

EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A PREDICTOR OF DEPRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENTS ATTENDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to exploratory study of social support as a predictor of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in delta state. The study was guided by three research questions and three tested hypotheses. The research design for the study was correlational. The sample size for the study was 1,000 senior secondary school adolescents. The study used the multi-stage sampling technique. The instrument for this study was a Social Support and Depression Rating Questionnaire. The content validity of the instrument was assessed. The social support and depression were found to have explained variance of 69.44% with 30.54% unexplained variance and depression had an explained variance of 64.73%, with 35.27% unexplained variance. The data from the trial testing of the instrument which was subjected to a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, indicates that social support and depression questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.77 and 0.81 respectively. The researcher administered the questionnaire personally with the help of five research assistants. The research assistants were trained on the objectives of the study and how to go about the exercise. The research questions were answered with the aid of Pearson's coefficient of determination. Hypotheses two was tested with regression statistics while hypotheses two and three were tested with Fisher's Z statistics. The finding indicates that the correction between the levels of social support and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State; the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant; the moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant. Based on this finding it was concluded that though social support is generally recognized as a protective factor for mental health, its contribution in reducing the of depression among adolescents is not significant. Therefore, recommended that a more comprehensive approach to addressing adolescent mental health should be adopted, focusing on a range of factors other than social supports that contribute to depression.

Keywords: Sex, Location, Social Support and Depression

Introduction

Secondary school is an important stage of education that follows primary school. It typically encompasses the ages of 11 to 18 and provides students with a more advanced and specialised curriculum compared to their earlier years. Secondary education plays a crucial role in preparing students for higher education or the workforce and serves as a bridge between the foundational knowledge gained in primary school and the more specialised subjects they will encounter at the tertiary level of education or their chosen career path. Secondary school students are typically adolescents, which is a crucial period of development between childhood and adulthood. An adolescent is an individual who is in the stage of human development between childhood and adulthood. This stage of development is characterised by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. The period typically spans from around 10 to 19 years.

In secondary education, adolescents are exposed to a wider range of subjects, with the aim of helping them to explore their interests and develop a deeper understanding of various disciplines. Exposure to this diverse discipline and the need for better academic performance, coupled with various changes that accompany adolescence stages, are in most cases capable of introducing emotional stress to the adolescent, resulting in negative feelings such as depression (Nimah, 2022). Depression among adolescents has become a growing concern worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 10-20% of adolescents' experience mental health problems, with depression being one of the most prevalent disorders.

Depression is a mental health disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities. It affects millions of people worldwide and can have a significant impact on their daily functioning and quality of life. While it is normal to experience feelings of sadness and grief from time to time, depression is different in its duration and intensity. It is not simply a temporary state of feeling down, but rather a persistent and chronic condition that can last for weeks, months, or even years. Depression can manifest in various ways, including physical symptoms such as changes in appetite and sleep patterns, as well as emotional and cognitive symptoms like difficulty concentrating, low self-esteem, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. It is important to recognize that depression is a real and serious illness, and seeking professional help is crucial for effective management and treatment. Depression can greatly impact a person's daily life and overall well-being. It can make even the simplest tasks feel overwhelming and drain all motivation and joy. Relationships may suffer, work or school performance may decline, and self-care may become neglected. It is crucial to understand that depression is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness, but rather a complex mental health condition that requires proper attention and care.

One crucial care that could be given to adolescents for reduced depression is the presence of social support. Hence the researchers will explore social support to see how it could mitigate reduce depression among secondary schools' adolescent. Social support may a crucial factor in reducing the risk of depression and promoting the mental well-being of adolescents. Social support plays a crucial role in overall well-being and mental health of adolescents. It refers to the assistance and help we receive from adolescents' social networks, including family, friends, and communities (Noret et al., 2019). Social support can be defined as the assistance and resources provided by individuals, groups, or communities that promote emotional, psychological, and practical well-being. It encompasses various forms of support, including emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support (Nagy-Pérez et al., 2020). These forms of support are crucial for individuals in

