

# Social Support as a Correlate of Mental Health Status of Undergraduate Students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile- Ife, Osun State

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the mental health status of the undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and examined the types of social support experienced by undergraduate students. It also investigated the relationship between social support and mental health status of the undergraduate students. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population for the study consisted of 26,382 undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo Universities in Ile-Ife. The sample comprised 900 undergraduate students selected using a multistage sampling technique. Six faculties were selected from the 13 faculties in the University using simple random sampling technique. A total of 150 students was selected from the three departments using systematic random sampling technique. Two instruments, titled Mental Health Status Scale (MHSS), Social Support Scale (SSS) were used to elicit information from the respondents. Percentages, Frequency counts and Point Biserial Correlation were employed to analyze the data. The results showed that 14.9%, 68.6% and 16.4% of undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo Universities, Ile-Ife demonstrated low, moderate and high mental health status respectively. The results also showed that family and friends support were the most common types of social support experienced by undergraduates with 96.1% and 71.4% respectively. Finally, the results of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between social support and mental health status ( $N=845$ ,  $r_{pb}= 0.327$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ). It was concluded that social support was a good correlate of mental health status among undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo Universities, Ile-Ife.

**Keywords:** Health, Status, Mental health status, Support, Social support and types of social support.

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### Highlights of this paper

- This study investigated the mental health status of the undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and examined the types of social support experienced by undergraduate students.
- It also investigated the relationship between social support and mental health status of the undergraduate students.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The mental health status of students could determine their ability to perform well in their academic pursuits and other endeavors in life. If the students' mental health status is high, they may be able to interact well with people around them and their environment. Students may feel happy, sad, lonely, and hopeless or even consider suicide due to some life circumstances that can pose a threat to them. Therefore, how students react to these life challenges determines whether their mental health status would be high or low. According to [Canadian Institute for Health Information \(2009\)](#) there are four indicators of mental health status which are well-being, health conditions, human function and death and non-medical determinants of health which are health behaviors, living and working conditions, personal resources and environmental resources. When students feel positive about all these indicators of mental health status, they may be said to be mentally healthy. In this study, mental health status can be defined as a state of social, psychological and emotional well-being in which a person is able to show love and affection to other persons around them, think well and enjoy good interpersonal relationship. An individual's ability to manage stress and engage in a worthwhile task(s) in one's environment makes a healthy person. It can be inferred further that mentally healthy people have what it takes to adjust with heinous circumstances and also effective in problem-solving.

Often times, it appears that some undergraduate students in Obafemi Awolowo University have one boy/girl relationship or the other that they keep, whose purpose may be to end up in marriage or build their self-esteem. Irrespective of whatever purpose might be the reason for their coming together, it is possible that all of these relationships may not last long. Persons involved in these relationships may result in excessive drinking or committing suicide (low mental health status) if either of the party experiences a heart-break. An investigation was reported by Vanguard Newspaper on March 6, 2014, of a 400 level Law student of Obafemi Awolowo University, who committed suicide at his resident outside the campus of the university a few days after his lover broke up with him. It can be deduced from this incidence that the deceased mental health status was low to have committed suicide. [Jenny et al. \(2007\)](#) affirmed the importance of mental health needs among undergraduate students of the University of California, Berkeley for relationship well-being. [Affiong et al. \(2015\)](#) also opined that the mental health status of medical students has been proven to be poor compared to their peers in other disciplines and has led to grave personal and professional consequences. This may be as a result of cultural differences or relative workload experienced by the students. There is, however, insufficient research especially in local settings on the correlation between social support and life satisfaction with the students' mental health status.

[Kirmayer and Kenneth \(2007\)](#) in their study of mental health status stated that relationships with others in one's family and community are basic social determinants of mental health status. This means that the effect of different types of social support goes a long way in determining what the mental health status of an individual would look like, whether it is going to be high or low. Social support can refer to the assistance or comfort from family members, friends, and lecturers. Social support can be given by family, friends, co-workers and mental health workers and others. [Salami \(2010\)](#) defined social support as the extent to which individuals feel that provisions of social relationships are available to them. When students are not getting the needed assistance from their family, parents, and university, they may experience emotional breakdown, depression and poor academic performances, if

they are not getting the expected social support from different sources, on which they have placed their hope. This also may result in low mental health status for them. Also, social support may enhance the mental health status of the students by helping them to depend on or improve their characteristics as the circumstances or the situation may be.

Several studies (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; World Health Organisation, 2012) have been carried out on the factors that could predict the mental health status of undergraduate students. WHO (2012) explained the likely factors (social and economic circumstances, individual attributes and behavioral and environmental factors) that could determine the mental health status and well-being of an individual. Furthermore, teachers that are not empathetic, teachers that do not listen to students' complaints and also teachers that are sarcastic towards students can affect the mental health status of their students. For example, a student's mental health status may be tampered with when a teacher ridicules a student in the classroom, such a student may never be able to contribute meaningfully well in the classroom again.

