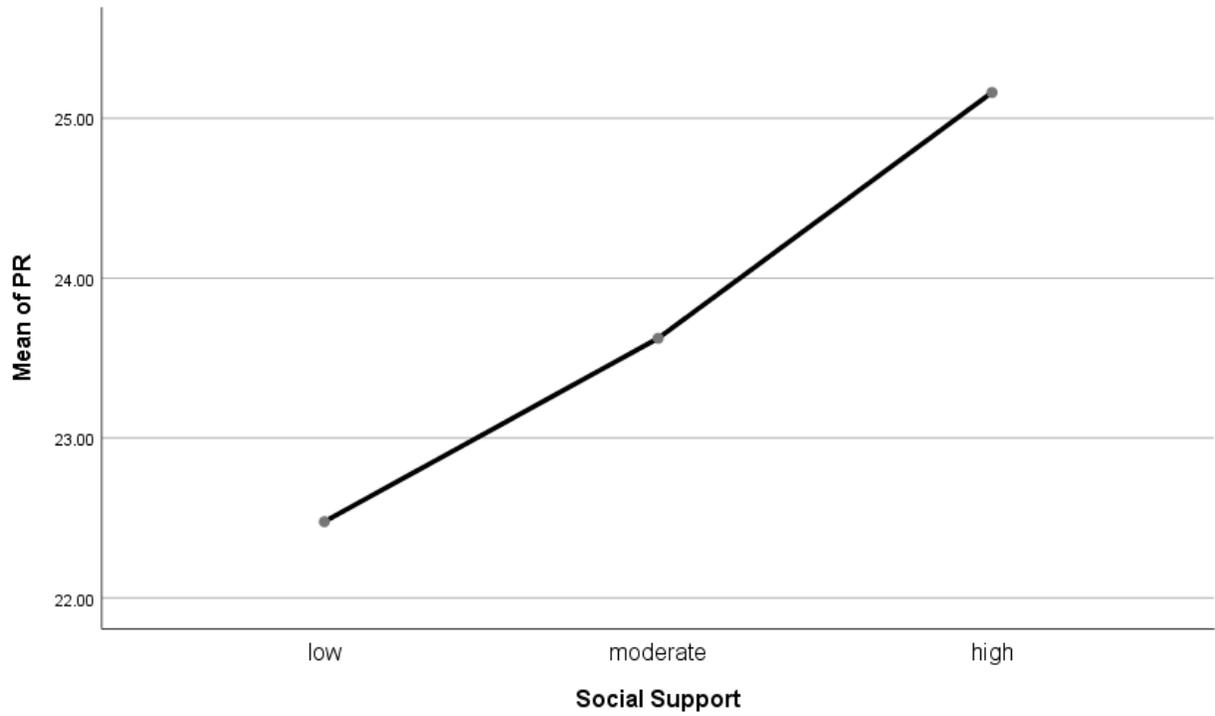
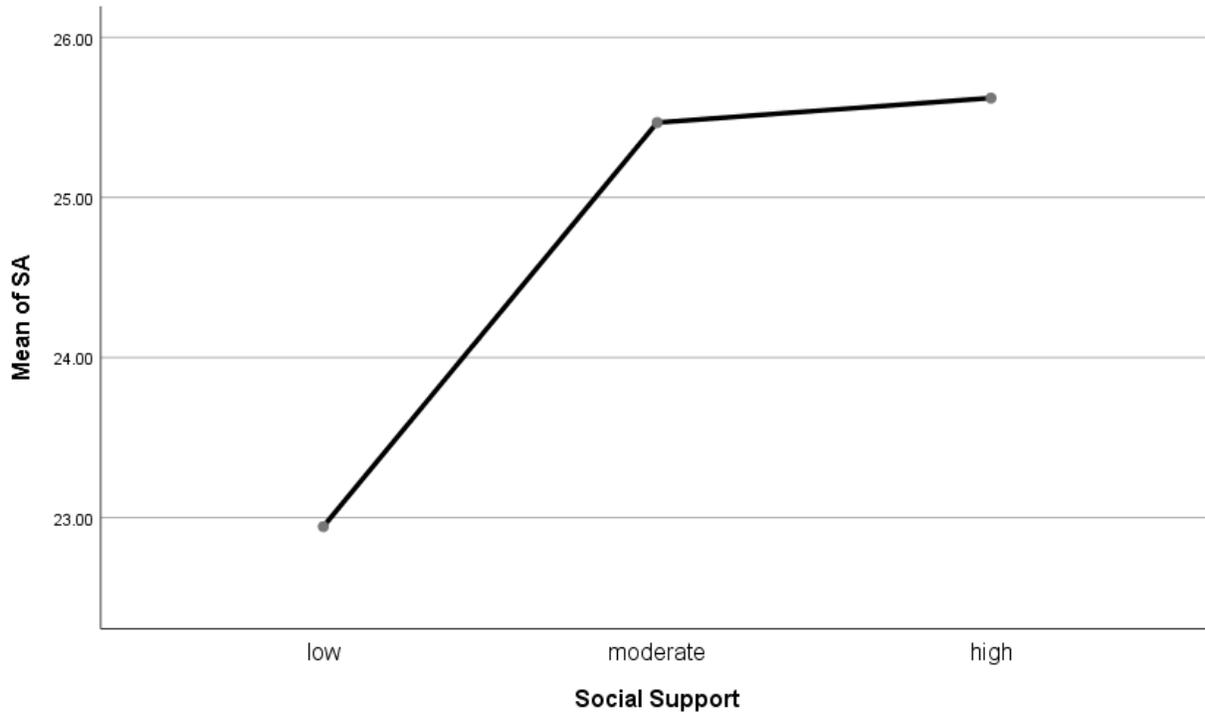