times of stress, crisis, or challenging situations, as they provide a sense of belonging, validation, and guidance. Furthermore, social support plays a vital role in maintaining overall mental health and resilience. When individuals have a strong support system in place, they are more likely to effectively cope with adversity and experience better overall well-being (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2016). Emotional support, for example, involves the expression of empathy, love, and understanding, which can help individuals feel heard and validated in their experiences. This type of support can come from close friends, family members, or even support groups where individuals can share their feelings and receive encouragement (Hwang & Toma, 2021). Having a strong support system not only provides individuals with emotional support, but it also offers practical assistance in times of need. Practical support can include things like helping with daily tasks, providing financial assistance, or offering transportation. These acts of kindness can alleviate some of the burdens that individuals may be facing, allowing them to focus on their well-being and resilience. Additionally, a support system can also provide individuals with informational support, which involves providing advice, guidance, and resources. This type of support can be particularly helpful when individuals are navigating challenging situations or seeking solutions to problems they may be facing. Overall, a support system plays a crucial role in promoting the mental and emotional well-being of individuals. By providing emotional and informational support, it helps individuals feel understood, validated, and empowered to overcome their challenges (Guo et al., 2020). Moreover, having a support system creates a sense of belonging and connection, reminding individuals that they are not alone in their struggles and that there are people who care about their well-being (Smith et al., 2022). Ultimately, a support system acts as a pillar of strength, enabling individuals to enhance their resilience and cope with life's difficulties more effectively (Maiuolo et al., 2019).

Researchers have consistently documented positive associations between social support and psychological well-being among adult and youth and inverse associations between social support and depression (Newman, et al., 2007). In particular, research findings suggest that social support may help protect youth against the negative effects of stressors and promote more positive mental health outcomes (Szuhany et al., 2023). Adolescents can also draw support from parents and friends to cope with depression. Adolescents receiving higher levels of social support reported better psychological well-being (King, 2015). Social causation model assumes that social support is an antecedent of well-being, and lack of social support causes psychological distress. This model explains the social support-to-distress relationship and predicts that social support mitigates the likelihood of depression (Zhen, et al., 2018). Social support may relieve depression through improving self-esteem and decreasing negative cognition (Zang, et al., 2017).

The influence of social support on the incidence of depression among adolescents can be moderated by sex. This means that the impact of social support on depression may vary for males and females. The interaction between social support and sex is an important consideration in understanding adolescent mental health. Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish males from females. Research findings have indicated that the influence of social support on depression differs between male and female adolescents. For instance, some studies have found that social support has a stronger protective effect against depression for females compared to males. Females tend to rely more on social relationships and seek emotional support when facing difficulties, thereby benefiting more from supportive networks. On the other hand, males may place greater emphasis on self-reliance and tend to seek support less frequently, potentially reducing the impact of social support on their depressive symptoms.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between social support, sex, and depression is complex and influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, individual differences, and the quality of available support. More research is needed to fully understand the specific mechanisms underlying the moderation effect of sex on the social support-depression association among adolescents. Recent studies have suggested that the impact of social support on depression among adolescents may differ based on their geographical location. Factors such as cultural norms, socioeconomic status, and access to resources can vary between different locations and influence the effectiveness of social support in preventing depression. For example, in rural areas with limited mental health services, the availability and quality of social support may be compromised, leading to a weaker buffering effect against depression. Recognizing the role of location in shaping the effectiveness of social support interventions is crucial for developing targeted strategies to prevent and reduce depression among adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

It seems that adolescents, particularly in Delta State, have encountered various social, psychological, and developmental challenges because of their interactions, which may have contributed to the accumulation of stress in them. In Delta State, most adolescents live with a lot of mixed messages and conflicting expectations from their parents, teachers, friends, and authorities. In a social environment like this, youth might find it difficult to fit in well and express themselves effectively and efficiently. The researcher's interactions with these students in counselling sessions showed they may be predisposed to depression if they face these challenges.

One of the most prevalent emotional disorders that adolescents suffer is depression, which is characterised by emotions including sadness, worry, fear, guilt, rage, and disdain as well as clouded thinking. Based on my own observations, some of these pupils appear to react to depressive symptoms by becoming less eager to perform the things they were used to doing and showing no interest in activities at home or at school. If they feel ashamed, inadequate, or unworthy, they can even try to flee their house or school. Some individuals might even be considering self-harm.

The prevalence of depression among students in secondary school may be due to a number of variables. Self-esteem, interpersonal pressures, and mental health are a few of these. Others might also include being exposed to psychological stressors, being the target of bullying, and traumatic experiences. However, it is possible that the factor of social support was excessively ignored. The problem of this study therefore is, to what extent will social support predict depression among secondary school students in Delta State?

Research Questions

The study was guided by the under listed research questions:

1. What is the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State?
2. What is the influence of sex as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State?
3. What is the influence of location as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The research tested the under listed hypotheses at 99% confidence level:

1. There is no statistically significant correction between the levels of social support and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State.
2. The moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant.
3. The moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design for the study was correlational. The correlational study approach is a particular type of design that examines correlations between variables without allowing the researcher to control or manipulate any of them. The correlation between two or more variables reflects the strength and direction of the link. The direction of a correlation may be either positive or negative.