Heather and Margie (2000) asserted that friendship may be increasingly important to older adults' morale as support becomes less experienced by adults due to a possible demise of any member of the family. Also, older adults are more likely to confide in peers, and such peers are preferred sources of support for situations relating to the aging process, such as the death of a spouse. Hence, when students are getting the needed assistance from the school, family, and friends in terms of love, care, advice and financial help, there may be a likelihood of having high mental health status because the students would be able to engage themselves in productive task(s) and be effective in problem-solving. For the society to experience meaningful growth and development, attention may, therefore, need to be given to social support, most especially in schools where undergraduate students cannot adjust to school learning conditions, inability to tolerate others in their various halls of residence (poor social relationship), inability to achieve their set goals (self-fulfillment) and poor health status that may lead to poor social, emotional and intellectual skills among them. Neglect of these challenges may also bring a devastating effect on the academic pursuits of undergraduates. The study of social support would also help to provide information on the extent to which the mental health status of students may be affected. From the foregoing, the study attempts to investigate the relationship between social support and mental health status of students.

The study therefore determined the mental health status of undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University. The specific objectives of this study were to:

- (1) Investigate the mental health status of the undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State.
- (2) Examine the types of social support experienced by the undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State.
- (3) Investigate the relationship between social support and mental health status of undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State.

To achieve the objectives of the study, two research questions were raised:

1. What is the mental health status of undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University?
2. What are the types of social support experienced by the students?

Research hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between social support and mental health status of the undergraduates.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University. The sample size of 900 undergraduates was selected for the study using a multistage sampling technique. Six faculties were selected from the 13 faculties in the University using simple random sampling technique. Three departments were selected from each of the faculty also using simple random sampling technique. A total of 150 students was selected from each faculty using convenient sampling technique. The convenience sampling technique was used by the researcher, to have easy access to the students. The undergraduates selected from the six faculties formed the sample for this study. Two instruments were used for data collection.

The researcher made use of Mental Health Status Questionnaire adapted from Keyes (2002) and Social Support Scale adapted from Adelusola (2015). The questionnaires were used to elicit information from the respondents to investigate the correlation between social support and mental health status among the undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. This consists of three sections. Section A is the bio-data of the respondents while section B and C is mental health status scale and social support scale respectively. The instrument was validated with the help of experts in Tests and Measurement and Educational Psychology at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) were carried out to ascertain the usability of factorial validation for the validation of the items in each section of the questionnaire and if each items will yield uniform data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) value for mental health status and social support scale section was 0.85 and 0.925 respectively which is greater than the critical value at 0.05 level of significance and so is acceptable. The Cronbach's Alpha approach was adopted in determining the reliability of the scale and it yielded a coefficient of 0.852 and 0.895.

## 3. RESULTS

Question 1: What is the mental health status of undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University?

To answer this research question, items in mental health questionnaire were scored such that "Everyday" response was allotted 6, "Almost Every day" response, 5, "two/three times a week" response 4, "about once a week" response was allotted 3, "once/twice" response was allotted 2, and "never" was allotted 1. Individual responses to each item were computed and the mean and standard deviation values were 97.1 and 15.71 respectively. This is represented in Table 1.

The minimum and maximum scores obtainable in this inventory were 20 and 120 respectively. Students whose scores were below the group mean score (i.e. 20-81) after computing mean minus one standard deviation were adjudged as having low mental health status. Also, those whose scores were below the mean (i.e. 82-112) after computing mean plus one standard deviation were adjudged as moderate mental health status while those whose scores were above the group mean score (i.e. 113-120) after adding the mean to the standard deviation were adjudged as having high mental health status.

**Table-1.** Mental health status of the undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University.

Mental health status	Frequency	Percent (%)
Low	126	14.9
Moderate	580	68.6
High	139	16.4
Total	845	100.0

Source: Obafemi Awolowo University, division of students affairs (2015/2016 session).

The results in Table 1 showed that 14.9% of the undergraduate students had low mental health status, 68.6% of them have moderate mental health status while 16.4% of them have high mental health status. From the results, there is an indication that majority of the undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University have moderate mental health status.

Question 2: What are the types of social support experienced by the students?

To answer this research question, the results are presented in Table 2 which represents the types of social support experienced by students.

Table-2. Types of social support experienced by students.

Social support*	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Family	812	96.1
Friends	574	67.9
University	603	71.4

Source: Obafemi Awolowo University, division of students affairs (2015/2016 session).

The results in Table 2 showed the types of social support experienced by students. The study showed that 96.1% of the students have social support from family, 67.9% of the students have social support from friends, while 71.4% of the students have social support from school. The findings of the study revealed that some students experienced social support from more than one source. From the results, there was an indication that majority of the students of Obafemi Awolowo University have social support from the family.