Figure 3
Perceived social support influence on self-acceptance



DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined how perception of social support is related to psychological well-being dimensions in a sample of non-indigene first year undergraduate in a Nigerian university. One-Way MANOVA was performed to test the influence of three levels of perceived social support on psychological well-being. It was hypothesized that perceived social support will significantly influence dimensions of psychological well-being among non-indigene first year undergraduate students.

Results revealed that perceived social support is significantly related to psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance). When the results for the dependent variables were considered independently, the only difference to reach statistical significance using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .008 were autonomy, positive relations and self-acceptance. Further analysis revealed that high perceived social support directly influenced autonomy, positive relations and self-acceptance dimensions of psychological well-being.

This finding agrees with previous research that reported that perception of social support predicts psychological well-being (Frisch, 2005; 2014; Nielsen et al., 2016). More specifically, the finding of this study supported past studies in their claim that more favorable perception of social support improved psychological well-being and decreased negative psychological state (Nielsen et al., 2016; Uchino et al., 2012). Our result revealed significant influence of high perceived social support on autonomy dimension of psychological well-being. The outcome may reflect that those who reported higher perceived social support may have being more self-determined to integrate successfully into their new environment. They may have resolved within themselves not to give in to negative thoughts regarding their situation.

Also, the finding showed that high perceived social support influenced positive relations, which could mean that those who perceived greater social support may have developed a warm and more trusting relationship with others which may have made assimilation into the environment

less stressful. Lastly, perception of greater social support positively influenced self-acceptance dimension of psychological well-being. This outcome may partly be explained by likely increase in positive feeling towards the self as greater support is perceived.

Conclusion

The key conclusion of this study is summarized thus: social support is necessary for non-indigene undergraduate students to enjoy improved psychological well-being. This may be most applicable in semi-rural universities where language barrier could predispose students to psychological distress.

Recommendations

The findings of the study showed that perceived social support is positively related to psychological well-being among non-indigene undergraduate students. Specifically, result showed that perceived social support predicted autonomy, positive relations and self-acceptance. Recommendation based on the result include the following:

- i. That university administration should focus on providing more support for non-indigene undergraduate students particularly those in their first year to enhance their psychological well-being. The support could be in the form of creating mixed support groups comprised of locals and non-indigenes to facilitate social interaction
- ii. To facilitate sense of autonomy, positive relations, and increased self-acceptance among freshmen, university administration should increase access to more social support.

Limitations

We acknowledge that the finding of this study is not without limitations with those considered the most important described next. Firstly, we collected data from only first year undergraduate students and did not seek the view of students in upper levels. The approach creates a knowledge gap in psychological well-being differences across the levels of undergraduate studies and may be investigated in future studies to extend the literature. Secondly, the findings of the present study may have been influenced by response faking, which is often associated with the use of self-report measures for data collection. Thirdly, the finding showed that social support is positively associated with psychological well-being, however because of the correlational approach adopted, causal relationship cannot be inferred from the finding of this study.

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Competing Interests

We declare that we have no financial disclosures or conflicts of interest to report.

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