The population of the study comprises 128,026 senior secondary schools adolescents (61,401 male students and 66,625 female students). The senior secondary school students were targeted because students at this level of education are typically between the ages of 10 and 19, which has been described as the adolescent age bracket. The sample size for the study was 1,000 senior secondary school adolescents. The study used the multi-stage sampling technique. The instrument for this study was A Social Support and Depression Rating Questionnaire. The questionnaire is made up of three sections; A, B and C. Section A contains the personal data of the respondents such as sex and school location; section B consist of 19 items on social support. The 19 items were adapted from Malecki, Demaray, Elliott and Nolten (1999). Section C of the instrument consisted of 20 items on Depression adapted from Radloff (1977).

Different methods were used to determine the study instrument's concept, face, and content validity. The validity of the face was judged by experts. The Department of Guidance and Counselling's research supervisors and other experts were given copies of the instrument to screen. Regarding grammar, sentence structure, and spelling, the experts offered some advice. Before the instrument underwent a validation process, corrections were made.

The instrument was given to 100 teenagers in locations outside the study area as part of the validation phase. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of factor analysis was performed on the collected data. The content validity of the measure was assessed using the total cumulative variance. Adolescent social support sub-scale had 69.44% explained variance and 30.54% unexplained variance, according to the results. Conversely, the subscale for adolescent depression exhibited a 64.73% explained variance and a 35.27% unexplained variance. This finding suggests that the sub-scales have sufficient content validity and can be applied to a study. This finding suggests that the scales have sufficient content validity and can be applied to a research project. The construct validity of the several scales in the instrument was evaluated using the rotating component matrix. The results show that the values for the teenage social support questionnaire ranged from 0.56 to 0.82, while the values for the adolescent depression questionnaire ranged from 0.53 to 0.82. This finding suggests that the instrument has sufficient construct validity and could thus be applied to a study.

The data from the trial testing of the instrument were subjected to a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, which provides an estimate of measures of internal consistency, in order to determine the instrument's dependability. The researcher used the coefficients it produced to

calculate the instrument's reliability estimates. The results indicate that the questionnaire on social support had a coefficient of 0.77 and the questionnaire on adolescent depression had a coefficient of 0.81. This result suggests that the numerous sub-scales are valid and can be applied to a study.

After collating the data of the study the data obtained were collated, research questions were answered with the aid of Pearson's coefficient of determination. Hypotheses 1 was tested with linear regression statistics while hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested with Fisher's Z statistics. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Questions one: What is the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 1: Pearson's correlation coefficient of social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Social Support		60.71	9.13				Negative
Depression	1000	38.06	9.53	-0.06	0.004	0.4	correlation

Table 1 shows the result of a Pearson's correlation and coefficient of determination, which the researcher used to find out the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State. The result shows a negative correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State ($r = -0.06$; $r^2 = 0.004$; $r^2\% = 0.4$). From the result shown above, social support contributed 0.4% to the variation in depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State. The negative relationship observed in the result indicates that the higher the level of social support, the lower the level of depression among the students. On the other hand, the lower the level of social support, the higher the level of depression among the students.

Research Questions Two: What is the influence of sex as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 2: Pearson's correlation and coefficient of determination of influence of sex as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State

Sex	Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Male	Social Support		59.30	9.87				Negative
	Depression	422	38.16	9.78	-0.055	0.003	0.3	correlation
Female	Social Support		61.73	8.42				Negative
	Depression	578	37.99	9.36	-0.063	0.004	0.4	correlation

Table 2 shows the result of a Pearson's correlation and coefficient of determination, which the researcher used to find out the influence of sex as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State. The result shows a negative relationship between social support and depression among male and female adolescents ($r = -0.055$; $r^2 = 0.003$; $r^2\% = 0.3$ for male and $r = -0.063$; $r^2 = 0.004$; $r^2\% = 0.4$ for female). From the result shown above, social support contributed 0.3% and 0.4% to the variation in depression among male and female students

respectively. The negative relationship observed in the result indicates that the higher the level of social support, the lower the level of depression among the students. On the other hand, the lower the level of social support, the higher the level of depression among the students.

Research Questions Three: What is the influence of location as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 3: Pearson’s correlation and coefficient of determination of the influence of location as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta States

Location	Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Urban	Social Support	677	61.33	9.20	-0.041	0.002	0.2	Negative Relationship
	Depression		38.29	9.68				
Rural	Social Support	323	59.40	8.86	-0.116	0.013	1.3	Negative Relationship
	Depression		37.60	9.21				

Table 3 shows the result of a Pearson’s correlation and coefficient of determination, which the researcher used to find out the influence of location as a moderating factor on the correlation between social support and depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State. The result shows a negative correlation between social support and depression among urban and rural adolescents ($r = -0.041$; $r^2 = 0.002$; $r^2\% = 0.2$ for urban and $r = -0.116$; $r^2 = 0.013$; $r^2\% = 1.3$ for rural). From the result shown above, social support contributed 0.2% and 1.3% to the variation in depression among urban and rural students respectively. The negative relationship observed in the result indicates that the higher the level of social support, the lower the level of depression among the students. On the other hand, the lower the level of social support, the higher the level of depression among the students.