### 3.1. Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between social support and mental health status of the undergraduates. Scores on social support were correlated with the weighted scores on the mental health status of students at 0.05 level of significance and was later subjected to Point Biserial Correlation Analysis. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table-3. Relationship between social support and mental health status of students.

Social support	$\bar{X}$	SD	$r_{pb}$
Low	62.6896	15.26	0.194
High	84.1277		

Source: Obafemi Awolowo University, division of students affairs (2015/2016 session).

Table 3 showed the relationship between social support and mental health status. As shown in Table 3 the mean of social support (low social support) is 62.6896 while the mean of social support (high social support) is 84.1277. The correlation coefficient ( $r_{pb}$ ) between social support and mental health status is 0.194. This value is significant at 0.05 probability level. This suggests that there was a significant relationship between social support and mental health status ( $N = 845$ ,  $r_{pb} = 0.194$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Since p value is less than 0.05, the stated null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This results show that there was a significant relationship between social support and mental health status.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to determine the relationship between social support and mental health status of undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. A larger proportion of the students had moderate mental health status. The difference between the number of students with low mental health status and the number of those who had high mental health status was relatively significant. Hence, the result of the first research question

showed that greater part of the undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife possessed moderate mental health status which can lead to their happiness, physical, psychological, emotional, social well-being, productivity and effectiveness. The finding is in concordance with the studies conducted by [Affiong et al. \(2015\)](#) who also found that the mental health status of medical students of the University of Calabar had been proven to be poor compared to their peers in other disciplines and had led to grave personal and professional consequences. This may be as a result of cultural differences. Again, [Ayodele and Ezeokoli \(2013\)](#) investigated the relationship between campus social life and psychological well-being among Babcock University undergraduates. The study indicated that psychological well-being accounted for the variance in the undergraduates' campus social life. It was therefore recommended that an increase in adolescence well-being may lead to enhanced inter-personal relationship, which may also promote a meaningful and fulfilled life academically.

The findings from research question two showed that the undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University experienced more social support from their respective families compared to other types of social support. This might be as a result of parents positive perception and understanding of the importance attached to giving aids to their children in the school. This is in line with the findings of [Adelusola \(2015\)](#) study on the influence of psychological well-being and social support on academic adjustment of undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University which showed that family support had the highest influence on the dependent variable (academic adjustment) followed by university support, while peer support had the lowest influence on the dependent variable. The findings of the present study also affirmed that students experienced more family support compared to other types of social support (i.e. friends and university).

The findings of the present study are not in line with the findings of [Heather and Margie \(2000\)](#) who asserted that friendship may be increasingly important to older adults' morale as support becomes less experienced by adults due to a possible demise of any member of the family. Also, older adults are more likely to confide in peers, and such peers are preferred sources of support for situations relating to the aging process, such as the death of a spouse. Moreover, the achieved nature of friendships may have increasing importance as one grows old. The present study goes contrary to the findings of [Heather and Margie \(2000\)](#) because in the present study it can be observed that students got more social support from their respective families. However, if the social support is subjected to other factors like age, it is possible that students may not experience more social support from the family as indicated by [Heather and Margie \(2000\)](#).

The findings from hypothesis one showed that there was a significant relationship between social support and the mental health status of undergraduate students in Obafemi Awolowo University which might enhance the quality of their interpersonal relationship, effectiveness, happiness, and productivity. The findings of the study was in line with work of [Kirmayer and Kenneth \(2007\)](#) investigation on mental health, social support and community wellness which explained that relationships with others in one's family and community are basic social determinants of mental health and well-being. [Stice et al. \(2004\)](#) investigated the differential direction of effects for parent and peer support in the prospective relations between social support and depression. [Stice et al. \(2004\)](#) asserted that family support was the type of social support experienced more by adolescents followed by friends and the school which is in line with the present study.

The findings of the present study are also in line with the findings of [Karimi et al. \(2015\)](#) whose study was on the relationship between social support and mental health in infertile women. [Karimi et al. \(2015\)](#) found that perceived adequacy of social support might interact with mental health considering the mediating role of problem-focused coping. [Karimi et al. \(2015\)](#) further stated that social support helps women to think that they are not alone and can share their painful experiences with others. So, they can be relieved of tension and anxiety through the

expression of intrusive thoughts and feelings. The present study also found that social support can be linked to mental health status.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The study concluded that social support is a good correlates of mental health status. The study also concluded that there was significant contribution of each of type of social support (family, friends and university) on mental health status.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

In order to ensure that the students' mental health status improves, it is recommended that the university should provide a conducive environment that will enhance students' mental health status by providing more infrastructures like lecture theatres and hostels for the students. Aside the fact that it will help in reducing the stress of walking long distances to receive lectures which may lead to tiredness and lack of concentration during the lectures, this will also help in reducing the mental stress of the students (psychologically, emotionally and socially).

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