Hypothesis one: There is no statistically significant correction between the levels of social support and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 4: Regression analysis of the correction between the levels of social support and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State.

ANOVA					
	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	327.427	1	327.427	3.611	.058 ^b
Residual	90398.473	997	90.670		
Total	90725.900	998			

Table 4 shows the result of a regression statistics, which the researcher used to find out the correction between the levels of social support and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State. The result shows that no statistically significant correction between the levels of social support and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools in Delta State $F(998) = 3.611$, $p > 0.05$ alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Two: The moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant.

Table 5: Pearson's correlation and Fisher's Z statistics of the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State

Sex	Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	Fisher-z	Remark
Male	Social Support	422	59.30	9.87	-0.055	0.159	Not Significant
	Depression		38.16	9.78			
Female	Social Support	578	61.73	8.42	-0.063		
	Depression		37.99	9.36			

Table 5 shows a multiple correlation analysis, which was used to examine the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State. The result shows that for male students, $r = -0.055$, while for female students, $r = -0.063$; $Z_{obs} = 0.159$. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant.

Hypothesis Three: The moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant.

Table 6: Pearson's correlation and Fisher's Z statistics of the moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State

Location	Variable	N	Mean	SD	R	Fisher-z	Remark
Urban	Social Support	677	61.33	9.20	-0.041	1.206	Not Significant
	Depression		38.29	9.68			
Rural	Social Support	323	59.40	8.86	-0.116		
	Depression		37.60	9.21			

Table 6 shows a multiple correlation analysis, which was used to examine the moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State. The result shows that for urban students, $r = -0.041$, while for rural students, $r = -0.116$; $Z_{obs} = 1.206$. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that the moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State is not statistically significant.

Discussion of Results

Social Support and Depression among Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Delta State

The first finding showed no significant relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State. Social support only contributed 0.4% to the variation in depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State. This finding implies that social support will not influence depression among adolescents in secondary schools. The possible reason for this finding may be because, at the adolescent stage of development, they may not care much about social support from their parents, siblings, and teachers, so long as they are in good relationships with their peers.

Hence, social support may not influence their level of depression. It is also possible that parents, siblings, and teachers could become sources of stress for these individuals, depending on their perception of such relationships.

The above finding is at variance with the finding of Cheng et al. (2014), which suggests that social support may help protect youth against the negative effects of stressors and promote more positive mental health outcomes. The finding also disagrees with King (2015), who found that adolescents receiving higher levels of social support reported better psychological well-being. The finding is further at variance with Chang et al. (2018), who found that family support (especially parental support) and friend support may reduce adolescent depression. Again, the finding disagrees with Rueger et al. (2016), who found that teacher support may be a protective factor against depression. Also, the finding is at variance with that of Zang (2017), which revealed that social support may relieve depression through improving self-esteem and decreasing negative cognition.

Sex, Social Support and Depression among Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Delta State

The second finding showed no moderating impact of sex on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State. Social support contributed 0.3% and 0.4% to the variation in depression among male and female students respectively, which is not statistically significantly different. This finding implies that no matter the sex of the students, the influence of social support on depression will be the same. The possible reason may not be far from the fact adolescent male and female students exhibit almost similar behavioural traits when they are depressed and the same factor may have led to such behaviours. The above finding is at variance with Hameed et al. (2018), who in a study of school students from Iran, found that female students had more emotional behavioural disturbances and higher levels of social support than males, also female students had low self-esteem than males.

Location, Social Support and Depression among Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Delta State

The third finding revealed no moderating impact of location on the relationship between social support and depression among adolescents in secondary schools in Delta State. Social support contributed 0.2% and 1.3% to the variation in depression among urban and rural students respectively, which is not statistically significantly different. This finding has shown that the location of students has no role to play on the relationship between social support and depression. This could be because, for a start, no relationship was found between social support and depression. In essence therefore, the location of students did not matter as far as the two variables are concerned.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study conducted in Delta State found no statistically significant correlation between social support levels and the presence of depression among adolescents attending secondary schools. Sex did not moderate the relationship between social support and depression. Also, location did not moderate the relationship between social support and depression. These findings highlight the need to consider multiple factors when understanding and addressing adolescent mental health, and emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to interventions and support services.

Recommendations

These findings have important implications for mental health interventions and support services targeting adolescents in Delta State. While social support is generally recognized as

a protective factor for mental health, it may not be the sole determinant in the presence of depression among this particular population. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach to addressing adolescent mental health should be adopted, focusing on a range of factors that contribute to depression.

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